On commemoration day of St. Catherine, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk officiated at the Church of St. Catherine the Great Martyr In-the-Fields the representation of the Orthodox Church in America



On December 7, 2020, the commemoration day of St. Catherine the Great Martyr, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate Department for External Church Relations, officiated at the festive service at the Moscow representation of the Orthodox Church in America - the Church of St. Catherine In-the-Fields.

The archpastor was assisted by Bishop Anthony of Moravichi, representative of the Patriarch of Serbia to the Patriarch of Moscow; Protopresbyter Vladimir Divakov, secretary to the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia; Archpriest Nikolay Balashov, DECR vice-chairman; Archimandrite Seraphim

(Shemyatovsky), representative of the Orthodox Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia to the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia; Archpriest Daniel Andreyuk, rector of the St. Catherine Church and representative of the Orthodox Church in America to the Moscow Patriarchal see; Archpriest Kakhaber Gogoshvili, Georgian Orthodox Church, acting dean of the Moscow church district; Archpriest Sergiy Tocheny, rector of the Church of Jacob Zabedee in-Kazennaya Sloboda and the Church of the Finding of the Lord's Sepulcher in-Barashi; Archpriest Leonid Kalinin, rector of the Church of Great Martyr Clement the Pope of Rome In-Zamoskvorechie and chairman of the Experts Council for Church Art, Architecture and Restoration; as well as clergy of the St. Catherine Church.

After the Prayer of Fervent Supplication, Metropolitan Hilarion lifted up a prayer read at a time of the spread of a pernicious infection.

After the liturgy, Archpriest Daniel Andreyuk greeted Metropolitan Hilarion and thanked his concelebrants for their prayers and read out the message of greetings from His Beatitude Tikhon, Metropolitan of All America and Canada.

"A year ago we marked together a feast timing it to the 25th anniversary of the representation church of the Orthodox Church in America in Moscow. At the time of our joyful celebration, no one of us knew what hardships the coming 2020 year would bring to us. Indeed, it has been a hard year filled with sorrow and confusion. But we are inspired by the example of martyrs who had to overcome great trials in their lives. They endured starvation and betrayal, torture and loneliness - all for the sake of the truth. They did not fear the universal evil and put their trust in Christ Who said to us, 'In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world' (Jn.16:33)", His Beatitude stated in particular.

Asserting that St. Catherine the Great Martyr showed an example of courage and found a great power in the Saviour's promise, His Beatitude called to follow her example and always trust the Lord despite all the problems and hardships in today's world.

On behalf of the clergy and parishioners of the St. Catherine Church, Archpriest Daniel presented Metropolitan Hilarion with an icon of Christ the Saviour. "May this image serve you as a reminder of our feast and give you strength", he said to His Eminence.

In his archpastoral homily, chairman of the Department for External Church Relations Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk said:

"Your Eminence, dear Bishop Anthony, representative of the Serbian Orthodox Church at the Moscow Patriarchal see,

Very Reverend Father Daniel, representative of the Orthodox Church in America to the Patriarchate of Moscow and All Russia,

Dear fathers, brothers and sisters!

I cordially congratulate all of you on the feast of St. Catherine the Great Martyr and convey to you a blessing and greeting from His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia.

Indeed, as His Beatitude Tikhon, Archbishop of Washington, Metropolitan of All America and Canada, has reminded us, the year 2020 has be hard for all of us. For it has been marked with a world pandemic, which is not weakening to this day. Each day we see how the number of the infected and dying is growing. Throughout this time, we have been ardently praying to our Lord Jesus Christ, the Most Holy Mother of God and all the saints we venerate, so that this misfortune may pass quicker, that the lives of our loved ones may be preserved and we could return to the way of life we are accustomed to, acting without regard for numerous restrictions existing today; above all, that we could freely pray in our churches, partake of the holy communion and become united with the Lord in spirit and body.

Unfortunately, not all have this possibility at present. Some people, especially elderly, and those who suffer from various illnesses, are recommended to stay at home, within the confines of their flats. Of course, this difficult situation compels us to pray fervently for a quicker end of all this.

