Metropolitan Hilarion: The Lord has imbued the waters of Jordan with his divine presence to wash away human sins



On January 19th, 2021, the feast of the Holy Epiphany of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations celebrated the Divine Liturgy at the Moscow church of "Joy to All the Afflicted" icon of the Mother of God on Bolshaya Ordynka street. Clergymen of the church assisted the archpastor.

During the Litany of Fervent Supplication, petitions were offered up for deliverance of the coronavirus infection.

After the Litany Metropolitan Hilarion lifted up a prayer recited at the time of the spread of baneful pestilence.

The Liturgy was followed by Metropolitan Hilarion's homily:

"Dear Reverend Fathers, brothers and sisters, I congratulate you on the Feast of the Epiphany of the Lord!

This feast is called Epiphany because our Lord Jesus Christ came to Jordan on this day and there were revealed to people the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity – the Father, witnessing about his Son, while people heard his voice, saying “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased”(Mt 3:17), the Son of God, coming to be baptized in the waters of the Jordan river and imbue them with his life-giving and divine presence, and the Holy Spirit, descending like a dove on Jesus Christ just as he came up from the water.

The Three Persons of the Holy Trinity have been revealed to people, and since then we have been confessing the One God glorified in Three Persons. They are not three different Gods, but One God who exists and reveals himself as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

We are baptized in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We had been ordinary people when entering the water, but as we were coming up from the water, the Holy Spirit dawned upon us, thus changing our human nature and making us members of his Holy Church.

Many people would ask about the difference between the baptized and unbaptized, between the churched and unchurched people. They do not differ in appearance, being people of flesh and blood, susceptible to passions, sins and vices. But a baptized man has chosen God as his guide and is trying to fulfill God’s commandments in his life.

Certainly, he is not always a success. Often enough he exerts efforts, but fails in fulfilling the commandments; he struggles with his passions, but remains prey to them; he tries to conquer his sins, but they are still with him; and he repeats the same sins over and over again, though he would have liked to be delivered from them.

To help people, the Church has established a sacrament which the Holy Fathers regard as a ‘second baptism.’ This is the Sacrament of Penance. A man is washed not by the water of Jordan, but by the tears of repentance. Through repentance he receives forgiveness from God and embarks upon the path leading to improvement.

The whole life of a Christian from baptism and to the moment when human soul would leave for the other world is a feat of struggle for piety and against sins and passions. A man overcomes his sinful nature and, relying on God’s help, moves along the way to salvation.

The water that washed us in the Sacrament of Baptism is the special water. Prayers which we will read at the Office of the Blessing are read during the Sacrament. Being baptized for the remission of sins, we are immersed not in ordinary water, but in the water on which the Holy Spirit descended so that it would

become the water of baptism, flowing into the eternal life for our rebirth and transformation. On the Feast of the Epiphany we recall the event described in the Gospels. Our Lord Jesus Christ has come to Jordan to be baptized by John as hundreds and thousands of other people. He stood in line with them, and as his turn came, he bowed his head to receive baptism.

Yet John was enlightened by the Holy Spirit that this man was not an ordinary man, but the One about whom he had said: “I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. (Mt 3:11). John would have prevented the Saviour as the Gospel tells us, but the Lord said: ‘Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness (Mt 3:15). And John baptized Jesus in the waters of Jordan as he had done for other people. But it was not for the remission of sins, because Christ has no sin, and not for repentance, as Christ had no need of it, but for Christ to imbue the waters with his divine presence and wash away human sins.

The Church has established the Sacrament of the Holy Baptism for Christians to begin their life with entering the baptismal font. The Church established the Feast of the Epiphany for us to recall our Lord Jesus Christ’s coming into the waters of Jordan and receiving the help of the Holy Spirit.

The social ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ began from the baptism in the waters of Jordan. Before that he had lived as an ordinary man. He came to John the Baptist as one of the many, and their meeting marked the beginning of Christ’s ministry for the redemption of humanity, bringing good news to the world. This good news began with the words said at first by John the Baptist and then by our Lord Jesus Christ: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near” (Mt 4:17).

We will pray to the Holy Spirit to descend upon water and for the blessed water to become the source of healing for us and for our near and dear. Let us beseech the Lord to heal our infirmities by this water and bless our homes. Let us ask God’s help in our going along the path to salvation, the path that is leading us to the kingdom of heaven. Amen.” After his homily Metropolitan Hilarion performed the Office of the Great Blessing of the Waters.

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