Metropolitan Hilarion: When we help someone, we help God Himself



On January 7th, 2021, on The Church and the World TV program shown on Saturdays and Sundays on "Rossiya-24", Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, Chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations (DECR), answered questions fr om the anchor Ekaterina Gracheva.

E. Gracheva: Hello! This is the time of the program "The Church and the World" on the TV channel "Rossia 24", wh ere we talk weekly with the Chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk. Hello, Vladyka!

Metropolitan Hilarion: Hello, Ekaterina! I congratulate all our TV viewers on the feast of the Nativity of Christ. I wish that this holiday will bring joy, peace and comfort to every family and heart. May the Incarnate God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who was born in Bethlehem, help us in this difficult time to overcome all the difficulties, challenges, illnesses and trials that fall to our lot. Happy Nativity of Christ!

E. Gracheva Street: From the latest news: it became known that Vladimir Putin is preparing to be vaccinated against coronavirus. The vaccine was development by our Russian doctors. I would like to ask: do you or Patriarch Kirill have any intention of getting a vaccine? Do you know anything about it?

Metropolitan Hilarion: As for His Holiness the Patriarch, I have no information whether he has been vaccinated or not. I followed with the vaccination at the end of August, when the vaccine was not even

fully certified and was only being tested. I considered it necessary to do this, because although by that time I had already had the coronavirus, the antibody level in my blood was quite low, but it was enough for me to make only one injection: after that, the antibody level rose, and the second injection was no longer necessary. For most people who have not had the coronavirus, two injections are necessary.

I still believe that the coronavirus vaccine is currently the most effective tool against the terrible pandemic that has befallen us. I believe that the faster and the more people we can vaccinate, the faster we will defeat this terrible scourge. I think that there are no alternatives to the vaccines that we have at the moment. Therefore, I recommend that anyone who can and who has no contraindications, get vaccinated against coronavirus.

E. Gracheva: Vladyka, the Pope called on countries to share coronavirus vaccines with each other. What do you think, given the existing interstate relations between Russia and other countries, is such an option possible with the Sputnik V vaccine?

Metropolitan Hilarion: I believe that the exchange of vaccines is a matter of time. The political situation now is such that the world is very polarized and anything is being used to increase this polarization. The vaccine is no exception. There are countries that accept the Russian vaccine, and there are countries that will not accept it, not for medical reasons, but for political reasons-this is the reality in which we live today.

I think that in the current situation, cooperation between the two countries should be tighter and more tangible, because we are talking about saving people's lives. Every day in different countries people die: in units, tens, hundreds, and sometimes thousands. This is a very serious challenge for all of humanity. There are countries that are able to produce a vaccine for the first shot, but have difficulty mass-producing vaccines for the second shot. Here, of course, it is important that countries that have other opportunities come to the aid of these countries. That is, wherever such mutually beneficial cooperation is possible, it would only be welcomed, because, once again, we are talking about saving people.

E. Gracheva: Priests have been vaccinated for free in Moscow for two weeks now. Do you have any information on how actively clerics use this right? How many people were vaccinated in the first few days?

Metropolitan Hilarion: We do not yet have statistics on how many priests have been vaccinated and how many have not been vaccinated, but I know of priests who went to vaccination centers as soon as this opportunity appeared and got vaccinated. I think this shows the responsible attitude of our clergy

not only to themselves, but also to their parishioners, because, as I have repeatedly reminded you, including on our program and during my meetings with priests, every clergyman is responsible not only for his own life, but also for the lives of parishioners. If a priest has become infected with the coronavirus or has only become a carrier of this virus, but at the same time does not observe hygiene measures – does not wear a mask, communicates with a large number of parishioners – he can become a carrier of this virus. That is why it is very important that priests are vaccinated against the coronavirus.

