



Patriarch Kirill celebrates Divine Liturgy at church of Our Lady the Joy to All the Afflicted in Ordynka

[gallery]

On November 6, 2010, the Day of the Mother of God 'The Joy to All the Afflicted', His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia celebrated the Divine Liturgy at the church of Our Lady the Joy to All the Afflicted in Bolshaya Ordynka.

He was assisted by a large assembly of bishops and priests. Present at the service were S. Popov, chairman of the State Duma Committee for Public Associations and Religious Organizations, and the Apostolic Nuncio to Russia, Archbishop Antonio Mennini, as well as benefactors of the parish.

After the service, His Holiness said a praise at the miracle-working Icon of Our Lady the Joy to All the Afflicted, the main shrine of the parish.

Addressing the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk said:

'Your Holiness, Our Primate and Father, I greet you in this holy church in which you celebrated for the first time as the Bishop of Moscow, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia. Its history reflects like in a drop of water the history of our homeland for the last 500 years. It was built presumably in 1523 at a place from which Russian people used to go to the Golden Horde. It has repeatedly destroyed by fires. The first stone church was built here under Patriarch Joachim and in 1688 people saw here the first miracle coming from the Icon of the Most Holy Mother of God the Joy to All the Afflicted.

The church was greatly damaged during Napoleon's invasion. It was fully reconstructed by architect Bove and consecrated in 1836 by St. Philaret of Moscow, who delivered one of his most remarkable sermons on the occasion. The great number of communicants we see today is perhaps the fulfilment of the words of the great saint, who, at a time when communication was not frequent, called people to make their partaking of the Holy Mysteries of Christ a permanent inner need.

In the Soviet time the church was temporarily closed, but after the war it became acting again not to be closed ever since. The late Archbishop Kiprian served here whom Your Holiness remember very well since you used to come to this church as a young archimandrite.

Today you are standing on this ambo as successor to Metropolitan of Kiev and Metropolitan and Patriarchs of Moscow. I am happy to greet you at this church, which is gradually reviving, in which we

have managed with God's help to revive the choir which was famous even in the Soviet times. It was the only church in Moscow and in all Russia where church music by Rachmaninov, Tchaikovsky and other great Russian composers was performed. And today we heard these compositions during the service and the works by N. Golovanov, who was the Bolshoy conductor in the Soviet time and composed church music secretly. He could not hear it performed during his lifetime, but now it resounds in the church.

Your Holiness, you are our Primate and Father who tirelessly preach the word of God to people, addressing not only the flock of the Orthodox Church but also the whole society, those who are still far from the Church or those who are in their way to it. I would like to wish you that your patriarchal office may be not only successful but also long and that the Lord may preserve you for many years because the Russian Church, our country and those countries which belong to the canonical jurisdiction of the Russian Church need you. You are to do much and we will tirelessly pray to the Lord that He may strengthen you in your carrying the heavy primatial cross'.

His Holiness Kirill said in response:

'Your Eminence, dear Metropolitan Hilarion, Honorable Bishops, dear Fathers, Brothers and Sisters, with a great joy I have celebrated together with you the Divine Liturgy in this famous Moscow church. I rejoice in the fact that today we prayed together with representatives of Local Orthodox Churches led by the most worthy representative of the Patriarchate of Antioch, our beloved brother Archbishop Niphon, who has served in the capital for many decades and who is well known to the ecclesial Moscow. I also greet His Eminence Anthony, representative of the Serbian Church, Father Alexis, representative of the Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia, Father Archimandrite Zacchaeus, representative of the American Church. And I congratulate you all, my dear Brothers and Sisters, on this remarkable day.

Thank you, Your Eminence, for having reminded me of the history of this church which occupies a special place in Moscow's church life. I remember that this church was well attended even in the Soviet time because the greatest shrine of Moscow – the miracle-working Icon of Our Heavenly Queen the Joy of All the Afflicted was and is here to this day, and also because there is an excellent choir conducted by N. Matveyev. Perhaps the older generation of the parishioners remembers what a great impression that choir made on both those who attended this church and those who tried to come in without being noticed because of their high social status and to pray here.

Today we celebrate the Icon of Our Lady the Joy to All the Afflicted. Why are there so many of us here? Why do thousands and thousands of people glorify the name of the Mother of God today throughout the Church? Because the Heavenly Queen helps us when our sorrow exceeds our ability to oppose it. It happens when external circumstances, sometimes destructive for our personality or the cause we serve

suddenly becomes so powerful and dangerous that we realize: our resources are insufficient to overcome them.

