Homily by Patriarch Kirill after the Divine Liturgy in the Resurrection Cathedral in Tirana

On April 29, 2018, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia and His Beatitude Archbishop Anastasios of Tirana and All Albania celebrated the Divine Liturgy at the Cathedral of the Resurrection in Tirana.

After the liturgy, Archbishop Anastasios addressed himself to the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church with the words of Easter greeting.

Then Patriarch Kirill spoke in response.

Your Beatitude,

Most Reverend Fellow-Archpastors, Honourable Fathers,

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

During the celebration of the Divine Liturgy today and our common prayer, we together with the whole Holy Orthodox Church continue celebrating the Holy Pascha. On this Sunday, the Church suggests for our edification the Gospel's text about the Saviour's healing of a paralyzed man, which seems to have no direct relation to the event of the Resurrection of Christ. The Saviour heals a man who was taken for thirty-eight years with a serious lethal disease – paralysis. Speaking with Christ, the sick man does not even ask Him for help since this miserable man continues to hope for a miracle of God but has no strength even to ask for it. And in his absolute powerlessness he suddenly receives what he hoped for.

The miraculous healing is a renewal of the distorted human nature, a revelation of God's glory in man. The Church now lives by the Paschal events and remembers them. Healing, even if it is partial and temporary but is still a triumph over corruption, suffering and death, and it also implies in some sense a prototype of resurrection. The Reading of the Gospel on the healing of a paralyzed man is to remind us that the Resurrection of Christ is a therapy, a remedy for healing our mortal world taken with the palsy of sinfulness and fallen away from God.

Resurrection is that supernatural change of human nature which can be only imagined. Human beings are accustomed to think that their life is not long and has its inevitable end. When St. Paul in Athens, the capital city of Greek scholarship, tried to speak about the resurrection of the dead, local philosophers

mocked him: *We will hear thee again of this matter* (Acts 17:32). For a heathen intellectual of those times, it was inconceivable that a man, a tiny grain of sand in the vast cosmos, can exceed so fundamental a law of nature as death.

St. Paul says, *But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness* (1 Cor. 1:23). The Christian faith in the exceptional mercy of the Godhead for man seemed incomprehensible to philosophers. In their point of view, the Godhead should be boundlessly perfect and in His perfection endlessly far from the human weakness and pain. The word of the Gospel about God-Man Christ crucified, dead and risen from the dead for our salvation overthrew that conviction. It is the basis, the unshakable foundation of our faith in the boundless mercy of God for the fallen human race. *If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain* (1 Cor. 15:14).

We have also heard now the reading from the Acts of the Apostles about how St. Peter raised from the dead a devout and God-loving Tabitha through the prayers of those to whom she did much good in her lifetime. This story reminds me of the history of the much-suffering Albanian Church. For centuries she served her people in the hardest of times; she was almost completely destroyed in the terrible years of atheistic persecution; and she rose from the dead to serve people with a new force with the help of God. Even this beautiful church of the Resurrection of Christ and the very name of Your Beatitude, Anastasios, are related to this striking fate of your Church. The Albanian Orthodox Church is truly a Church of the Resurrection of Christ.

The Resurrection for us is a triumph over the global evil, an unconditional victory over it. Faith in Christ crucified and risen from the dead opens a way of the most effective opposition to evil but peaceful and compassionate towards people. The power and courage of Christians lie not in aggression or desire for revenge but in a humble and steadfast witness to the truth in any situation, in the readiness to always serve to this truth.

Christian martyrdom is not just a heroic death in the struggle for one's beliefs: in the first place, it is an act of compassion towards the lost ones. We say that martyrs by their death bear witness to Christ. The path of a martyr is an effort to rectify, even if by the price of one's own live, the human untruth, to heal the spiritual blindness of one's neighbours by the light of Divine Truth. Thus our Church held out in the time of the 20th century atheistic persecution: by the humbleness and truth of their witness they overcame, trampled upon the death and suffering of the fallen world. Christian martyrdom is not death but its exact opposite, the triumph of true life.

And the Church's service to people is also a part of this witness, a part of her feat of confession here, on earth. I remember what troubles the Albanian Orthodox Church took upon herself under the guidance of Your Beatitude during the armed conflict in Kosovo by receiving all the refugees regardless of their

religion and political beliefs. The Orthodox world was amazed: with so small resources such an incredible work was carried out. The Church is unable to prevent all the troubles and misfortunes brought to the world by evil human will. But she can oppose evil and death with her only invincible weapon of life, which is love and compassion for the whole human race.

St. Cosmas of Aetolia, who once preached in these lands and suffered martyrdom here at the hands of adherents of a different faith, said remarkable words in his admonitions, ‘The All-Good and Much Merciful God has many names: He is called Light and Life and Resurrection. But the main name of our God is Love’. The love of Christ gives us life, and where there is love there is no room for death.

I thank Your Beatitude for the invitation, for the opportunity to pray together with you and with the whole Holy Albanian Church. May peace and love in Christ be with us all and may the Lord preserve your holy Church and her devout flock!

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