After all, it is no coincidence that the state, having started mass vaccination, first provided this opportunity to doctors and teachers, then to other groups of social workers, and then it was the turn of the clergy. All of them work with a large number of people, and therefore, accordingly, the degree of threat that can arise when communicating with them increases. I say this with regret, because a priest is a person who brings good and light to people, and the last thing I would like is for someone to be afraid of a priest. But the current situation is quite special, and any person who has a wide social circle due to his profession, his vocation, unfortunately, is at risk and himself poses a certain risk to the people around him. That is why it is very important for us to treat our own health and the health of others responsibly.

E. Gracheva: Just before the New Year, the Federation Council approved the law on regulating social networks. Starting from February 1, the administration of social networks should block illegal content: posted posts should not contain insults based on gender, age, race, or attitude to religion. Do you think this initiative is useful? If so, to whom first?

Metropolitan Hilarion: I think this initiative is very useful and important, because, unfortunately, the Internet still largely exists outside the legal framework. There are laws that are enforced by all people living in real space, and if people do not comply with them, then they bear criminal and administrative responsibility for this. But there are people who live in virtual space, hide behind nicknames or fake names, who believe that laws are not necessary for them, and commit crimes only in virtual space. They can even commit real crimes by recording them on video, posting videos on the Internet and getting an additional number of subscribers for this. Recently, there was a case when a blogger abused a girl directly in front of his computer screen, beat her up, and kicked her out in the cold. In the end, this girl died, and the blogger gained an additional number of subscribers.

This type of illegal content, as well as calls to extremist activities, incitement to hatred based on race, nationality, religion or any other affiliation-all this should be blocked by Internet service providers. If this does not happen, then both distributors of illegal content and providers that allow this content to exist on their platforms should bear responsibility. Therefore, the law is timely and correct.

Another question is how this law will be used, because, unfortunately, it happens that the right law is

adopted, and then it is used incorrectly or all sorts of abuses occur. I think we will see all this after the law is adopted and implemented.

E. Gracheva: One of the innovations of 2021 is an increase in taxes on the income of rich Russians who earn more than 5 million rubles a year: for them, the income tax will now be 15 percent instead of 13. This additional money will be used specifically for the treatment of seriously ill children, only for these purposes. Do you approve of this law? Do you agree with the 15 percent rate, or do you think it could have been higher?

Metropolitan Hilarion: Any initiative of the state aimed at helping sick children should only be welcomed. Of course, the Church warmly approves of the state's care for sick children. The only thing that needs to be carefully considered, and probably experts should calculate it, is how the tax increase will affect Russian business and, in particular, the desire of Russian businessmen to invest in their country. The danger of this kind of increase in taxes on luxury or wealth is that it can contribute to the outflow of business from Russia to other countries. If this happens, it will hit the economy and turn out to be the reverse side of the coin. It is very important that experts carefully calculate all possible risks associated with the introduction of such a tax.

E. Gracheva: Russia has returned an ancient icon of St. Nicholas, which was earlier presented to Sergey Lavrov by the Bosnian authorities. After our minister was presented with this gift, Ukraine suddenly declared that the icon is an object of its cultural heritage. In fact, Bosnia was accused of theft. Tell us, what kind of icon is this, and in general, what is the background of this diplomatic scandal?

Metropolitan Hilarion: As far as I know, there is still no evidence that this icon is the property of Ukraine. Experts should work here. If this is true and the icon is stolen, which the donor of this icon may not have known, then, of course, it is subject to return. But if this is not the case, then, again, there should be an expert opinion that will confirm the origin of this icon.

E. Gracheva: Thank you very much, Vladyka, for answering our questions.

Metropolitan Hilarion: Thank you, Ekaterina.

In the second part of the program, Metropolitan Hilarion answered the questions of viewers received

*on **the website** of the Church and the World.*

Question: How did it happen that the Catholic clergy followed the path of celibacy, and in Orthodoxy the clergy is mostly married (with the exception of monks)? And why are bishops in the Russian Church elected only from among the black clergy?