In the life of the Orthodox Church in America, this year has been marked with an importance commemorative date - the 50th anniversary of the granting of autocephaly to the Orthodox Church in America, which we all could have solemnly celebrated together if it were not for the existing restrictions.

Today a peculiar mythology is spreading throughout the world, which has been created by the Patriarchate of Constantinople, alleging that the Patriarch of Constantinople alone has the right to grant autocephaly to various Churches. Moreover, according to this mythology, the Patriarch of Constantinople can take away a part of any Church and give it autocephaly. This is what he tried to do in Ukraine. But the attempt has suffered a defeat because the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church has not followed the Patriarch of Constantinople, not accepted the paper he signed but remained faithful to the Russian Orthodox Church of which it is an integral part.

It is sufficient to look at the history of the emergence of Local Orthodox Churches to see that this ridiculous theory propagated to and imposed on Local Orthodox Churches today has nothing to do with reality. Neither the Church of Alexandria, nor that of Antioch, not that of Jerusalem, nor that of Georgia received their autocephaly from the Patriarchate of Constantinople - they had become autocephalous

prior to the Church of Constantinople.

I do remember how, being a 16 year-old boy, I was present at the festivities in Tbilisi on the 1500th anniversary of the autocephaly of the Georgian Orthodox Church. Therefore, when we are told now that the Patriarch of Constantinople alone has certain special rights and privileges allegedly granted him by Ecumenical Councils, we do not believe in these fairy tales and fables.

We know from history that the statutes of autocephaly emerged in various ways. For instance, the Russian Orthodox Church became autocephalous not owing to a tomos from Constantinople, as nobody gave it to us. It happened so that the Patriarch of Constantinople signed off *unia* with Rome in the mid-15th century and the see of Constantinople found on itself a Uniate patriarch instead of an Orthodox Patriarch. So, the hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church had to elect a new metropolitan. And the procedure was to travel of Constantinople to affirm the election and only after that the elected metropolitan could come into his own. But since there was no Orthodox Patriarch in Constantinople at that moment, there was nothing left for the hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church to do but to elect their own metropolitan and install him without the participation of the Patriarch of Constantinople. And many centuries later, recognition was given not only to the autocephaly of the Russian Church but also to the Patriarchal Office, and not only by the Patriarch of Constantinople, but also three other Eastern Churches - those of Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem. This is how our autocephaly emerged.

The autocephaly of the Orthodox Church in America emerged at the request of the faithful, episcopate and clergy. They asked for it the Russian Orthodox Church, which was the mother for the autocephalous Church in America, for it was from Rus' that Orthodoxy came to the American continent through the feats of Russian monks and missionaries. By the will of the Holy Spirit and through the decision of the Local Council of the Russian Orthodox Church, autocephaly was granted to the Orthodox Church in America. And nobody has a right to challenge it or to encroach on it. May this date remind us of the glorious page in the history of the Orthodox Church in America and of those who stood at the origins of this important and remarkable event.

A half century has elapsed since that time. The Orthodox Church in America has been developing dynamically: her churches exist in all the American states; her faithful are Orthodox but they are also citizens and patriots of their Motherland. And I would like to wish the whole Orthodox Church in America that she, conscious of this gift received from the Russian Orthodox Church by the will of the Holy Spirit, may grow from strength to strength in her pastoral and missionary ministry in the American continent.

The representation of the Orthodox Church in America, which has existed in Moscow for long years, is a liaison between our two sister Churches. I hold this church especially dear because, as you know, I used to serve in it as a priest for several years under one of your predecessor, dear Father Rector, whose

name is also Daniel, and he, as I know, is still in good health despite his very old age. We always remember Father Daniel and his wife in our prayers.

I would like to wish God's help to you, Reverend Father Daniel, the clergy and parishioners of this church. May the intercession of the Most Holy Mother of God defend us; may Her honourable veil protect us from every evil. May the Lord, through the intercession of Great Martyr Catherine, whose memory we brightly celebrate today, help us in our life journey.

During this Nativity Fast, let us prepare ourselves by prayer and participation in the Divine Liturgy for the meeting with the Divine Enfant Christ Who was born in Bethlehem. May the Lord preserve us for many good years.

Happy holiday! May the Lord preserve all of you!"

DECR Communication Service

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