



His Holiness Patriarch Kirill celebrates the Office of Blessing of the Cathedral of the Transfiguration in Odessa and officiates at the Divine Liturgy

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On 21 July 2010, the feast of the appearance of the Icon of the Most Holy Mother of God in Kazan, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia celebrated the Office of the Great Blessing of the restored Cathedral of the Transfiguration in Odessa and officiated at the Divine Liturgy there.

Concelebrating with His Holiness were His Beatitude Metropolitan Vladimir of Kiev and All Ukraine; Metropolitan Varsonofiy of Saransk and Mordovia, Chancellor of the Moscow Patriarchate; Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, Chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations; Metropolitan Agafangel of Odessa and Izmail, Lazar of Simferopol and the Crimea, and Ilarion of Donetsk and Mariupol; Archbishops Ionafan of Tulchin and Bratslav, Varfolomei of Rovno and Ostrog, Ioann of Kherson and Tavria, and Mitrofan of Belaya Tserkov and Boguslav, chancellor of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church; Archbishop Feognost of Sergiev Posad, abbot of the Laura of the Holy Trinity and St. Sergius; Bishop Sergiy of Solnechnogorsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's Administrative Secretariat; Bishop Mitrofan of Gorlovka and Slavyansk, Bishop Evlogiy of Sumy and Akhtyrka, Bishop Aleksandr of Pereyaslav-Khmel'nitsky, a vicar of the Kiev diocese; archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin, chairman of the Synodal Department for Church-Society Relations; archpriest Nikolai Balashov, deputy chairman of the DECR MP; ordained staff members of the Synodal Departments, and many clergymen of the Odessa diocese. Praying at the service was Vladimir Legoida, chairman of the Synodal Information Department.

Attending the service were deputy prime minister of Ukraine for regional politics V. Tikhonov, chairman of the State Committee for Nationalities and Religions Yu. Bogutsky, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Russian Federation to Ukraine M. Zurabov, Consul General of the Russian Federation in Odessa A. Grachev, head of the Odessa Regional State Administration E. Matviychuk, Odessa Mayor E. Gurvits, chairman of the Odessa Regional Council N. Skorik, people's deputies of Ukraine, diplomats, and other officials.

Despite the heat, some five thousand people gathered in the Cathedral, and some thousand more stood around it.

After the reading from the Gospel, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia delivered a

sermon.

After the Divine service, the ruling hierarch of the Odessa diocese, Metropolitan Agafangel, greeted His Holiness the Patriarch and presented him with a patriarchal staff.

His Beatitude Metropolitan Vladimir of Kiev and All Ukraine said in his address:

"We are very happy today for many reasons. The first one is that persecution of the Church and people had ended, the visible beauty has been restored along with its invisible spiritual power. The inhabitants of Odessa rejoice today as His Holiness the Patriarch has come to visit them. We believe that God will hear the prayers offered up to Him today, and the Heavenly and the earthly Church will exult...

"May God grant you strength, patience, faith and ardent prayer, and heartfelt devotion to God. May He keep you and multiply your gifts to His glory and your salvation. We ask for your blessing and prayers for your flock of many millions living in many countries. We ask you not to forget us and to come visit us more often. Bless us, our Holiness!

"Dear brothers and sisters, let us say just four words to His Holiness: May God save you!"

The worshippers in the church and those standing around it repeated these words.

His Holiness the Patriarch said:

"Dear bishops, fathers, brothers, and sisters!

"I would like to wholeheartedly thank you, Your Beatitude, for your warm and sincere words filled with love to your people and your Church that is undergoing a difficult period in her life.

"The Lord has granted you reason and strength to wisely lead the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, keeping faith and piety in people and maintaining the unity of the Russian Orthodox Church – the largest church in the world that bears responsibility for upholding the Orthodox faith and observing God's law in the world. We believe that this mission of our Church marled by the blood and suffering of the martyrs, is gaining a particular meaning today.

"I thank you, Your Beatitude, and all bishops of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church for your firm standing in Orthodoxy, for your steadfast and uncompromising devotion to the canonical order of the Universal Church that has provided for the existence and unity of the Church for over two thousand years. Whatever heresies and schisms were shaking the Church, she has always been victorious, as God,

Who has conquered evil on the Cross, conquers the devil. Any victory of evil is a temporary victory, while God's victory, the victory of good over evil is eternal. All who observe the law of God and contribute to moral transformation of the human person are with God, are among His warriors who bring the great and salutary witness to the world."

Addressing Metropolitan Agafangel of Odessa and Izmail, His Holiness said:

"I cordially thank Your Eminence for all great and important changes in the life of the Odessa diocese that have taken place during your time here. You are a worthy successor of the bishops of Odessa, zealous of piety and pillars of the faith...

I thank you for your wonderful gift, a patriarchal staff. Any time I take it in my hand, I shall remember the pious people from the south of Russia, the inhabitants of Odessa and all those who are upholding the faith by their ardent faith and prayers, thus protecting it from fading away and not allowing anyone to extinguish this fire."

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill presented Metropolitan Agafangel with a set of two pectoral images and a pectoral cross in gratitude for his labours.

His Holiness donated an Icon of the Saviour to the newly blessed Cathedral, saying: "May Christ the Saviour protect all of us, may His image be always in your hearts and make you strong and invincible people who affirm the truth of God in the world."

His Holiness gave small icons of the Mother of God of Kasperovo to all the worshippers and wished them constant intercession of the Heavenly Queen for Odessa, Ukraine, and the entire Holy Russia.
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