



Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk: Our life journey on this earth is a way to the Kingdom of God

On February 13, 2010, the eve of Cheesefare Sunday also called the Sunday of Forgiveness, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk officiated at All-Night Vigil at the church of Our Lady the Joy to All the Afflicted in Bolshaya Ordynka Street.

In his sermon after the service His Eminence Hilarion reminded the congregation of one of the features characteristic of divine services celebrated on the week preceding Lent. Thus, Psalm 137 beginning with 'By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept...' was sung for the last time during All-Night Vigil before the Holy Forty-day Fast. The Archpastor stressed:

This psalm is about the distress the people of Israel felt in the Babylonian captivity. It reflects first of all the nostalgia and love of the homeland expressed in profound and very powerful words: *For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion* (Ps. 137: 3-4).

In old Israel there was no division of music into temporal and spiritual; therefore there were no what we call folk songs today. The songs of Zion the enslavers told their slaves to sing were the songs which ancient Jews used to sing to the music of harp and which were the song of the Lord, that is, psalms and prayers. When the people of Israel were deprived of their homeland, they were also deprived of the temple because they had one temple and it was in Jerusalem. Being deprived of the temple, they were deprived of an opportunity and desire to sing the song of the Lord because they were *in a foreign land*.

It is not accidental that this psalm is sung on the threshold of Lent. It reminds us that we all stay here in a land of exile because our homeland is the Heavenly Kingdom. Here we stay as if in captivity, in the captivity of passions and sins.

It is in this land of exile that Adam found himself when the Eden gates closed behind him – the event we commemorate on the Sunday of Forgiveness by the words of a church hymn: 'Adam sat before Paradise and lamented his nakedness', his misery, his life and his sins. This is the state we all share. And though we love our homeland and all that the Lord gives us on this earth, we should not forget that our true homeland is in heaven and that our life journey on this earth is a way to the Kingdom of God.

The Church has established for us special periods of repentance so that we could remember that the Lord awaits us in the Heavenly Kingdom. In order to traverse the path lying ahead in a worthy way, we should repent and forgive each other and stand firmly in our Orthodox faith and remember that the Lord awaits every one of us in His Kingdom and has prepared a place for each of us there, in the heavenly homeland.

Listening to the words of this psalm, let us ask the Lord to give us His help in our Lenten journey, to give us the ability and desire to forgive each other and the strength to make true repentance so that the Lord Himself may guide us on our way to the Heavenly Kingdom.

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