



Speech by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill at the 19th award ceremony of the International Foundation for the Unity of Orthodox Christian Nations

On 21st November 2019, in Moscow, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia led the 19th annual ceremony of awarding the Patriarch Alexy II Prize of the International Public Foundation for the Unity of Orthodox Christian Nations “For Outstanding Activities in Strengthening the Unity of Orthodox Christian Nations and for Upholding and Promoting Christian Values in the Life of Society” for the year 2018. The prize was awarded to His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III of Jerusalem. Greeting His Beatitude, the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church delivered the following address.

Your Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III of the Holy City of Jerusalem and All Palestine,

Dear Valery Arkadyevich, President of the Foundation,

Your Eminences and Your Graces,

All-Honourable Fathers, dear Brothers and Sisters,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I cordially greet all those who assembled today in this hall in order to honour our lofty guest – His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III of the Holy City of Jerusalem and All Palestine, the laureate of the Patriarch Alexy II Prize “For Outstanding Activities in Strengthening the Unity of Orthodox Christian Nations and for Upholding and Promoting Christian Values in the Life of Society,” awarded to His Beatitude by the International Public Foundation for the Unity of Orthodox Christian Nations.

Today the world Orthodox family has been brought under great pressure by external forces and is undergoing a time of hardships.

The unity of the Holy Churches of God, the unity of Orthodox nations, which is now subjected to a serious ordeal, is completely different from the way this word is understood in political or social life. The church unity cannot be reduced to the similarity of interests or to mere respect for one another. Unity is a characteristic of the Church and at the same time a commandment of the Saviour, opened for us in His prayer as High Priest: “Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that

they may be one, as we are" (Jn 17:11). The Church of God cannot be divided, just like Christ Himself cannot be divided. However, certain members of the Church and even entire communities can fall away from the unity with her, as, regrettably, happened in history over and over again. The history shows that divisions in the Church were always preceded by diminishing of love. Our Lord Himself said: "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (Jn 13:35).

The preservation of church unity is of concern to each and every of us, but especially to the Primates of the Local Churches who have responsibility to preserve the purity of Orthodox faith, to maintain the unity of the Church, and to strengthen good relations between the Orthodox Churches and between the Orthodox peoples. It is not fortuitous that among the laureates of the Prize of the Foundation for the Unity of Orthodox Christian Nations were often Primates of the sister Churches, for the cross of Primatial ministry requires complete self-sacrifice for the sake of the people of God and willingness, according to St Paul, to "rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep" (Rom 12:15).

At a time of hardships, when elements of this world try to shatter the unity of the Holy Orthodoxy, acquiring particular importance is the Church of Jerusalem which is the Mother of all Churches. For she carries out her ministry and special mission in the Holy Land, sanctified by the feet of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Most Holy Sepulchre, the Holy Golgotha, the Bethlehem cave and other greatest shrines of the ancient Palestine are the major places of veneration for the pious pilgrims from all the Local Orthodox Churches.

Since his election to the See of the Holy Apostle James the Brother of Lord, which is the most ancient one in the Church of Christ, His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III of Jerusalem has been exerting much effort to preserve and maintain in good order the great Christian shrines and has been striving to ensure that the holy sites of Palestine are always available for the faithful of all Holy Churches of God, uniting them with one another in Christ Jesus. Distinguishing His Beatitude is the unshakeable firmness in conforming to the canonical order, pastoral wisdom and discretion which helped him earn sincere respect and true authority all over the Orthodox world. Honourably bearing the cross of Primatial service in the Holy Land, His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos tirelessly strives to preserve Christian presence in the place where our Lord Jesus Christ was born and performed His ministry, was crucified and rose from the dead. Patriarch Theophilos carries out his service, defending the rights and dignity of Christian Churches in this region. I wholeheartedly congratulate the laureate of the Foundation Prize on such high appreciation of his labours and wish him God's unceasing help in his ministry to the glory of the Church of Christ, to the glory of the plenitude of the Holy Orthodoxy.