



Patriarch Kirill's homily after Divine Liturgy in Old City in Minsk

Your Holinesses,

Your Beatitudes,

Your Eminences and Excellencies,

Dear Fathers,

Distinguished Representatives of the Government,

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

I greet you all on the occasion of the great feast. We are celebrating today in the capital of Belarus the 1025th anniversary of the Baptism of Rus' – the event described as a turning point in the destiny of all the peoples who have inherited the tradition, spirit and faith of Holy Rus' – that same Rus' which came out of the Dnieper baptismal waters. We know that this event resulted in tremendous changes in the people's mentality, in their morality and in the order of public life. It urged on a rapid development of the culture and art so that Old Rus' was no longer lagging behind but was on a par with the rest of the European nations. Speaking volumes about it are marriages concluded with monarchs in Western Europe. It was really a thriving state stretching from Galicia to the Volga, from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea. And we are spiritual and cultural heirs of that civilization created as a result of the Baptism of Rus'.

In the recent days which we have spent in prayer, in a stately manner remembering the Baptism of Rus', much has been said about the special contribution Christianity made in all the aspects of our peoples' life and the fact that thanks to the choice made by the Holy Prince Vladimir Equal-to-the-Apostles, Rus' saw the formation of a special system of spiritual and moral values which, by entering into her culture, fertilized first the life of the one people of Kievan Rus' and now the life of all the peoples successively linked with that civilization, those people and that act of the Baptism of Rus'.

Today, however, I would like to speak of something different. Each knows what Baptism is. Through Baptism we received the grace of the Holy Spirit, joining the community of the apostles named the Church and establishing our personal relations with God. It is in the Baptism and Chrismation that the link between God and man is closed. Through the act of Baptism we as if switch on this means of connection with the Lord and the current, not electric but that of divine energy, runs from God to us and our prayers go towards God.

This was the most important thing in the Baptism of Rus', with the rest – much spoken about by historians and scholars today – being of secondary nature because primarily it was the union of people with Living God through the Lord Jesus Christ. If the Baptism of Rus' had only been a cultural act, nothing would have remained from it, as everything would have been destroyed in the course of the tragic history of our people; everything would have been burnt down in the fire of wars and fratricidal strife; everything would have been destroyed under the impact of powerful intellectual forces which influenced our people often seeking to tear them away from God. The 20th century alone counts for a lot... But we as a people and a Church have withstood these trials, and there is no other institute but the Orthodox Church which, having gone through all these trials, has preserved its unity and spiritual power. It has happened not because the Church has been led by clever or educated persons or because the clergy have fulfilled their duty honestly, but precisely because at that time 1025 years ago the link was closed between each one baptized in Kiev in the Dnieper and the Lord. And after that the Baptism went on to the whole Rus'.

We know that the Polotsk land was the first after Kiev to embrace Baptism. Today you symbolically represent it as the people of Belarus. That is why we celebrated the Baptism of Rus' in Moscow, Kiev and Minsk – the places where the peoples-heirs of this Baptism live. And today as always, as 1025 years ago, as in the hardest times of our history, we are nourished by the power of God's grace. And I call those who have not yet experienced this influence to experience it, as St. Paul said, *Test them all, hold on to what is good* (1 Thes. 5:21). If one experiences the power of God's grace in his heart at least once, he will never refuse this gift of God. These are not just words. In our history, there was much suffering and persecution. Martyrs and new martyrs were not stopped by the fear of death, discredit, alienation from the society or other fears because they experienced the gift of God's grace in their hearts.

Celebrating the 1025th anniversary of the Baptism of Rus', we recall and reflect on all this, taking it through our hearts and minds. But a feast does not exist for us just to gather together and mark it but first of all to think over our life – personal, family, social and public, to ardently pray for God's grace which, in response to our efforts, transforms this temporal reality.

Today we prayed together with Primates and representatives of the Local Orthodox Churches from all over the world. We celebrated the universal liturgy at this historic place in Minsk. Praying together with us were people of various nationalities staying there, in their homes. I say so because their Primates are here with us, and through them praying with us was the whole plenitude of the Churches they represent.

It is a historic event for Moscow and for Kiev and for Minsk. It shows that the Baptism of Rus' and the subsequent history and today's state of the Russian Orthodox Church – all is related to the life of the entire Orthodoxy, just as the life of any Orthodox Church is related to our life. The solemn pan-Orthodox liturgy is a symbol of our earthly and heavenly unity. This unity is manifested, among other things, in the spiritual unity of our nations and in the unity of the Russian Orthodox Church, which throughout the 1025 years, despite all the hardships and severe trials, has borne her pastoral service and faithfulness to the Lord, preserving the purity of the faith.

I would like to wholeheartedly thank you, Your Holinesses and Beatitudes, Primates of Holy Orthodox Local Churches. I would like to thank the high representatives of the Local Orthodox Church whose Primates could not stay with us to the end of our feast for valid reasons. I would like to thank His Eminence Metropolitan Filaret, Exarch of Belarus, Primate of the Byelorussian Church, for the work he and his episcopate, clergy and faithful have carried out for the good of holy Orthodoxy here, in the Byelorussian land. We can see the fruits of this work in the churches built, in social work, in educational projects and in the work with youth, and today we can see with our own eyes the beauty of church life here, in this square.

I would also like to thank the governmental authorities of Belarus, President Alexander Lukashenko and

all those who have taken an active part in the arrangement of the celebrations. I, together with my fellow-archpastors, invoke God's blessing upon Byelorussia and her people. May the Lord preserve you all in the faith, in unity, in spiritual power, so that this power may help, among other things, to transform the external life for a better.

May God's blessing and the Protection of the Heavenly Queen through the intercession of St. Vladimir Equal-to-the-Apostles be with all of you. Amen.

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