Greeting address by His Beatitude Anastasios, Archbishop of Tirana and All Albania

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 the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church with words of Easter greeting.

‘Krishti u Ngjall! Χριστός ανέστη! Христос Воскресе!

Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me bless his holy name (Ps. 102:1).

The Easter exultation and gratitude fill the hearts of all of us during your first peace visit to Albania, Your Beatitude and Holiness, my brother in Christ, Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia. This sincere joy has been crowned with today’s con-celebration, which chiefly serves as an expression of the unity of Orthodoxy. Our gratitude for the Paschal gift of your presence here is throbbing with life, rising to God glorified in the Trinity.

During the thanksgiving yesterday, I mentioned the experience of our initial cooperation in the early 1970s in the framework of SYNDESMOS, the World Fellowship of Orthodox Youth, in which we served as vice-presidents; you as a representative of the energetic young generation of then Soviet Union, and I as a SYNDESMOS veteran responsible for the external mission of Walking, an inter-Orthodox center. At that time the Russian Church could still feel the anti-religious pressure, while the Albanian Church reached the bottom of the abyss of godless persecution as she was completely destroyed.

I often ponder over our energetic participation in the work of Orthodox youth, because, as you know, I consider this sphere to be decisively and always vitally important for Orthodoxy. I am invariably convinced that the youth who search for freedom, justice and love will find the richness of life they wish in the Church of He Who Himself is Truth and Life. Speaking of the Albanian Church, we always stress that the youth are not just her ‘future’ but also her powerful present.

In the post-war period, the Orthodox youth, lay theologians and clergy raised their voice calling for the need for a greater unity mostly within Orthodoxy. The key phrase from the 1960s, which have not ceased to be voiced, is this: ‘The Orthodox Church is not a Conference of Local Churches but the One Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church’.

Concurrently with our primary pain, which is Orthodox unity, there also developed an intense feeling of the duty to bear witness to Orthodoxy in new boundaries, especially in the African continent and to repeat the bearing of good news to the countries that had been subjected to severe anti-religious persecution.

I am well aware, my dear holy Brother, that in all these searches and efforts you walk in the forefront with your relentless zeal and powerful word. I cannot forget your bright presence as chairman of the Russian Orthodox Church's department for external church relations at assemblies, committees and other bodies of the World Council of Churches, the Conference of European Churches and the European Council of Religious Leaders.

In the 21st century, there are problems remaining vitally important for our Church, such as a) the deepening of unity of the Local Orthodox Churches. At the same time, we should always stress her mystical and soteriological nature, the need for an effective improvement of her members with a stress on Holy Scriptures and patristic tradition, on raising the self-consciousness that the Church is the Body of Christ*, the fullness of Him Who fills all in all* (Eph. 1:22-23); b) powerful Orthodox witness before the modern world in the confidence that the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, to which we belong, lives not exclusively for herself but she herself and what is given to her are intended for the whole humanity; c) a contribution to the peaceful co-existence and harmonious cooperation between local religious communities. In doing so, we should make efforts to reconcile contradictions between different Christian communities in order to achieve peaceful co-existence with people of different religious beliefs.

At a time when suspiciousness, polarization and armed conflicts are disturbing the world, the Church should be a factor of peace and harmonious cooperation. At a certain interreligious symposium that took place here in Tirana a few years ago, I insisted that ultimately the opposite to peace is not war but egocentrism, individual, collective, national, racial, religious. It mobilizes various forms of violence, which, in very diverse ways, kills the world.

Antidotes for egocentrism are not general calls to morality, nor juridical formulations or repressive mechanisms. On the contrary, it is necessary to strengthen love, effective and manifold, not confined to some limits, prejudices or discrimination. Here are enormous opportunities and responsibility for the healthy religious awareness. The latter, even in a situation of long-standing conflicts, gives an opportunity for forgiveness and reconciliation. The might and power of love must and can overcome the love of oneself that ruins the world. The Church as the mystical Body of Christ, the Chief of Peace and Love, is always active as a laboratory and agent of this enormous power.

This is how it is possible to fulfil in an Orthodox way the duty defined by the Creator and Head of the

Church – Jesus Christ. During His first meeting with His disciples after His three-day Rising, He greeted them with words, *Peace be to you*, and added, *as my Father has sent me, even so I send you* (Jn. 20:21). The risen Lord did not confine Himself to proclaiming His victory over injustice, despair and death but He made a unique appeal to them to take part in His cause, to continue working for the sake of truth, reconciliation, dignity, solidarity and true peace not through force or reliance on state and economic power but through selfless love, sober humility of mind and resolute responsibility. Through the enlightenment and work of the Holy Spirit you will be a factor of peace, reconciliation and creative work.

The mystically continued extreme humility of Christ, the fruits of the sacrifice on the cross and consequences of the new Pascha – all this we, the Orthodox, live up in experience mostly in the Sacrament of the Divine Eucharist, which we have just celebrated. The power of the Cross and the exultation of Christ's Resurrection make our hard everyday reality 'a liturgy after the Divine Liturgy', with the Paschal breathing and Resurrection pouring out also on those around us.

Your Beatitude and Holiness, my dear Brother, once again expressing our fraternal joy and gratitude for today's con-celebration, we wish you good health for many years, ever growing inspiration and feeling of the pulse of the Holy Spirit so that, using the generous talents with which God has endowed you and your country, you may nourish the Most Holy Russian Church with insight and wisdom and radiate in the modern era the light of the Cross and Resurrection – this Paschal light giving meaning, hope and richness of love to our life.

Christ Is Risen! Krishti u Ngjall! Χριστός ανέστη!'

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