Homily delivered by Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia in Kiev Laura of the Caves on the commemoration day of St. Vladimir Equal-to-the-Apostles

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia delivered this homily after the festive liturgy celebrated by the heads and representatives of Local Orthodox Churches and an assembly of bishops from Ukraine, Russia, Belarus and Moldova, who came to Kiev for the celebrations marking the 1025th anniversary of the Baptism of Rus', at the cathedral square of the Kiev Laura of the Caves:

I wholeheartedly greet you on the occasion of the feast of the Baptism of Rus'!

We have counted off 1025 years of our common history which has developed under the cross of St. Andrew the First Called. And today the whole plenitude of the Orthodox Church, through her primates, bishops and priests, has assembled here, in the Kiev Laura of the Caves, to thank God before this very cross of St. Andrew for the fact that the apostle's prophecy about Orthodoxy in our lands, about the truth shining forth in them, has come true.

We all have been brought together by the power of God as One Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. What is the foundation of our unity? Why are we all together in the Orthodox Church despite the hard conditions of our life in history? – Because the foundation of our life is the foundation stone which is our Lord Jesus Christ. Precisely for this reason the word of God states: On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it (Mt. 16:18). They will not overcome it because what lies in the foundation of the Church is not human wisdom or human power but the power of God. This power of God is almost never realized in human power because the Lord said, My power is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor. 12:9).

The whole history of Christianity in Rus' shows this human weakness of ours. But if we were the only foundation of the building that Christ has built, would it withstand the pressure of various ethnic and cultural factors and especially the tremendous influences from outside, which for centuries have worked to undermine the unity of the Church, to weaken her witness? Christ is the foundation stone of our Church's and our life.

How then to come to this stone, how to touch it, how to enter the Kingdom of God proclaimed by Christ? Today's Reading of the Gospel answers this question: I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved (Jn. 10:9). There is no other door to salvation. And this is confirmed by other words of the Gospel:

I am the way and the truth and the life (Jn. 14:6).

We as Orthodox Christians of the 21st century experience a colossal impact of different thinking, different philosophies, a different understanding of life, especially the one that does not recognize any objective truth but links the truth with human dispensation. That is why they say: 'There are as many truths as there are minds' or 'Each has his own truth'. This destructive philosophical idea offered today to the whole human civilization, being falsely justified by personal freedom, leads to the disappearance of truth, its minimization; you cannot discern it amidst other points of view. It is precisely what the struggle against the Church is aimed at so that the truth and the way of truth and life could not be seen.

However, today we show our commitment to Christ. Through Him we enter into communion with Triune God, into the Kingdom of God. It is on Him as the foundation stone that we build our life. We remember, believe and confess that He is the way and the truth and the life.

It is not easy to confess this gospel's truth today. In some places and in some countries there is even a conviction that those who insist on their possession of the truth should be punished. They should accept the truths held by other people – false truths even if these truths belong to a minority but are included in the life of society and state through law. And if some people speak of the truth of Christ and reject these false truths, in some countries they can already be subjected to legal persecution.

We believe that Jesus born from the Virgin Mary is the Lord and Saviour. There is no other saviour; He is the one. And that is why He is the way and the truth and the life.

We proclaim our faith without hesitation or fear, just as St. John Chrysostom states this in his instruction to catechumens on the Easter day. It is quite clear that the Church as Divine organism living in history among people also has human nature, just as the Lord Jesus Christ had human nature. This human nature of the Church is vulnerable as was the human nature of the Saviour. Indeed, He was beat up, outraged, nailed to the Cross. And the Church bears these wounds of Christ, this weakness of human nature. We are witnesses to a great deal of consequences of this weakness, human weakness. Perhaps more relevant for us today is the sin of schism, division, when people motivated by political or ethnic interests destroy the one body of Church. But no one is ever given to destroy the foundation stone, just as no one is given to destroy the invisible body of the Church which is the Body of Christ the Saviour Himself.

In celebrating the Divine Liturgy today together with Primates and representatives of all the Local Orthodox Church, we confess the faith in One Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, the foundation of which is Christ. Today just as in the past, she is able to overcome schisms, divisions, heresies and temptations. For the Church is the place of salvation. However strongly the everyday life of sin may rage

around us, we find our salvation in this island of freedom, the island of salvation called the Church of Christ.

I extend great gratitude to all the Holinesses and Beatitudes the Patriarchs, their Beatitudes Primates of Local Churches, His Eminences the representatives of Local Churches who share in this great festivity in Moscow and Kiev and, by God's grace, will share in them in Minsk. Today we have not simply celebrated this universal Liturgy, but we strongly prayed for the whole Orthodox Church, for her unity, so that no human temptations – no pride or suggestibility from outside, nor weakness of the human spirit – may destroy our unity. And we believe that it will never happen because the Church is created by Christ Himself on His foundation stone.

I would like to thank His Beatitude Metropolitan Vladimir for his courageous and wise service of the Church of Christ in the Ukrainian land. We preserve the unity of our Local Russian Orthodox Church, the very Church which came out of the Kiev baptismal font and is supported by venerable fathers whose relics rest here, in the Kiev Laura of the Caves – the very Church whose glory was clearly seen by St. Andrew on Kievan hills.

I thank you, Your Beatitude and the episcopate of our Church in Ukraine and all the people who, in spite of temptations and pressures, preserve the unity of One Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church dwelling here, in the Ukrainian land.

I would like to thank Ukrainian President Victor Yanukovich, the authorities of the country and representatives of the public for the excellent organization of the feast, which contributed to these celebrations. God grant that on the basis of peace, mutual understanding and non-interference in each other's affairs, the cooperation between Church and State may be carried out not only in all the vast lands of historical Rus' but also throughout the Orthodox world.

I wholeheartedly thank you once again, my dear Patriarchs, Metropolitans and Archbishops, for the joy, ease and excellent mood with which you have come to our land and share with us and our devoted people in the feast of the 1025th anniversary of the Baptism of Rus'. May the experience of catholic, pan-Orthodox prayer we have had these days, be not overcome by any external circumstances, even the most severe ones, like those we hear from reports about the developments in the Middle East.

May the Lord preserve us. May the Protecting Veil of the Heavenly Queen cover us all, preserving our unity which can be the only guarantee of the unity of the entire human race. Amen.

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