Address delivered by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill at the session of the Holy Synod on 13th April 2021

On 13th April 2021, in the Throne Hall of the Patriarchal and Synodal Residence at St. Daniel's Monastery in Moscow, the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church held its first session in 2021 under the chairmanship of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia. His Holiness delivered an opening speech:

I greet all the members of the Holy Synod.

Hopefully, we all show understanding as out of necessity we have to wear face masks even during a meeting of the Holy Synod. Indeed, our people and all of us are enduring great hardships caused by the spread of the virus infection. It affects not only our country and not only the countries within the sphere of pastoral responsibility of the Russian Orthodox Church, but the whole world.

What is taking place now is surely a pandemic, inasmuch as the infection is everywhere. Therefore, I believe that the Supreme Authority of the Russian Orthodox Church took timely measures pertaining to church attendance and it helped curb an emerging tendency to accuse, as is often the case, the Church of spreading the infection. New regulations govern attendance of divine services and distance between worshippers inside churches, prescribe wearing face masks and a special method of administering communion. Of course, there are always those who are discontented, who criticise the measures intended to prevent the infection fr om spreading, but the absolute majority recognize the necessity of these measures.

We by no means cast doubt on the healing power of the Holy Mysteries of Christ, as is evidenced by the fact that after communion our deacons consume the Holy Gifts from the common Chalice, and none of them did or ever will fall ill. And wh ere there are no deacons, priests do that, including your unworthy Patriarch and Primate, whenever I celebrate the Divine Liturgy in the church at my residence. There is a flock there, and they receive communion, and since I serve without a deacon, after the Divine Liturgy I consume the Holy Gifts without any doubts, with full confidence that when receiving the Body and Blood of Christ we partake of the great Holy Mysteries which are not susceptible to any infection, any evil, for they are the Holy Things given to the holy.

I suppose that we will have to stay on the path of restrictions a little while longer. New patterns of pastoral work with people are now being developed. With gratitude I would like to note the selfless ministry our pastors are carrying out in hospitals, in infectious disease wards in particular, taking pastoral care of COVID-19 patients. There have been casualties among the clergy. I have already spoken about it in public and during one of the sessions of the Supreme Church Council we sang ‘Memory Eternal.’ Living in my grateful memory is the heroism of our clergymen, unafraid of infection, unafraid of death, who fulfilled their pastoral duties to the end. May their memory be eternal.

I hope that this ordeal will be over and our Church, our people and our countries will return to their life unshadowed by the spread of the dangerous infection. Yet, I believe that the experience we have undergone has enriched all of us. It helped us realize what a great joy it is to each of us to participate in the divine service in a church full of people. Our hearts sink as we see restrictions introduced in many places on the attendance of churches which today look half empty. At the same time, we are aware that apparently this experience is also necessary, because we get used to everything, especially good things, and while facing difficulties we thank the Lord with greater fervour for the mercy He grants unto us when we all gather together and can attend churches without any restrictions, praying and partaking of the Holy Mysteries of Christ.

Brethren, let us continue our prayers and our labours, dutifully carrying out all the necessary sanitary

instructions and encouraging our people in following them as well, so that, pinning our hopes on God's will, we may look forward to the time when this ordeal comes to an end and we can celebrate divine services as is customary in our Church, bearing witness to God's loving kindness which will be clearly revealed by the end of the pandemic and the coming of peaceful and untroubled times. This is what we are praying for today.

Press Service of the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia/
DECR Communication Service

Source: https://mospat.ru/en/news/86985/