



Metropolitan Hilarion: We can know God through Divine energies



On 28th March 2021, the second Sunday in Lent, on which we celebrate the memory of St. Gregory Palamas, Archbishop of Thessalonika, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations celebrated the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great 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.

Then the archpastor addressed those present with a sermon, saying:

“In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit!

This week has marked 200 years since Greece gained independence after many centuries of Turkish yoke. This happened thanks largely to Russian soldiers, Russian weapons, as well as those Greeks who lived in Russia then preparing the liberation of their Motherland together with Russian Orthodox people. On the occasion of this remarkable date a divine service was conducted at Donskoy monastery this week. The service was attended by the Ambassador of the Hellenic Republic and representatives of the Greek diaspora living in Moscow or working at the embassy.

Our faith is rooted in the Greek language and in Greek theology. We are used to the name of our Church as the Russian Orthodox Church. However, not all might know that originally and till the time of the revolution our Church had been called the Orthodox Greek Catholic Church of Russia. So, even the name of our Church contained Greek element.

As we know from the history of Christianity, only the first generation of Christians was Jewish by blood and upbringing. But Gospels were written in Greek, not in Hebrew, because Greek in those days was the literary language of the entire Roman Empire. St. Paul, a Hebrew born of Hebrews, as he presented himself in his epistles, would not write his works in Hebrew, but in Greek. In other words, from the very beginning Christian faith was formulated and handed down to the following generations in Greek.

All year throughout, we celebrate the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom and on special occasions – the Liturgy of St. Basil the Great. The text of both Liturgies was written in Greek and then translated into Slavonic. So also the hymns heard in our churches at Matins and Vespers (with the exception of psalms, composed in Hebrew long before the Nativity of Christ), as well the hymns of Octoechos and the Lenten Triodion – all these were originally written in Greek and later translated into Slavonic. That is why up to this time our faith has been Orthodox Greek Catholic. And each time we enter the church of God to attend a divine service we hear words that once were written in Greek and now are pronounced in the language of our forefathers – the Slavonic language.

If only for this reason alone, we ought to be grateful to the Greek people for giving the Holy Orthodox faith to us. Even the first hierarchs of the Russian Church were native Greeks; and for several centuries the Russian Orthodox Church had been part of the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

Today we commemorate St. Gregory Palamas, Archbishop of Thessaloniki, one of the many Greeks whom we venerate and whose names can be found in our church calendar. St. Gregory Palamas has greatly contributed to the Orthodox teaching on the essence and the energies of God, the light of Tabor, and on how a human can communicate with God.

This teaching, formulated in the Greek language, was defended at different councils held in Constantinople and might seem to some people as laying apart from life. Some theologians had

disputes in Constantinople in the 14th century, but what is all that to us – one would think Yet, the Church has established the feast to be celebrated on the second Sunday in Lent to remind us of the everlasting value of Orthodox theology and of the goal of our Christian life.

What was the point of the argument? The opponents of St. Gregory Palamas, Barlaam the Calabrian and Gregory Akindynos said that God was incomprehensible and invisible in His essence, and therefore we can gain all knowledge about God from books or philosophy, or find them in guesses and hypotheses. St. Gregory Palamas asserted that God, though incomprehensible and invisible, reveals Himself in His energies, i.e. acts. The Divine energies permeate the whole universe. Long before St. Gregory Palamas, another great Greek theologian, St. Basil the Great, asserted that the whole universe was a kind of the burning bush permeated by the Divine energies, which are everywhere invigorating this world, but not burning it, like the sun that gives life to the earth and all therein without burning it up.

St. Gregory Palamas said that God, incomprehensible in His essence, reveals Himself to us in His energies, i.e. acts. One of the Divine acts is the light of Tabor seen by the apostles at the Mount of Transfiguration. The light of Tabor has been seen by the zealots during many centuries when they were praying to God and in their prayers and thoughts of God reached such a state in which God revealed Himself to them in His acts and energies.

Barlaam and others said that the light seen by the disciples of Christ on Mount Tabor was a material light created by God, while St. Gregory Palamas asserted that the light of Tabor was the uncreated light, a God's light which people can see with the eyes of their soul. This light, this act of God is inseparable from the essence of God. We cannot see and comprehend God in His essence, but we can communicate with Him through Divine light and other acts and revelations.

Therefore, our communication with God is not only the knowledge of Him gained from available sources, such as books, philosophy and theology. We can communicate with God directly. As we partake of the Holy Mysteries of Christ, God enters our body. St. Gregory Palamas emphasizes that our communication with God takes place not only intellectually or spiritually – all our nature communicates with God when we take part in the Sacraments of the Church.

When we partake of the Holy Mysteries of God, our body, soul, spirit and mind become the burning bush in which the flame of God is burning. This flame of fire warms us, but does not burn because God wills to come and dwell in us. St. Gregory Palamas, an outstanding Greek theologian, reminds us of this on the second Sunday in Lent.

The Church has established this feast to be celebrated in Lent to remind us of the aim of Christian life and the purpose of our endeavours during Lent. The purpose is to communicate with God, know and

see Him. We cannot see the essence of God with our eyes and know Him through our mind and intellect as He surpasses our mind. God is immaterial and invisible, but we can communicate with Him through His acts and energies, through the light with which He illumines the whole universe and which is shining in our souls as we partake of the Holy Mysteries of Christ, participate in the Sacraments of the Church and pray addressing our petitions to God, and He would respond to them.

Let us remember St. Gregory Palamas and read his writings translated into Russian. Let us be illumined by the light of good sense and thank God for the Holy Orthodox Greek Catholic Orthodox faith He has granted us in order to bring all of us to salvation and life eternal. Amen.

I greet all of you with the feast!”

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