



Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk consecrates the church of the Three Hierarchs-at-Kulishki

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On February 11, 2010, the Day of the Synaxis of the Three Hierarchs: Sts Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian and John Chrysostom, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate department for external church relations, consecrated the church of the Three Hierarchs-at-Kulishki. On the same day, he celebrated the Divine Liturgy in this newly-consecrated church.

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After the service, the rector of the church, Archpriest Vladislav Sveshnikov, greeted the DECR chairman, saying,

Your Eminence, Dear Metropolitan Hilarion,

The whole of our small parish would like to thank His Holiness Patriarch Kirill for the paternal attention he has given us, especially for having blessed precisely you to consecrate this altar and to celebrate the first Divine Liturgy on it.

I cherish the memory of the day several years ago when the Lord was pleased to make me your concelebrant in the Divine Liturgy in Vienna. It was at that time that I was struck by your seriousness and attentiveness, complete lack of vanity, simplicity and grace of your movements. It was so vivid that it could not but pass on to all the worshippers. For this reason I have long dreamt of having you as celebrant in our church.

It is very significant that it has been you who has consecrated the altar of the church of the Three Hierarchs, because it must be the reason why these three hierarchs have waited so long for the moment when a bishop-theologian will come to consecrate the altar in a church dedicated to them.

It is not accidental that His Holiness has chosen you as his closest helper. You share the same spirit; you follow the middle royal way which does not allow of either excessive liberalism or extreme conservatism. You both love both the Holy Tradition and is ready to respond to all the

challenges the world hurls at the Church.

Archpriest Vladislav also stressed it was the first consecration of the church that His Eminence Hilarion performed in the rank of metropolitan. In memory of the consecration he presented Metropolitan Hilarion with an icon of the Three Hierarchs.

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Having thanked the rector for his warm words, Metropolitan Hilarion addressed himself to the congregation with an archpastoral homily:

Dear Fathers, Fellow-Bishops and Concelebrants,

Dear Brother and Sisters:

Today, the Commemoration Day of the Three Hierarchs: Sts Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian and John Chrysostom, we have consecrated the altar dedicated to the Most Holy Trinity: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. When we were consecrating this altar, remarkable and very meaningfully profound prayers were read saying that a church is a place of God's special presence – the place of the dwelling of the Holy Trinity.

Every Orthodox church is a place where God is present, but a church dedicated to saints is also a place where people meet these saints in spiritual communion, in prayer. In consecrating this stone altar today, dedicated to the Holy Trinity, we also felt the presence of the three great hierarchs whom the Lord ordained to become defenders of Orthodoxy at a time when the Arian heresy prevailed everywhere and no human efforts could defeat it without special God's help.

That heresy was monstrous because it was aimed at destroying the very core of Christian faith. Arius taught that Jesus Christ was the Son of God just like every person is a son or daughter of God but He was not consubstantial to the Father and was one of God's creations, senior of course, more important than we are but still only one of the creatures.

This teaching spread as an infection, as an epidemic to dioceses and parishes. Some did not understand that behind it was a most dangerous deviation from Christian faith, while others were inclined to accept the new teaching at the civil authorities' order. But there were people who were gifted with a special theological vision. At that time when there were no catechisms written and approved by the Church while the church doctrine was still developing, they saw in the Arian false teaching essentially an attempt to undermine all the foundations of Christian teaching.

Because, if Christ is not God then Christianity is a deception and neither Church nor Sacraments are needed. The whole dogmatic teaching of ours, the whole sacramental life of our Church is based on the firm foundation of the doctrine as solid as this stone altar we have consecrated today – the doctrine that Jesus Christ is not merely the Son of God but also God incarnate who is consubstantial to the Father.

It was at that time, in the 4th century when that terrible dispute broke out to shake the whole Church, that the great hierarchs, Sts Basil the Great and Gregory the Theologian and later St. John Chrysostom rose in rebellion to formulate the teaching of the Church on the Holy Trinity once and for good, so that no Ariuses could come again and shake the Church, so that no heresy could destroy the good news we have received from Christ and His apostles.

Christ commanded His apostles to preach and baptize ‘in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit’. It is the Trinitarian formula which became the baptismal formula in the early Church, but theologians were to understand what it meant and what the relationships between the Persons of the Holy Trinity were. This difficult task fell to the lot of the three great Cappadocian fathers – Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian and Gregory of Nyssa.

Basil the Great stood up in courageous opposition to Arianism. He dedicated all his efforts to the defense of the church teaching and left this world at the age of 49 because all his physical and spiritual resources were given to the struggle for Orthodoxy. He left behind disciples and followers and Gregory the Theologian was one of them. It was he who was destined to come to Constantinople at a time when almost all the churches were in the hands of Arians, to take away these churches from them, to restore the Orthodox faith and to deliver five homilies about theology in which he laconically and clearly set forth for centuries the Orthodox teaching on the Holy Trinity.

In the late 4th century, St. John Chrysostom, who inherited the chair of Constantinople, had again to defend the teaching on the Holy Trinity, to come out against the Arians, the Eunomians and other heretics and to seal the theological teaching formulated by the Cappadocian fathers in their works.

Unfortunately in our time there are not so many Orthodox Christians who read the works of great Fathers and Doctors and the Church. Few of us can boast of having read in Russian if not all but at least one or two works of Basil the Great or Gregory the Theologian or John Chrysostom. However these works never become obsolete and constitute the basis of our faith.

If we have doubts about anything, if our faith seems to be shaken, if today’s heretics or

apostates begin to tell us that we 'should not believe in the Holy Trinity because God is one' or we 'should not believe in one God because there is no God', then we must turn again and again to the life-giving heritage of the holy fathers because they are the foundation on which the Orthodox Church stands to this day. And her power lies precisely in faithfulness to the patristic Tradition. This Tradition imbues our whole liturgy.

We are told: 'You, Orthodox, pray too much; your services are unintelligible; you are not on modern lines; everything in your Church has gone out of date'. Our answer to this is that we keep the Tradition of the Orthodox Church which the holy apostles handed down to holy fathers to reach us through generations of our parents and ancestors. They, our fathers and mothers, grandmothers and grandfathers, preserved the patristic Tradition in the severe years of persecution against the Church. They could not read the works of holy fathers but they lived up their spirit and handed it down to us.

How can we after this take a path of modernization or liberalization of our teaching, as our Protestant brothers and sisters in Western Europe did? Now they tell us that we are lagging behind life and that we should take into account the achievements of modern liberal theology and that we should review our theological and moral teaching to make it consonant with modern godless standards. We will never do it! We will firmly safeguard the Orthodox faith because it is the basis of the Holy Church, and no trends will be able to shake our commitment to Orthodoxy. This is what is taught by holy fathers who showed by their life and death that the faithfulness of Orthodox faith can be preserved despite all the temptations, threats or trials'.

On behalf of His Holiness the Patriarch and on his own behalf, the DECR chairman thanked Archpriest Vladislav Sveshnikov and his helpers for the church restoration work and wished them God's help in their work in the vineyard of Christ in emulation of Sts Basil the Great, Gregory the theologian and John Chrysostom.

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