



THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

Department for External Church Relations

Message of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia and the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church to Archpastors, Priests, Monastics and the Laity on the Occasion of the 1025th Anniversary of the Baptism of Rus

Beloved in the Lord Your Graces the archpastors, all-honourable presbyters and deacons, God-loving monks and nuns, dear brothers and sisters!

This year we commemorate a significant event – the 1025th anniversary of the Baptism of Rus. In the distant tenth century Rus, through the labours of the Holy Equal-to-the-Apostles Prince Vladimir, adopted the Christian faith and culture, making a choice of religion and civilization which defined the vector of the historical development of our peoples.

As Metropolitan Hilarion of Kiev said, 'faith, replete with grace, has spread throughout the world and has come to our Russian people... Our beneficent God has had mercy upon all lands and has not despised us; he desired it, and we were saved, and he has brought us to the reason of Truth.'

The past 1025 years have seen both glorious and tragic events. Faith in Christ was inculcated in our forefathers and brought forth abundant fruit, yet it happened in the most difficult of circumstances. Many have tried to deflect the peoples of Rus away from Orthodoxy. This was the goal of those who wanted to enslave us, coming from the West and the East. This was the wish of those wanting to build the 'ideal' society without God, going against his eternal law. Yet the nation that adopted the Christian faith has repeatedly shown its fidelity to Christ. It was able to return to him even after the apostasies imposed by those who cruelly persecuted it. Despite the 'weak endeavours' of the latter, the hearts and souls of many of our compatriots have been sanctified by Christ's truth. It is our duty and spiritual imperative to preserve this truth and build our private and public lives upon its foundations.

We must learn the lessons of the past. And the main lesson is this: the edifice of our civilization cannot exist without the Gospel foundation upon which it was raised up. Today many again are proposing that we build up our lives without God. Freedom is often understood as the pursuit of all kinds of desires, including those imposed upon the human person from without. This understanding of freedom may be broadened to the extent that it will begin to threaten our natural moral instinct, our duty to our neighbours and ultimately the very possibility of speaking the truth and acting according to conscience.

Nations that have lost the morality of self-limitation and ministry to God, the Fatherland and neighbour lose their spiritual strength and become weak and vulnerable, thus bringing the threat of extinction and the sad prospect of conceding their place to others spiritually stronger. We have to understand this clearly and not pursue the path leading to destruction, recalling the words of the prophet: 'Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls' (Jeremiah 6:16).

The modern world encounters many afflictions: crime, terrorism, the increasing number of suicides and abortions, the collapse of the family, alcoholism and drug addiction, the destruction of the environment and social injustice, the loneliness and suffering of the souls of many people. These calamities can be overcome by embarking on the path of the revival of faith in God who is ready to grant forgiveness of sins and his gracious aid for a new life to both individuals and whole nations. The Baptism of Rus is the life-creating fount which sustains us to the present day and which gives strength to build up the lives of the lands that are the inheritors of historical Rus on the basis of the eternal values which they have received from God and which unite and bind us spiritually. These values and the world view which they have influenced are reflected externally in the culture of our peoples, including art, architecture, literature, education, our family way of life and the way we order our economy, our relationship with nature and many other things, forming a commonality of a single spiritual expanse of the inheritors of Holy Rus.

It was a quarter of a century ago that the rebirth of the Russian Church began. During these years tens of thousands of churches and hundreds of monasteries have been restored and built, the Church's mission has been put on a sure footing in many spheres. A powerful spiritual and moral factor in the life of our peoples – the Orthodox faith has become the heritage of millions of people. With humility it is to be noted that world history has not known such a great and swift religious revival as that which has occurred throughout the territory of Historical Rus over the past twenty-five years. We render our sincere thanks to God, who is the Lord of history, for the mercy which he has shown to our peoples. From our hearts we thank all those who have through their labours responded to this compelling divine grace and made all of this possible.

However, there is still much to be accomplished, for the Lord awaits from us new fruits. And the main fruit must be the uniting of faith and life, the affirmation of Gospel truth in the words and deeds of our compatriots.

We recall that throughout history the destinies of the peoples who were spiritually born in the baptismal font of Kiev have played out in various ways. In the past they lived in a single country extending from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, from Galicia to the Volga River. At other periods some of these peoples found themselves under foreign dominion and formed part of other countries. Yet our spiritual unity,

preserved by the gracious power of God and the common moral ideal preached and guarded by the Russian Orthodox Church, has existed and still exists immutably.

The peoples in whom the holy Orthodox faith has taken root are called upon, as St. Sergius of Radonezh teaches, 'to overcome the divisions of this world in contemplation of the Holy Trinity,' being an example of brotherhood and mutual aid for mankind. Holy Rus will live as long as it remains faithful to the choice made by St. Vladimir, as long as it preserves its spiritual unity, as long as it remembers and prayerfully venerates our common saints. And if we preserve this single heritage and spiritual affinity, then we have a future.

May God, through the prayers of the saints who have shone forth in the Land of Rus, grant that we may be confirmed in the truth upon which the life of our peoples has been built and, we believe, will be built.

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