Christmas Message of His Holiness Patriarch KIRILL of Moscow and All Russia, to the Archpastors, Pastors, Monastics and All Faithful Children of the Russian Orthodox Church

Beloved of the Lord archpastors,

all-honourable presbyters and deacons,

God-loving monks and nuns,

dear brothers and sisters!

On the radiant of the Nativity of Christ I cordially congratulate you on this great feast day.

For two thousand years Christians throughout the world have turned, with joy and hope, their mental gazes to the event which has been decisive for the history of mankind. Our contemporary reckoning of time, which begins with the Nativity and is the reckoning of time for the Christian era, testifies to the exceptional meaning of the coming of Christ the Saviour.

The cave in Bethlehem, where the animals took refuge from the cold of the winter night, has become the image of a world that has abandoned its Creator and felt the pain and darkness of being abandoned by God. However, the radiant night of the Nativity filled with light not only the cave which gave refuge to the Most Pure Virgin Mary, but also all creation, for through the birth of the Son of God every man that comes into the world is illumined by the Light of truth, as witnessed by St. John (Jn 1: 9).

We may ask: what does the Light of truth mean? We find the answer to this question in the same Gospel narrative of John. The Light of truth is the Lord, the Divine Word who '*was made flesh, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth*' (Jn 1: 14).

Through the Saviour's birth people have been given the chance to possess grace and Truth (Jn 1: 17). Grace is the divine power granted to man by God for salvation. It is through this power that people vanquish sin. Without grace it is impossible to vanquish evil, and so we cannot vanquish all that darkens our lives.

Truth is the fundamental value of existence. If at the foundation of our lives there is untruth, error, then our lives are not realized. Of course, the life of a person who has gone astray may outwardly seem to be a successful one. Yet this does not mean that error is without consequence: sooner or later it will manifest itself, including in the tragedy of human destinies.

The Light of truth is the Divine light; it is the righteousness of God. It is immutable and eternal, and does not depend upon whether we accept it or not. When we accept God's truth it defines in the first instance the nature of our relationship with others, the ability to bear, as St. Paul says, '*one another's burdens*' (Ga. 6: 2), that is, to show solidarity by sharing both their joy and pain. '*By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another*' (Jn 13: 35), says the Lord. However, these eternal Divine truths, which can but only transform our lives, today have ceased to be ideals. They are persistently expunged from modern man's consciousness by the propaganda of moral irresponsibility, egoism, consumerism and the negation of sin as the fundamental problem of human existence.

It is the substitution of true values by false values that largely explains the ever-growing significance of the so called 'human factor' in tragic events that take away hundreds of lives. It is this that explains the crises which have had a global impact on the economy, politics, the environment, family life, the generation gap, and many other things.

To celebrate Christ's Nativity is to bring us closer to the Saviour, to help us seen more clearly his countenance, to be immersed in his good news. The Lord is born ever anew mysteriously for us in the depths of our souls so that we may '*have life more abundantly*' (Jn 10: 10). The event of that night in Bethlehem enters our life today, helps us to see it from another perspective, at time unusual and unexpected. That which seemed important and great suddenly becomes trivial and transient, making way for the majesty and beauty of eternal Divine truth.

It is with especial power that the words of the Saviour today resound: '*I am with you always, even unto the end of the world*' (Mt 28: 20). These words give hope based on the firm conviction that no matter what temptations befall us in this life the Lord will never abandon his inheritance.

The past year in the life of the Church has been highlighted by many important events. The Local Council convoked in Moscow in the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour elected the successor of the late His Holiness Patriarch Alexy II. Fortified by the prayers and support of the episcopate, clergy and numerous flock, I placed my hopes in the Lord and accepted the lot of the Patriarchal ministry. Worshipping in Moscow, in a number of Russian dioceses, as well as in Ukraine, Byelorussia and Azerbaijan, I experienced the joy of prayerful communion with our pious Orthodox people, with the young and the elderly, with the middle aged and with children. Everywhere I saw the radiant faces of people, the sincere expression of deep faith. This was a powerful spiritual experience for me and a visible testimony

to the unity of Holy Russia, which through the strength of the faith of its multinational people is overcoming the restrictions of society, property, age, ethnic origin and so on to preserve its spiritual unity in the conditions of contemporary political realities.

This unity is strengthened by the one Church in which all that is temporary and transient is overcome by the grace of God. It is here that before human eyes the majesty of unchanging values appears. This is why the Divine truth ought to be the main compass for all human activity, for growth and movement forwards.

It is a joy to see that an ever greater number of our contemporaries are becoming aware of their spiritual roots, are valuing their religious and cultural tradition. The festive solemnities today are shared not only by the faithful who are firmly rooted in the Orthodox Church but also by those who find themselves on the path to the discovery of saving faith and who may cross the threshold of the church for the first time, their hearts responding to the call of the Gospel.

In prayer I wish you, your Graces, all-honourable fathers, dear brothers and sisters, the abundant mercies of the Divine Infant Christ who was born in Bethlehem so that your joy is increased by the grace of God, that your infirmities are healed and your pain comforted. May the light of the star of Bethlehem be the guide of each and everyone of us, and may the Lord bless your labours in the field of building up the life of the Church and countries where we live, our societies, and may he grant that we abide constantly in the Gospel Truth.

+KIRILL

PATRIARCH OF MOSCOW AND ALL RUSSIA

The Nativity of Christ

2009/2010

Moscow

Source: https://mospat.ru/en/news/57927/