Metropolitan Hilarion: the Church bears special responsibility today

After the enthronement celebration at the Kiev Laura of the Caves, during which Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk voiced a patriarchal letter of recognition to the new Primate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Onufry of Kiev and All Ukraine, he shared his thoughts about the mission of the Church in Ukraine and priority tasks facing its Primate in a talk with Deacon Yevgeny Murzin, a correspondent of the Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate:

In each historical era, especially at turning points in history, the Lord calls to the high primatial ministry those who by their life have shown their commitment to Him and His Church. Today we cannot but recall how – in 1992, at a crucial moment for the Ukrainian Orthodox Church when a threat emerged to the unity of Ukrainian Orthodoxy because of a schism – the Council of Bishops unanimously elected His Beatitude Metropolitan Vladimir as the Primate.

We were witnesses to his apostolic work, to the rebirth and growth of the Ukrainian Church under his guidance. In the recent years, we saw how his strength was failing but his spiritual gifts and intellectual abilities persisted allowing him to govern the Church. Several times when he seemed just at the point of leaving this world, the Lord miraculously revived him. It happened because Metropolitan Vladimir, even in his emaciation, was needed by the Church as symbol and guarantor of church unity. But when his journey on earth was over, the Church had to elect a new Primate. By God's will it was Metropolitan Onufry.

Again it has happened at a time crucial for Ukraine, when the country is torn apart by fratricidal strife, when the east of Ukraine has turned into a firing ground for testing weapons on people, when each day takes a new toll, when civilians' blood and tears are shed. It is regrettable that in this situation those upon whom the developments depend are lacking political will to move from hostilities to peace negotiations, from the language of threats to the language of peace, to cease fire and sit down at the negotiation table. And here a special responsibility is placed on the Church. Today the Church can say its strong reconciling word, addressing it to all the sides of the conflict without being involved in a polemic about its causes and nature, without dividing people into the right and the wrong. Indeed, in a conflict each side involved in it is guilty to this or that extent. I think that the priority task for His Beatitude Metropolitan Onufry will be a search for peace, a search for national reconciliation for all the Ukrainian people.

Today, right before the beginning of the enthronement, a Patriarchal letter of recognition was voiced,

giving a blessing of the Primate of our Church to the newly-elected Metropolitan of Kiev and All Ukraine upon his ministry. Today, the whole multinational millions-strong Russian Orthodox Church has prayed together with the Ukrainian flock for the newly-elected Metropolitan. We will continue praying for him and believe that the Lord will strengthen His Beatitude in his lofty and important ministry to which He has called His servant at such a crucial moment for Ukraine.

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