Metropolitan Hilarion on symbolism of name in Christian tradition

Speaking on the Church and the World talk-show, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations, explained the difference between a guardian angel and a heavenly patron and the symbolism of name in Christian tradition.

'Every Orthodox Christian has a Name Day – the commemoration day of the saint after whom he was given a Christian name. In old times, a person was given the name of the saint on whose commemoration day he was born. Accordingly, it was both his birthday and his name day. "The day of the angel" is not a church expression, but a colloquialism. Some people confuse their saints and guardian angels. A guardian angel is assigned to every person, while a saint is a heavenly patron – the person after whom a baptized Orthodox Christian was named and to whom he appeals in his prayers', His Eminence Hilarion said.

Among the newly inchurched people there is a popular opinion that children should be baptized for a child to have a guardian angel. Metropolitan Hilarion reminded the viewers that the Lord speaks in the Gospel about non-baptized children who have angels. Therefore it can be assumed that every person has a guardian angel. 'We know that God takes care of every person, baptized and non-baptized. Indeed if a person comes to church to be baptized it means that he has been brought in by God and that a guardian angel has been assigned to him. The sacrament of baptism is the entry to the Church. It opens up for a new Christian the life of the Church in all its fullness and gives him an opportunity to partake of the Holy Mysteries of Christ. The Name Day and veneration of saints belong to the domain of devotional traditions of the Church but has no bearing on the essence of church life', the archpastor noted.

Asked about the reason for one to change his name in taking monastic vows, His Eminence Hilarion answered: 'This tradition goes back to the Old Testament times. The name was a certain symbol of a person. It is not accidental that when the Lord assumed a special care of a person to make him a God-chosen one, his name was changed: Abram became Abraham, Sarai became Sarah and so forth. The Lord Jesus Christ renamed some of His disciples: *Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church'* (Mt. 16:17-18). The change of one's name means that one has entered into new relations with God. It is also linked with the old custom to change the names of slaves: one who bought a slave could give him any name since the slave was one's property. A person who gives himself up to full obedience to God becomes God's voluntary servant in the literal sense, because he gives

himself up to be owned by God and gives Him the right to give him a new name, that is, he rejects his previous life and begins a new life in full obedience to God’.

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