



THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

Department for External Church Relations

Address by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia at the Easter reception given by Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Dear Sergei Viktorovich,

Reverend Bishops,

Distinguished Ambassadors,

Brothers and Sisters:

I cordially greet you all who have gathered here with the radiant feast of the Resurrection of Christ.

Christ is Risen!

First of all I would like to thank the Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation, Sergei Lavrov, for having invested me with the Commemoration Medal honouring Alexander Gorchakov, an outstanding Russian diplomat of the nineteenth century. I see in it a testimony to the recognition of services rendered by all

those who represent the Russian Orthodox Church in the field of external church relations.

Our meeting today has become a good Easter tradition, a good indicator of developing relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and Russian diplomacy. We share the festive repast with all those who have joined us to express respect for the people of our country whose historical journey has been inseparably linked with Orthodoxy.

For every believer, the Resurrection of Christ is a source of joy and hope that gives us strength on our spiritual journey of spiritual perfection, honest work and service to our neighbours. It is not easy to live according to conscience and truth, but to live according to conscience and truth means to build real social welfare, true peace and accord on the earth. Pascha calls us to transformation, renewal and review of our life. Following this way, we can change the world around us.

The feat of Christ the Saviour crowned with victory over sin and death cultivates in the human soul the ability for self-sacrifice. Its loftiest manifestation is the willingness to lay down one's life for others, even for people we do not personally know.

Yesterday I came back from Ukraine, where I took part in commemoration events marking the 25th anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster. On April 26, the anniversary of the tragedy which coincided with Tuesday of Easter Week, we prayed for the repose of those who died in the reactor's explosion and during the liquidation of its consequences. People who self-sacrificially performed their duty in a situation threatening their life and health acted according to the gospel. They did not spare their life and saved it eternal life (cf. Lk 9:24). Saving their neighbours without thinking about themselves and their own future, they fulfilled the words of the Saviour, *Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends* (Jn 15:13). It is not the only example of the heroism of people in the face of destructive man-made and natural disasters.

With joy we can testify that that the Japanese people have withstood in an organized and courageous manner the catastrophe that occurred at the Fukushima nuclear plant. This man-made catastrophe touched the Moscow Patriarchate directly: in Japan there exists the daughter church of the Russian Church, the Japanese Autonomous Orthodox Church, which became the fruit of the mission of Russian Orthodoxy on the Japanese islands in the nineteenth century. The East Japanese Diocese, with its centre in Sendai, especially suffered. Thank God, no one of the clergy was affected, but there were victims among parishioners and several churches were destroyed. At present, the Moscow Patriarchate is raising funds for repair of the damaged churches and construction of the new ones. I thank God that people have responded to our appeal. We have already transferred a large sum of donations to Japan and, I hope, restoration work will begin in the very near future.

The courage and strength of spirit which unite people, enabling them to develop a system of human solidarity before dangerous challenges – whether natural disasters or man-made – evokes a sense of deep respect. Therefore I want to repeat that we value highly the spiritual condition of the Japanese people, who have courageously resisted the calamity visited upon them.

Next year we shall celebrate the hundredth anniversary of the demise of St. Nicholas of Japan, Equal-to-the-Apostles. He was a Russian priest, then archbishop, who brought Orthodox Christianity to Japan, and subsequently headed the Japanese Church. God willing, I hope to visit Japan next year and in particular the diocese of Sendai, destroyed by the elements, in order to express my solidarity with our Japanese brothers and sisters in their hour of need and at the same time pray with them, and then to think of how we can in other ways help to overcome quickly the consequences of this catastrophe.

Regrettably, in today's world we hear about examples of self-sacrifice and kind-heartedness on rarer occasions than about conflicts and clashes of interests. Heavy upheavals have shaken the Middle East and North Africa, where there is a considerable number of Christians, including those who are Orthodox.

Humanity needs solidarity, so that we could together oppose the temptation to settle international contradictions by military means and oppose the threat of terrorism and extremism, confrontations on ethnic and religious grounds and social injustice aggravated by crises in the economic sphere. Sincere, steadfast faith gives us the strength to create a common space of trust, negate violence, falsehood and double standards, show love and be well meaning, and where necessary to show sacrifice in relation to our neighbours and those far from us.

Believing people are convinced that the way to building good-neighbourly relations between nations lies through the assertion of traditional spiritual and moral values on which nations and civilizations build their life. In this sense a special place is occupied by traditional moral values. I thank you, Sergei Viktorovich, and in your person the Russian diplomacy for the initiatives in pushing through the Human Rights Council the corresponding UN resolution.

I recall how the first time at a session of this Council several years ago I expressed my thoughts, which fortunately later found reflection in this resolution. I must say that I did not expect such a favourable reaction. It was perhaps the only instance when at a session there were present ambassadors from almost all countries represented at the UN. It seemed to me that after my speech there would ensue criticism as it looked like a challenge to the firmly established views on the topic of human rights, but the lengthy discussion convinced me that the absolute majority of those present in the hall not only shared my thoughts but were also willing to defend them.

I thank once more Russian diplomacy for the fact that, guided by the loftiest ideas and principles, you

have managed to construct a new paradigm for the philosophy of human rights within the framework of which rights are linked to the dignity and responsibility of the human person. May God grant this interpretation of human rights – rights which are realized within the moral system of values – enter the consciousness of people today. Without the tying of human rights to moral responsibility, we may be faced by the danger of the unfettered human instinct which, while laying claim to human rights, will destroy all that is around it by subjugating the environment to gratification of instinctive consumption.

I would also like to point to an event which has become ‘a moment of truth’ for many Europeans and generally all those for whom religious symbols are an expression of their faith and cultural and religious self-awareness. Italy, supported by other states including Russia, has defended her right to place crucifixes in Italian public schools. It is a sign of hope for the preservation of common European Christian identity. This decision is a result of joint efforts made by Christians in Europe including statesmen. Thank God that this long-standing court has ended with the victory of common sense, with the realization that Europe without its Christian heritage simply cannot exist. And we may note that in other parts of the world greater respect is now being paid to religious symbols and historical religions.

I hope that this decision will become a starting point for a critical review of the concept of aggressive secularism which leads in Europe to the restriction of the rights of Christians in public life.

Brought together by the great Feast, we express hope for a future of humanity that would be worthy of the great Sacrifice offered by Christ the Saviour for each of us. Once again, I greet you all who have gathered here with the Pascha of Christ. I wish you good health and God’s help in your future work.

Sergei Viktorovich, allow me to thank you for the remarkable words you have uttered. As Patriarch, I am ready to subscribe to them. I am a fortunate Patriarch, as I do not recollect a time when the opinion of the Church and the opinion of the authorities on very important philosophical topics and questions of world-view have so happily coincided. May God grant that our accord become a part of the experience of practical co-operation, which is already sufficiently rich, yet, I hope, will become ever richer and important, will serve the genuine prospering of Russia, of all the Russian world, and will make its contribution to the prospering of global life and the institution of justice on our planet.

Christ is Risen!