



## Metropolitan Hilarion: We should be mindful of the value of human life



On 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2020, 8<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, commemoration day of the Holy Prophet Elijah, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations, rector of Ss. Cyril and Methodius Theological Institute of Postgraduate Studies, celebrated the Divine Liturgy at the Church of the Holy Martyrs Michael and Theodore of Chernigov in Moscow.

Concelebrating with Metropolitan Hilarion were Hieromonk Ioann (Kopeykin), director general of the Poznaniye Charitable Foundation, and ordained staff members of the Department for External Church Relations.

During the Litany of Fervent Supplication, prayerful petitions were read out in view of the persisting threat of the spreading coronavirus infection. After that Metropolitan Hilarion lifted up a prayer which is read at a time of harmful pestilence.

At the end of the divine service the archpastor delivered a homily, saying, in particular:

“This Sunday we are commemorating the Holy Prophet Elijah renowned for the miracles he performed at the Old Testament times. We know about his heroic deeds, his standing firm in the true faith from the Books of Kings which tell us that after his numerous feats and miracles here, on earth, the holy prophet was miraculously taken up to heaven in a chariot of fire. At that moment his disciple Elisha was with him. Elisha saw everything and, aware that his teacher would soon leave him, asked Elijah to inherit his spirit. And when the Holy Prophet Elijah was taken up to heaven, Elisha felt that his teacher’s spirit now rested on him. Elijah left his mantle to Prophet Elisha; it fell from him when he was already in the chariot of fire.

“Today we have also heard from the Sunday Gospel reading about a miracle that occurred in the New Testament days, when the Lord Jesus Christ miraculously multiplied the five loaves of bread and two fish to feed five thousand of men, besides women and children.

“This miraculous and miracle-working thread runs from the Old Testament to the New Testament, tying not only the Old Testament prophets with the Lord Jesus Christ, but also all of us both with the Old Testament and the New Testament. For the entire history of the Church, which began in the Old Testament days and continues today, is full of miracles of God’s presence. When God wills, He performs wonders and signs that we should interpret as His messages addressed to us.

“These miracles can be very different and by no means always they are performed in response to our prayers. Sometimes they are God’s signs which come unexpectedly to us, and the Lord wants us to interpret them and hear His voice in them.

“The greatest miracle that marks the beginning of Christian life is a miracle of the old man stepping into the water of the baptismal font and of the renewed man emerging from it. This new man is being given the Kingdom of God so that in his earthly life he may embody the Divine ideal described first by the Old Testament prophets and then by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, Only Begotten Son of God. All our Christian life is a fulfillment of the potential that we received in the baptismal font when we rejected the Satan and were united with Christ while the Holy Spirit first descended into the water and then on us, transfiguring us from “old men” into “new men” and giving us strength to fight against evil in ourselves and in the world around us, and to follow our Lord Jesus Christ.

“Another miracle which is being constantly performed before our eyes and in which we participate every time we want is the miracle of transubstantiation of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. It is not the multiplication of the five loaves and two fish, but the conversion in the Sacrament of Eucharist of the sanctified bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. And we feed not only on

earthly food, which those five thousand hungry people ate when Christ turned small amount of food into the large amount in order to feed them; we feed on the Very Body and Blood of God Incarnate, being united with Him spiritually and bodily through the communion of the Holy Mysteries of Christ.

“Such miracles are being performed before our very eyes. The Lord speaks to us through these miracles, as well as through the very order of church life, through Gospel readings that we hear every time we attend the Divine Liturgy, through prayers that are being read out and sung in the church, through church hymns, icons and images of the saints looking at us from church walls, and through events of our life that sometimes can come as a severe warning from the Lord, reminding us what He expects from us and what He calls us to do.

“Over the recent months we have been reacting, each in our own way, to what is happening to us and around us. Someone has passed away, someone has suffered, to a larger or smaller extent, from the disease and recovered, someone has had the virus without even noticing it, and someone has not had it. Yet, these days each of us, perhaps, has been repeatedly thinking about the value of human life, that we only live once and no one can be safe from illness, or sudden death, or suffering, and that not only our life, but also the life of our relatives and friends is in the hands of God.

“While going through this experience, we should be mindful of the value of human life – the life of our beloved ones and those around us. At the same time, we should not forget that life, as well as death, health and sickness are in God’s hands. Therefore, with faith and hope for God’s goodwill, invoking His almighty succour and praying to the Most Holy Theotokos and the Old Testament and the New Testament saints, let us remember that just as the Lord miraculously took up the Holy Prophet Elijah to heaven in the chariot of fire He in the same manner takes us up to heaven every time we come to the church of God and partake of the Divine fire and the Divine light in the communion of the Holy and Life-Giving Mysteries of Christ. In our body we remain on earth, but in our spirit we are being taken up to heaven. In our body we continue to live in this world, but our spirit partakes of the riches of the Heavenly Kingdom.

“Let us thank God for this ineffable gift, which we receive in the communion of the Holy Mysteries of Christ. Let us never neglect this gift and try as often as we can to partake of the Holy Mysteries of Christ, preparing ourselves for this by our whole life.

“May the Lord save all of us and our beloved ones from every evil, from every disease, and lead us to His Heavenly Kingdom. Amen.”

