



Metropolitan Hilarion: Story of Christ's Suffering Is the Core of the Gospel



On 1 March 2015, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, celebrated the Passion Service, commemorating the suffering of Christ, first time during this Lent, at the Moscow Church of the “Joy to All the Afflicted” Icon of the Mother of God in Bolshaya Ordynka Street.

Concelebrating the service with Metropolitan Hilarion were archpriest Rauno Pietarinen and Rev. Mark Patronen (Autonomous Orthodox Church of Finland), as well as clergy of the church.

After the reading from the Gospel According to St. Mathew, Metropolitan Hilarion addressed the worshippers with a homily, saying in particular:

“In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit!

“On Lenten Sundays we celebrate the Passion Service which prepares us for the Holy Week. The word “passion” is of Latin origin and means “suffering.” Read during this service are passages from one of the Gospels, dedicated to Christ’s Passion. Customarily, four Passion Services are celebrated during Lent; therefore, passages from each of the four Gospels are read.

“All four Gospels tell about Christ’s Passion. It seems that the whole narrative prepares readers for hearing the story of Christ’s suffering. All four Evangelists tell how Our Lord Jesus Christ was crucified, died and then rose from the dead. The story of Christ’s suffering is the core of the Gospel.

“This story fully reveals to us the reason of Our Lord Jesus Christ’s coming into this world. It is this story that shows that He was not merely a prophet and a teacher, but the Son of God, Who came into the world thanks to God’s ineffable goodwill to humanity, Who became man, lived a human life, left disciples behind Him, who formed the Church, and then died, rose from the dead and ascended into heaven.

“However, the Church is still His inheritance here, on earth. And we are members of this Church. Within it, we experience the same feelings as His disciples, as the women who were standing at the Cross, as the apostles who did not believe that the true Son of God had been with them until He had risen from the dead and sent the Holy Spirit upon them so that they could finally understand the purpose of His earthly life, suffering and death.

“We must remember that Our Lord Jesus Christ willingly endured the cross in order to help us, to deliver us from eternal death. When sufferings befall us, we must bear in mind His Passion. If suddenly a thought crosses our mind that God forsake us (since there are such moments in life when it seems that God does not hear our prayers), we must remember that the begotten Son of God Himself, the One, Who, according to the Gospel, *is in the bosom of the Father* (Jn. 1:18), and about Whom St Paul said that by Him also God had made the worlds (Cf. Heb. 1:2) – that even He went through all His sufferings as a human being.

“Let us plead with God that we might always remember about His Passion and His death on the Cross. Let us ask Him that His death might yield a good fruit in us, Christ’s disciples and followers. Let us pray that we might never weaken in faith, never forsake the Lord. Let us pray that if we happen to fall into sins and forsake God voluntarily or involuntarily in thoughts and deeds, that the Lord might grant us strength to repent, the way Peter did it.

“During Lent, while listening to and reading the Gospel stories about the suffering and death of the Saviour, may we ask God to let us experience the feeling of His beloved disciple and Mother, standing at the Cross – the feeling of love for God *Who so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life* (Jn. 3:16). Amen.”

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