



Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk: His Beatitude Metropolitan Vladimir was zealous advocate for the unity of Russian Orthodox Church



On 5 July 2015, after the Divine Liturgy at the Church of the “Joy to All the Afflicted” Icon of the Mother of God in Moscow, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate’s Department for External Church Relations, spoke in his homily about the late Metropolitan Vladimir (Sabodan) of Kiev and All Ukraine, who died on July 5, 2014. The text of the homily is given below.

I would like to say a few words about His Beatitude Metropolitan Vladimir of Kiev and All Ukraine. I knew him very well. We worked together in various ecclesiastical institutions, including the Holy Synod, when he was healthy enough to attend its sessions. We had many cordial meetings in Kiev and other Ukrainian cities.

The following words from the Holy Scripture could be used to describe His Beatitude Metropolitan Vladimir, “He was a burning and a shining light” (Jn 5:35). We rejoiced in his light. It was in a difficult

period that the Lord commissioned him to head the Ukrainian Orthodox Church: political storms were raging in the country; the church schism began, which, much to our regret, has not been overcome yet. At the time, the Ukrainian government proclaimed that an independent country needed an independent Church. Taking advantage of this idea, Metropolitan Filaret of Kiev created a schismatic group which exists to this day.

In that difficult situation, bishops of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church unanimously elected His Beatitude Vladimir (then Metropolitan of Rostov and Novocheerkassk) Primate of the self-governing Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate. His Beatitude Metropolitan Vladimir did not expect that and was not prepared to continue his ministry in the Ukrainian land, but he humbly accepted his fate and came to Ukraine. His election took place at the Kharkov Council chaired by Metropolitan Nikodim of Kharkov and Bogodukhov, of blessed memory, another outstanding hierarch of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church whom I happened to know.

Having become the head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in those difficult times, His Beatitude Vladimir was met with love by the Ukrainian people, because he was modest, affable and humble. He could get on easily with all kinds of people and at the same time was a man of prayer and profound spirituality. When he was still healthy enough, he would celebrate the Divine Services very frequently, almost every day, would visit dioceses and parishes and meet with clergy and laypeople. The faithful loved their Primate whose humility served as a witness to the fact that no political forces or upheavals could shake the Church.

His Beatitude Metropolitan Vladimir was a zealous advocate for the unity of the Russian Orthodox Church within her canonical borders. It is for over a thousand years now that the one Russian Church has been bearing her witness to the world. This witness began not in Moscow, or Minsk, or St. Petersburg, but in Kiev, in the Dnieper baptismal font, born in which was the Holy Rus', thanks to the holy Baptizer of Russia, whose namesake was His Beatitude Metropolitan Vladimir. This year the whole Russian Orthodox Church is celebrating the millennium of the demise of Prince Vladimir, Equal-to-the-Apostles, in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and other countries.

The late Metropolitan Vladimir understood that church life could not be based on political slogans, since politicians come and go, and political trends change, but the Church remains. Even when the Church faces enormous pressure, she must defend her unity and what she has accumulated during many centuries. Politicians would exert pressure on His Beatitude Vladimir, saying to him, "Why do you need Moscow? We have our own Ukraine. We have thousands of parishes and a strong Church. Why don't we separate? You will become a patriarch, the head of an independent Church." However, he never yielded to such persuasion, was firm in his beliefs, and answered humbly that the unity of the Church could not and must not be undermined.

By the will of the Lord, the last years of Metropolitan Vladimir's life were marked by a serious illness which progressed month after month. There were periods when his death seemed to come soon, since he could neither speak nor recognize those who came to him. Yet, the Lord miraculously brought him back to life, and His Beatitude Vladimir continued his ministry, overcoming physical infirmity and serving as a symbol of church unity for the Ukrainian Orthodox faithful.

When God took His Beatitude Metropolitan Vladimir into His heavenly mansions, bishops of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church elected as his successor His Beatitude Metropolitan Onufry who performs his primatial ministry with the same commitment to church unity.

Ukraine is undergoing hard times today. The land of eastern Ukraine is suffering a fratricidal strife: many people have died or been injured; hundreds of thousands have lost their homes. In this situation the Ukrainian Orthodox Church faces great pressure again ...

What is now going on in Ukraine was to a large extent caused by the support politicians gave to the schism. The schism would have never become as large-scale as it is now, had it not been for the political figures who had supported and nourished it. However, the Church has Christ's promise that the gates of hell will not prevail against her. And those people who serve the Church, such as the late Metropolitan Vladimir and Metropolitan Onufry of Kiev and All Ukraine, who uphold the church unity instead of following political trends, realize that momentary political advantage will only yield momentary political happiness.

We often hear in the news about this or that governor being removed from his post, about this or that prime minister resign... Politicians have temporary power and they should be aware of that. They should realize that the Lord gave them power to work at their posts for a limited term and then to give way to others. They must not encroach upon the Church of Christ, which stands firm and will stand firm till the end of time; they must not encroach on the church unity we inherited from the Holy Prince Vladimir, Equal-to-the-Apostles. This unity is above any political borders, above any divisions and civil confrontations, and we all, people living in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and other countries, will strengthen it.

We will always cherish the memory of His Beatitude Metropolitan Vladimir who devoted all his life to the service for the benefit of the Church, her prosperity and unity.

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