



## **Patriarch Kirill's homily in Kiev Laura of Caves on the Baptism of Rus' Day**

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit!

With great joy and in the simplicity of our hearts we celebrate the Day of the Baptism of Rus's, the day of the demise of the Holy Prince Vladimir Equal-to-the-Apostles through whose will and efforts our people were baptized thus opening a new page in our history. Today we have listened to the Gospel of St. John, which helps us in a wonderful way to understand the mission of Prince Vladimir and all that he did. It also helps us to understand why the spiritual and church history of our people was built in that and not other way.

In the lines of the Gospel of St. John we have just heard, we find these words of the Lord: *Truly, truly, I say to you... All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them* (Jn. 10:1, 8).

Who were those about whom the Lord spoke to the apostles? He must have spoken about something obvious, because those strict words were taken as a statement of some well-known fact. What were these facts?

Among the people of Israel there appeared from time to time some people who claimed to be prophets and even 'messiahs'. Some of them used preaching for the purposes of their own power and enrichment, while others seemed to be engaged in a good cause: they led or wished to lead the Jews in a struggle for independence from the Romans. The Lord does not condemn His people's desire of independence but describes as thieves those who, employing the most sacred and great thing there was in the Old Testament devotion – the expectation of the Messiah, used that expectation for their own earthly political purposes.

There was nothing wrong in people's struggle with foreign invaders. On the contrary, it was right, and perhaps if the people turned to God with prayer for help then the Lord would have given that help. But it was not at all help that was asked by those who called themselves messiahs and called upon people to rise in a political struggle!

The Lord called them thieves because they stole the most sacred thing that people have – they steal God and the meaning of His saving message to people. These strict words of the Savior help us to understand how terrible it is to use the word of God not for people's salvation by distorting the very

nature of this word but to call them to achieve the purposes that the Lord did not at all define as the goal of human salvation.

There are many good things in our life which people seek to achieve relying on God's help. These are the state order, independence and support of cultural life. Perhaps many people pray to God asking Him to help them on this path. But the name of God could not be used and the ministry of the Savior Himself could not be appropriated to call upon people to what the Savior Himself did not call them!

We remember today another outstanding servant of God's truth – St. Paul. At almost every liturgy we read his epistles and recall his life journey. Both Prince Vladimir before his baptism and Paul – Saul before his conversion used to serve the aims and values which were not the truth of God. But at a certain moment, appealing to Christ and having experienced similar torments and suffering, they both found sight, both spiritual and physical. That is why Paul's preaching never contained what was in the false preaching of thieves and robbers who tried on themselves the word 'messiah'.

In the Letter to the Roman, the apostle says that in the good news he brought to people *the truth of God is revealed* (cf. Rom. 1:16-17). This truth of God is the very core of the apostolic preaching. This truth of God was taken in by Prince Vladimir Equal-to-the-Apostles with all his heart, and wishing to realize this truth, he baptized the people, pointing for them together with the first apostle to the authentic salvific goals of their existence on earth and consequently in heaven.

How is the truth of God reflected in people's world? It is realized in the words which have in Russian the same root as the word 'truth', namely, righteousness and justice. By the way, in the Russian version of the Gospel, both justice and righteousness are designated by one and the same word because there can be no righteousness before God without adoption of God's truth nor can there be justice in human life without adoption of God's truth. Thieves and robbers could not establish justice by their word, nor could they find freedom or give people the spiritual perspective of life because appropriating what belongs to God they could never help people to find righteousness and justice in their life.

More than a millennium has elapsed since the Prince Equal-to-the-Apostles shook off both spiritual and physical blindness in the baptismal font. Since then the historical life of the nations who came out of this Kievan font of Baptism has been developing. People have endured much grief and suffering, and it is impossible to say that the life of our people has been more comfortable and happy than that of other nations.

But what does constitute the core of our spiritual tradition? What constitutes the eternal dimension of the entire Orthodox Christian civilization? – It is the fact that despite grieves, losses and torments our people have preserved the faith. And today, in face of aggressive godlessness and reviving heathenism

we have preserved the firm and unshakable faith in God, and on this faith we seek to build both the life of our society and our private life, remembering that a faire order of social life is linked with the personal righteousness of every person.

When our people lived up that righteousness our Fatherland was called Holy Rus'. There were sinners and there were crimes and there were weaknesses in the people's life but we have carried through a millennium the great ideal of Holy Rus' as the greatest value – Holy Rus' as a community of people in which righteousness dominates. And however condescendingly and disdainfully the powers that be may look at our childish and naïve faith, however hard they may try to pour dirt and contempt on it, we will preserve this naïve faith with humbleness and in the simplicity of our hearts because it helped our people to rise to the defense of our Motherland and to preserve faith and to raise children in spite of terrible persecution and oppression.

We believe that getting to the meaning of what we learn through our today's reading of the Gospel, we will continue to keep the purity of Orthodox faith; we will continue to have before our eyes the ideal of Holy Rus' and, living in different states, we will remember our common past and preserve the spiritual unity of the people who have the same divine ideal of life – which is justice and righteousness. Let us preserve this ideal; let us preserve the spiritual power of Holy Rus' so that this power may be reflected in our everyday actions and help us to build the life of our nations in the spirit of the divine truth and justice!

Amen.

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