Metropolitan Hilarion: This is a very complex and long-standing story, which I can only tell you very briefly here. Initially, the Church had one rank of pastors, called bishops or presbyters. In the epistles of the Apostle Paul, we see the use of these two terms as synonyms. The Apostle Paul says of both orders: "A bishop (or presbyter) must be blameless, the husband of one wife" (1 Timothy 3.2), and then various qualities are listed. Monasticism as an institution in the Church appeared only in the IV century, although ascetics who took a vow of celibacy existed in the Church from the very beginning. Gradually, monasticism began to gain more and more solid positions in the Church. These positions became especially strong after the period of iconoclasm, that is, after the eighth and ninth centuries, when it was the monks who came to the defense of icon worship.

If we talk about celibacy for the clergy, then in the Eastern Orthodox Church, celibacy has never been mandatory for the clergy at the level of presbyters, that is, priests. From the very beginning, the priests were married, and still the majority of parish priests are married. As for the episcopal ministry, for some time now, namely, since the IV century, preference was given to celibate bishops, while they were not monks, but simply did not marry. Until now, in a number of Local Orthodox Churches, bishops are not monks, but simply people who have not married – that is, celibate clergy.

The most interesting question is: why did celibacy become virtually mandatory at the level of the episcopate in the Orthodox Church, while the Apostle Paul himself said that a bishop should be married? I think there must be several reasons for this. First, the high authority of the monastic and celibate clergy, which was higher than that of the married clergy. Secondly, it is the authority of monasticism itself, that is, if they were elected to the episcopal ministry, they chose the most authoritative pastors who were just in the monastic environment. Third, there is also an interest in protecting the Church from possible encroachment on its property.

What do I mean? Imagine that a bishop is a married man with a wife and five sons. Perhaps he will want to put his five sons at key points in the diocese, in the richest parishes, make them rectors of these churches, and perhaps his wife will play a special role in this whole structure. Imagine what such

diocese can become. That is, if a person has all sorts of family interests in addition to the ministry itself, which should occupy all his thoughts and feelings, then these interests can intertwine and lead to a big crisis in the diocese. That is why the Orthodox Church at a fairly early stage began to give preference to celibate clergy for election to bishops, and subsequently, no later than the X century, made celibacy a prerequisite for taking the episcopal rank.

Question: Your Eminence, what is the meaning of the teaching about the end of the world? What is it and how will it work?

Metropolitan Hilarion: The Lord Jesus Christ Himself spoke about this in sufficient detail. In the Gospel of Matthew, an entire chapter is devoted to explaining what He said about the end of the world. He said that the end of human history will be preceded by various disasters. "Nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places" (Mt. 24.7); "The love of many will grow cold" (Mt. 24.12). But the Lord also predicted that He Himself would appear to judge all men, but He would not appear as He did the first time, in a humble human form, but in all glory: He will be accompanied by the angels of God, and He will put some people on the right side and others on the left. On the right side will stand those who kept His commandments and did good to people: they fed the hungry, clothed the naked, and visited those in prison. And those who did not do good, the Lord will put on the left hand, because, as He said, the good that we do or do not do in relation to a particular person, we do or do not do in relation to God Himself.

The Lord identified Himself with a person who needs our help, that is, whenever we help someone, we help God Himself. Not because God needs this help, but because He sends us a person who needs our help, sympathy, and participation. This is exactly what the Lord says in this lesson about the Last Judgment – that every person is going to pay for his life. Each person is responsible for their actions and the posthumous fate of people will depend on how they lived on this earth. Those who have done good, kept the commandments of God, will inherit the Kingdom of Heaven, and those who deliberately resisted God, did not use the opportunity to do good, will inherit eternal punishment. This is what the Lord Jesus Christ reminds us of in the Gospel.

But the Lord warns us not to think about when the end of the world will happen, because for each of us, the end of life can come at any moment. As for the end of human history, there are words about this, which I will conclude today's broadcast with. These are words from the same 24th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew: "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but only my Father alone" (Matthew 24: 36).

I wish you all the best and may God protect you all.

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