



Metropolitan Hilarion: It is in human will to respond or not to respond to God's call, to follow and not to follow Christ

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On July 11, 2010, the eve of the commemoration day of Sts Peter and Paul, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations, officiated at All-Night Vigil in the Church of Our Lady the Joy to All the Afflicted in Moscow.

Among the hymns sung by the Moscow Synodal Choir were those from Metropolitan Hilarion's 'All-Night Vigil'.

After the service, His Eminence Hilarion, who is also the rector of the church, delivered an archpastoral homily:

'I greet you all, dear brothers and sisters, on the occasion of the commemoration day of the holy first apostles Peter and Paul! The Church has established this day for celebrating the memory of these apostles in order to underscore their special importance for the life of the Christian Church. St. Peter was a man who was called by the Lord Himself to accompany Him in His life on earth and to be, among the three of His closest disciples, a witness to His special miracles, such as the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor, and to be with Him in the Garden of Gethsemane.

'St. Paul was a man who did not accompany Christ in His life on earth and, when he learnt about Christianity, he took it for a heresy, a violation of the forefathers' tradition. He was a persecutor of the Christian faith until the Same Christ but now risen from the dead appeared to him on his way to Damascus and opened up his spiritual eyes. These revelations were so strong that his eyes stopped seeing physically and it was only after he was baptized he recovered his sight not only spiritually but also physically and became an apostle, like others who were such during Christ's life on earth. He worked no less but, as he writes in one of his letters, perhaps even more than other apostles did to preach Christian faith (cf. 2 Cor. 11:23).

'Glorifying these holy apostles, the Church shows us that the Lord calls people at different times. There are those who were vouchsafed to see the Saviour with their physical eyes but there are also those who gain an insight into the mysteries of Christian faith only with their spiritual eyes. During the service this morning we heard a story from the Gospel about how the Lord gave sight to the blind. The story of St.

Paul shows that the Lord opens up the eyes of His persecutors as well, because if their intentions are good, if their heart burns for God, why not then to direct this ardour for good. The Lord mysteriously chooses disciples for Himself. Nobody knows why the Lord has chosen these rather than other people. Nobody knows why the Lord chose illiterate fishermen to send through them His divine word to humanity. Why the Lord chose those twelve, not other twelve? Why the Lord chose Judas who was to betray Him? Why the Lord chose Paul who was His persecutor? All this belongs to the mystery of God's economy. But it is in human will to respond or not to respond to God's call, to follow or not to follow Christ, to become an apostle or not to become an apostle. When the Lord calls it means to follow Christ always or to reject Christ, just as it happened to St. Peter; it means to be a disciple of Christ or to betray Him, just as it happened to Judas. The Lord's ways are mysterious and inscrutable. He calls every person to live a life of virtue, and those who have become members of the Church of Christ the Lord calls to be not just good people but to be apostles and preachers of His divine glory and to show to others by their way of life the beauty of the gospel's teaching and word. Let us ask the holy apostles Peter and Paul to give us firm faith so that through their intercession we in our difficult and sorrowful era could bear apostolic witness to the eternal truths which we partake in the Gospel through the Church of Christ. Amen'.

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