The same happens when serious illnesses visit us, when we realize that neither doctors nor modern medicines can help us. Then the sorrow exceeds our ability to live, destroying our inner world. But when we cry out to the Heavenly Queen from the depth of this suffering, She hears us.

The same happens when conflicts break out suddenly, threatening to destroy the fabric of human relations in our families, parishes, communities, work teams. Then we see that we are not able to reconcile people on our own. It is felt especially strongly during family conflicts when trust between spouses is destroyed and families are wrecked.

And finally, each of us sooner or later will have to face death. However numerous were the people around a dying person, however dear he was to them, however famous he was in society and loved in his family, approaching death always means profound loneliness... He becomes lonely because nobody can be with him at this moment, even if his deathbed is surrounded by many people. At the same time, there can be no one except our Heavenly Queen who is our Mother. She is with us when we experience the greatest sorrow and agony, when we do not have enough strength to cope with our tasks, to overcome our physical and spiritual illnesses, to restore human relations, and when we, utterly lonely, approach death.

It is not accidental that people call this icon 'the Joy to All the Afflicted' because the Heavenly Queen, according to the great gift She received from God, the gift to become the Mother of the Church and all the believers, can be with us in the most painful situations, if we wish Her to be. If we attract Her love and attention by our ardent prayer to her and our faith.

Nobody comes to a dried well for water. Nobody would turn to God and the Mother of God for help if there had been no response. And we turn to God and the Heavenly Queen precisely because She hears our prayers and the Lord gives us His mercy. On this the entire religious life is built.

I remember how in the years of atheism many intelligent and educated people, especially students, were averted from God by all kinds of references to scientific achievements: 'there is not God because science has proved something'. And there were people who abandoned God in the belief that if science had proven it, there was no God indeed. But why has the faith survived in our people despite the tremendous machine of propaganda targeted at both educated and simple people? Simply because people, even if they did not know what science had proved, did know that in response to their prayer they did receive an answer from God and from the Most Holy Queen of Heaven. And the heavy weight they put on the Orthodox faith to suppress it was removed; and all the references to science, progress,

education and the happy life to come were destroyed – because people did know that God heard them. And this church in the center of a state which used to call itself atheistic saw thousands and thousands of believers including scientists who concealed their religious views but came here to pray to God and to receive help from the Queen of Heaven.

We are now living at a different time, and it may seem to many that everything is all right, calm and peaceful. But if we take a close look at what is going on in the world, we will see that the attempts to destroy the faith in God are much more skillful today than they were before when it was done straightforwardly, without any sophistication. Today tremendous efforts together with human thinking are used to avert people from God. But we believe and know that it will never happen. Some will be lured, some will take the path of satisfying their carnal desires which take people away from God, but very many will say: No, because I know for sure that God hears me and the Heavenly Queen helps me in my life. It is especially true for those who come to the Icon of the Joy to All the Afflicted at a time of sorrow and hardships. When they receive miraculous help, no temptations of the world can attract them. And one becomes a believer because one's faith unites with one's experience. It is no longer just faith but knowledge that God is present in our life and the Protecting Veil of the Heavenly Queen is not an image, not a metaphor but a real power which protects us.

I would like to wish us all the closeness of the Mother of God, so that we may have sufficient inner strength to pray, to establish the relations through which help is given us from above. Indeed, the Lord in His great mercy requires of us, too, some sacrifices, not at all great like those demanded by the human race, but essential. This sacrifice is our faith and ordering our life in accordance with divine law. In response to our small efforts, the Lord reveals to us the mystery of His being, the mystery of His presence in the life of human community and in the life of each of us.

May the Heavenly Queen always stay over the city of Moscow, over all Russia and historical Rus', over our Church, strengthening us in the faith, devotion and great hope for her maternal intercession before God.

I would like to thank you, Metropolitan Hilarion, for taking care of this parish. You occupy an important post as permanent member of the Holy Synod responsible for the external relations of the Russian Church. This post requires strong faith, utter commitment to God, strong spirit and courage because you are in the forefront of church life, and this means the first to take blows. I say it because I know what it means to be chairman of the Department for External Church Relations. I would like to wish you all that I have mentioned as well as the love of the clergy and support of your parishioners. May prayer in this church always help you in fulfilling your task on behalf of the whole Church. May God preserve you all'.

Patriarchal Press Service/DECR Communication Service

