Patriarch John X of Antioch's homily on Sunday of Forgiveness

On February 22, 2015, the Sunday of Forgiveness, His Beatitude John X, Patriarch of Great Antioch and All the East, and His Holiness Kirill, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, celebrated the Divine Liturgy at the Cathedral Church of Christ the Saviour in Moscow. After the service, the Patriarch Kirill addressed the congregation. In his response, Patriarch John said the following:

Your Holiness, our dear Brother, Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia:

I address myself to you with great gratitude; for God's mercy let me be today among you in the Russian Church. I am happy to be again at the altar of the Church of Christ the Saviour – the Church which gathered us together last year and which today, on the eve of the Holy Forty Days, has gathered us together again so that we may bear witness to the spiritual unity which unites Moscow and Antioch. We are our God's vineyard planted in the good place in which the task of our salvation was accomplished, and common love came to unite us all on the bosom of the Lord.

Your Holiness, you have just attested here to the fruits of the Spirit, and I would like, on behalf of all our brothers in the Church of Antioch, to address myself to the newly-consecrated bishop and the newly-ordained priest and wish that they may carry out with dignity the service crowned with the grace of God.

The Holy Church has established for us the time of Lent as a preparatory period for the Orthodox Pascha, which in our see of life is our sail of victory leading to the shore of the Kingdom of God. The Heavenly Kingdom, its beauty, begins in the praying heart of man as humble as a publican; it begins from the expulsion of the Pharisee's pride from the depth of his heart.

On the way to the Heavenly Kingdom, the cry of the Prodigal Son is heard: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.' This cry casts off from us the cover of idleness and despair, and puts on us the clothes of repentance, making us ready to stand before the All-Merciful Judge and to hear, through the thick layer of our sins, the beautiful merciful voice: 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world' (Mt. 25:34).

The shore of the Heavenly Kingdom leans against our today's Liturgy on the Sunday of Forgiveness as eternal immortality lost by lost Adam who was released from hell by the wounds of Christ. The journey to the Heavenly Kingdom is unthinkable without the Prayer of St Ephraim the Syrian in which we, aware of our being in the darkness of sin, ask the Almighty to deliver us from despair and idle talk, so that through

repentance we may come out to the light of Christ and seek the spirit of chastity, humble wisdom, patience and love.

The shore of the Kingdom is law for Orthodoxy reflected in the icons of the eternal glory of saints, which God has prepared for the righteous. The image of this holiness is a window out of the world filled with everyday troubles and worldly weaknesses.

The shore of the Kingdom directs to the grace of God. St Gregory Palamas says that it comes to get in and dwell in people's thoughts and bodies, giving them the light of the Almighty – the light bringing us closer to the Lord's Cross in which we trust as the power that drives away from us the horror of Golgotha and which delivers us from all our grieves.

The shore of the Kingdom is the crown of our virtues, which brings our hearts closer to God – the source of goodness, morality and blessing. The shore of the Kingdom needs a spiritual feat to be performed by the monastic soul, but it belongs not only to monks but to all those who, like the Most Holy Virgin, cries out: 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord' (Lk. 1:38). Their souls strive for the One Whose soul, having thrown off the shroud of flesh, could enter the fold of saints.

The shore of the Kingdom is not shaken by the darkness of Golgotha, nor is it afraid of it, crushing it by the Cross that has destroyed the curse to become the glory and symbol of our salvation. The light of the Resurrection illuminates all those who melt in the love of the Lord, who praise Him together with His angels: 'Christ is risen and by Himself He has raised us all from the dead'.

Your Holiness, we pray for you and for your noble people. We express gratitude to representatives of the Russian authorities for their efforts to promote peace dialogue in Syria, for their role in stabilizing the situation in Lebanon and the Middle East. We very much hope for the assistance of the Russian State and the Russian Orthodox Church in releasing our brothers – Metropolitan Paul Yazigi and Metropolitan Gregory John Ibrahim of the Syrian Orthodox Church, who were captured two years ago.

We thank Russia, the people, the Church and the state for their support of the people of the Church of Antioch, for their helping hand of humanitarian aid. We ask you to pray for the Church of Antioch, for her noble people, for everyone who has been kidnapped, who has had to emigrate and who suffer from what is happening in our much suffering East. We pray that the Lord may send His mercy to Russia and preserve Syria, Lebanon and all the East; we pray for Ukraine so that the Lord may be merciful to us all and grant peace to the whole world, illuminating it with the light of His Holy image. May the Lord be blessed for ages to ages! Amen.

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