Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk: Each of us can find his or her way back to God

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On 12 February 2012, the Sunday of the Prodigal Son, the Church also celebrates the Synaxis of the Ecumenical Teachers and Hierarchs: Sts Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, and John Chrysostom. On that day Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Department for External Church Relations, officiated at the Divine Liturgy at the Church of the "Joy to All the Afflicted" icon of the Mother of God in Bolshaya Ordynka street.

Concelebrating were hegumen Mitrofan (Shkurin), abbot of the Monastery of the Dormition in Lipetsk, and clerics of the church.

At the end of the service Metropolitan Hilarion delivered an archpastoral homily:

"Two weeks before Great Lent begins, the Holy Church prepares us for the act of penance by the reading from the Gospel, which tells the Parable of the Prodigal Son. This Parable reminds us of the destiny that every man and all mankind have before God. The Prodigal Son is a man who isolated himself from God in a certain period of his life for some reasons, either due to age-related crisis, soul-searching, or due to the influence of other people, or because of some other circumstances.

And very soon his life becomes awful and unbearable, because he doesn't follow God's commandments any more and doesn't fill himself with the Divine grace, but with passions and transient enjoyments.

The Prodigal Son finally realizes that he can't go on living like that, can't keep moving away from God. And he starts to search his soul, remembers about his Heavenly Homeland and about his Heavenly Father, starts thinking of returning to Him.

Upcoming Great Lent is the time when we can think our life over and ask ourselves a question: where are we, in a *distant country* or in the house of our Heavenly Father, do we partake in the divine meal or fill ourselves with the *pods that the pigs are eating*? Each of us can find his or her way back to God. And we are not alone: the Church guides us and the Lord Himself teaches us what we should do in order to return to the path leading to salvation.

This is what the great Fathers and Teachers of the Church: Sts Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, and John Chrysostom, have been teaching us for centuries. By their works they remind us that every

man is created in the image of God and is called upon to ascend from the image to the likeness of God by exercising in virtues, by following God's commandments, and by living a Christian life.

But let us ask ourselves a question: have we read any of the writings of Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, or John Chrysostom? Written in the 4th century, these writings will be of great use for us today. They will lead us on our way back to the Lord, because we fall apart from Him every time we start living according to the laws of this world, when we indulge our passions and sinful thoughts and do not accept God's grace, but follow our own sinful human will.

So let us pray without ceasing to these great saints who offered us their wonderful and ever timely guidance in spiritual life. Let us lift up our prayers to God so that he would accept us as his Prodigal Son, forgive us everything, and re-establish our dignity as His sons and daughters. Amen."

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