



Metropolitan Hilarion: Our love of God is tested beyond the church walls

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On July 29, the commemoration day of the Holy Fathers of the Six Ecumenical Councils, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations, celebrated the Divine Liturgy at the church of Our Lady the Joy to All the Afflicted in Moscow.

After the liturgy, Metropolitan Hilarion delivered the following homily:

'In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit!

'In today's Reading of the Gospel, we heard the story of how our Lord Jesus Christ, at the request of His disciple, fed up a multitude of people with bread and fish. The Gospel speaks of five thousand men who were fed by the Lord, not counting women and children. So, we do not know the exact number of people. The Lord fed them with five thousand loaves and two fishes.

'This miracle of the multiplication of loaves in a desert reminds us that the Lord is the Giver of every blessing, the Giver of both material and spiritual food. It is not accidental that every time before eating we ask the Lord to bless our meal and after the meal we thank Him for satisfying us with His earthly gifts and ask that He may not deprive us of His Heavenly Kingdom.

'Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Giver of all blessings and it is He Who gives us food, even if we buy it in a grocery or cook it with our own hands.

'In a quite different manner however, the Lord gives us Himself as the Bread which gives eternal life and gives us His Holy Blood as the source of water running into eternal life. And it is not accidental that from the very beginning of the Church of Christ on earth this miracle of the multiplication of the loaves was seen as the image and prototype of the Holy Eucharist which we received from the hands of the Lord Himself. We ask for bread and wine produced by human hands, but the Lord by His divine power turns them into His life-giving Body and His honourable Blood to feed not five or fifty or five hundred thousand but millions of people around the world – the people to whom the Lord Himself said, 'I am the bread of life' (Jn. 6:48). 'I am the source of living water; whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst' (cf. Jn. 4:14). The Holy Eucharist is the source of spiritual blessings which helps us in our earthly life to unite with the Lord Himself, while remaining in our material bodies.

'There is a simple physical law: when man takes food, this food is digested by his organism. Particles of this food are absorbed by his flesh and blood to become part of his own flesh. When man takes in the Divine Bread – the Body of Christ, this material bread is miraculously united with the material body of man and the Body of Christ becomes part of our body, and the Blood of Christ becomes part of our blood. This is that ineffable and incomprehensible union between God and man which is possible only in the Christian Church and for the sake of which the Lord came to earth.

'Holy Fathers say that the goal of Christian life is deification, that is, the union of man with God in which man, while remaining in his material body, becomes imbued with the presence and energies of God, in which man, while on earth, lives the life of the upper world. This happens to us in the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. In this sacrament we unite with the Lord and the Lord begins to live in us, begins, from within our own body, to feed us with His own Divine Body and His Divine Blood, thus enlivening and giving life to our human nature and burning the sinful principle present in each of us. This sacrament is a great gift of God, but it places a great responsibility for our life, our behaviour, our attitude to God and people.

'The Lord demands that we should fulfil His holy commandments, that we live by His laws, that the Gospel should be for us not just a book to read but the book with which we verify our everyday life. The sacrament of the Holy Eucharist is indissolubly linked with what happens before and after it. It is not

accidental that the Church calls us to be thoroughly prepared for the communion, to purify our hearts through the sacrament of confession, to purify our minds through prayer and repentance, through the attentive and heartfelt participation in the Divine Eucharist. The Eucharist however is also linked with what happens after we have taken communion and after we have been dismissed and come out of the church. Indeed, it is beyond the church that lies the space in which we should manifest our Christian love, our Christian courage, and in which we should do as it befits Christians. If we partake of the Holy Gifts of Christ but our life is not consistent with the gospel's ideal, then this sacrament proves to be, as St. Paul put it, 'in judgment' of us (see, 1 Cor. 11:28-29), like one of the apostles, having partaken of the Last Supper, proved to be unworthy of that holy gift. Whenever we come up to the Holy Cup, we remember this former apostle and pray that we may never make his mistakes, never lapse into duality which led him to betrayal.

'Our love of God is tested outside the church walls where we encounter human grief, need, evil and perfidy, where the Lord calls us to act in the way He Himself acted among people. In our everyday affairs we should emulate the Lord Himself, looking at Him as the image we should imitate.

'Whenever we partake of the Holy Gifts of Christ, we will pray that the Lord may give us strength to be good Christians in this world where Christian values have been forgotten by many, where the gospel's commandments are unknown to many. We will ask the Lord to fill our hearts with the grace and love which helps us to carry our cross of life, which helps us in all life situations to act as it befits Christians. Amen'.

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