Patriarch Kirill's homily after liturgy at Cathedral of the Holy Trinity in Paris

On December 4, 2016, the Feast of the Presentation of the Most Holy Mother of God to the Temple, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia consecrated the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity in Paris and presided over the Divine Liturgy at the newly consecrated church. After the service he addressed himself to the congregation with a primatial homily.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I cordially greet you all on today's Feast of the Presentation of the Most Holy Mother of God to the Temple, an unmovable Great Feast and a Sunday.

Today, just as at every feast devoted to the Mother of God, we read the same Gospel well known to those who often come to church. It is a story about Martha and Mary and their encounter with the Lord and Savior in their house. The Gospel Reading ends with the words: *Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it.* In the Slavonic version we use a different word: *Bless rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it.*

These two words *obey* and *keep* are of great importance. One can keep only that which is cherished. We do not keep rubbish but rather throw it away. But we certainly keep what ties us with our kin, with our loved ones, with our past and with some significant events in our life. We almost never sell what we hold dear, nor do we barter it for something different. Moreover, we do not voluntarily abandon what we hold dear.

What does it mean for us to hear the word of God? In our time when the world is overfilled with information, the word *to hear* becomes a key one. A colossal information flow, a tremendous number of words, ideas, thoughts, is falling upon us. And more often than not, much of what we hear passes by us, for no human intellect is sufficient to accumulate all that enters our consciousness or touches our ear.

The Lord says: blessed are those who hear the word of God and obey or keep it. In other words, the human person is saved if he hears the word of God and keeps it. Why? Indeed, many important thoughts have been expressed through the history of the human civilization. Why then salvation is ensured only by the word of God rather than a wise human word? – Because the word of God contains the absolute truth, whereas all other truths, all other ideas are defined by the context of human life and lose their meaning after a while.

This city knows of a great number of thinkers whose words used to excited people's conscious. Many of these words overshadowed the word of God and people, utterly struck by the magnificence of human words, treated the word of God with condescension. It happened not only in this city but also in my country, when millions of people fully gave up their conscience, their heart and their will to human words. Inspired by these words, people gave their lives for human ideas defending them with arms in their hands.

And now I will ask the most important question: where are these human words now? Who of us in Paris or Moscow will give our life for them? Nobody knows most of these words any longer, except for academics who study the history of the human thought.

Why then does the word of God make us gather together? – Because there is the absolute truth in it and the absolute criterion of distinguishing between good and evil. It is very important. Indeed, if one stops distinguishing good from evil, one stops being a human being and the human society will be destroyed. These are not mere words said on a particular passage of the Gospel. Let us remember history: in the Old Testament the people of Israel – when they refused to accept God as the absolute truth, when they rejected their law – they disintegrated as people and lost their integrity. And only when they returned to God, they could unite again and recover.

In Russia, people rejected God in the beginning of the 20th century. Our fathers and grandfathers decided to build a prosperous society with justice but without God, following the human wisdom. And what do we see? The people were destroyed by a civil war and contradictions. Many found themselves here in France. And we thank France for it. In our country at that time all human resources were aimed at building a society with justice. A great superpower, in which everything – science, art, resources, technologies and the army – was concentrated in the hands of one power, everything was aimed at achieving only one goal to reach a prosperous society with justice. But all the efforts failed. Then the question arises: how many more lessons does mankind need for people to understand that without the absolute criterion of distinguishing good from evil, which comes from absolute God, the human society cannot be happy just as a human person cannot be happy?

Some wonder and ask us: why are so many churches being built today in the Russian Church? What are almost a hundred monasteries and almost 36 thousand churches for? Why do we need thousands of monks? And all this has been rebuilt within only 25 years. We answer: because we have had such a historical lession as no nation has had. We do not explain our actions, for each knows our history and understands that as a people we have been saved only through having kept the faith.

As a result of historical events that happened in Russia, as I have said, many found themselves outside

her, including in France. We keep in our hearts our gratitude to France and her people for the hospitality accorded to our refugees after the 1917 Revolution. And today, now for other reasons, many come to France from our country. They come bringing their life experience and many have profound faith in God and believe it important to be faithful children of our Church.

For 85 years the small chapel in rue Petel used to be the main cathedral of the Russian Church in France. Initially, this church was arranged in an underground garage and later on the ground floor of the building. Whenever I came to Paris, I prayed in that church and the very dramatic history of the Russian diaspora passed before me.

I would like to express deep gratitude to France, her supreme leaders, for in response to our requests and wishes they have given us an opportunity to acquire a remarkable place on the Seine bank for building this beautiful cathedral of the Russian Church and a spiritual and cultural educational center. Of course, it is a great support for all our people living in France. Perhaps, like the Alexander III Bridge, this church is a visible architectural symbol of the special closeness of our peoples, our cultures and traditions.

I would like to express special gratitude to the city of Paris in the person of its mayor and to all those who favoured the idea to build a Russian cathedral here, on the Branly embankment. It is not only a monument to our good relations in the past and our close traditions but it is certainly a symbol of what awaits us in the future. As one very well educated and well known person told me recently in England, what is happening between Russia and Western Europe today is simply a wind that hits the roof of the building in which people live – live by the past and the present, warming up at the fireplace and meeting each other. And the most important thing is happening inside the house, because today the wind blows from one side and tomorrow it will blow from another. And what we have done today in Paris is a great symbol of the closeness of our peoples and cultures.

Today is the Feast of the Presentation of the Most Holy Mother of God to the Temple. A small girl is brought to the temple in Jerusalem and walks without any help up the high stairs towards the high priest who meets her. This wonderful image is depicted in our iconography and the Renaissance remarkable panting. In these paintings we see the girl’s parents who smile looking at this wonderful event.

God grant that the time may come when we all, like the children of God, after coming through the hard historical search, losses and acquisitions, joys and disillusions, will ascend the stairs towards God. And the symbol of this encounter, both in old time which we referred to today and in our time, is the church of God. May this church of God become the place of meeting God so that this great experience of coming in touch with the Divine may help us to overcome the hardships of today.

Patriarchal Press Service

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