Metropolitan Hilarion: it is in a dialogue with their priests that Christians should decide how and to what extent to observe the Fast.



On April 10th, 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", where 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! Hello, dear brothers and sisters!

E. Gracheva: I would like to start this program with a topic that caused a stormy wave of discussions and it still continues to this day – an interview that journalist Ksenia Sobchak took with the "Skopinsky maniac" Viktor Mokhov. In your opinion, should such people have the right to vote and at what point does a person change from the status of a maniac to the status of a citizen who has served a sentence?

Metropolitan Hilarion: I don't want to make a comparison between one criminal and another, but there are similar problems in other countries. For example, the Norwegian terrorist Breivik shot about a

hundred people, mostly young people. He was jailed for 21 years. When that time is up, will he be released and walk around among the relatives of his victims? People are very concerned. It is difficult to imagine how this person will continue to exist and how people will be around him.

I think that in the case of Mokhov there is a similar situation. Therefore, first of all, he should be constantly monitored by law enforcement agencies around the clock to prevent anything like what he has done in the past. Secondly, I believe that he should not be shown to the public, he should not be interviewed, because such a person can not teach the world anything good.

E. Gracheva: Vladyka, in the United States of America, serious discussions are boiling among Catholic politicians, who are literally divided along party lines as to whether President Joe Biden should be allowed to receive Communion because of his views on abortion, which he supports. 55 percent of Republican Catholics believe that he should be deprived of the right to receive Communion, but almost 9 out of 10 Catholic Democrats (87 percent) hold a different view and believe that Biden should be allowed to partake of the Eucharist. In the history of our country, have there ever been cases in which the Russian Orthodox Church discussed (perhaps behind closed doors) whether to allow some politicians to receive communion or not?

Metropolitan Hilarion: Our history differs from the American one: before 1917, all the rulers of Russia were Orthodox. After 1917, until the collapse of the Soviet Union, the rulers of Russia were atheists, and mostly militant, that is, they were persecutors of the Church. Therefore, such a question did not even arise.

If we talk about how a politician's life combines his political beliefs and religious views, then we, in the Russian Church, do not share the point of view that one can be separated from the other, that is, a politician can promote some anti-church views, but at the same time be a church person. We don't agree with that. I think that many Catholics (and not only Catholics) in the United States of America do question this very serious discrepancy between the religion to which Biden belongs or declares his affiliation, and the values that he promotes.

Some time ago, Biden was asked if he considered President Putin a murderer, and he answered in the affirmative. And America's religious leader, Franklin Graham (son of the famous preacher Billy Graham) said that this statement offended millions of people in Russia, reminding that Biden, declaring himself a Christian, at the same time promotes abortion and therefore supports murder. I think that such a discrepancy [between religion and propagandized values - ed] is very noticeable, it causes people to have a lot of questions. And the fact that some American Catholics (and even Catholic bishops) believe

that he can be allowed to take communion can be explained by the fact that in America there is a very tolerant attitude to all kinds of views and there is an opinion according to which a person can profess any views, and at the same time belong to any religious denomination.

E. Gracheva: Vladyka, our channel recently hosted the premiere of a documentary series by Metropolitan Tikhon of Pskov about the events of the February Revolution, the series is called "The Death of the Empire. Russian Lesson". You have also been making documentaries for a long time. Have you seen this premiere of Metropolitan Tikhon and how do you assess this work?

Metropolitan Hilarion: There are a lot of little-known facts in the film. The film dispels several very common myths, for example, that Emperor Nicholas II was a weak-willed man and a mediocre ruler, that he dragged Russia into a war that it lost. Vladyka very consistently shows that this is not so, proving it on the basis of facts and figures. It shows, for example, how Russia lived before the revolution at the beginning of the 20th century: the country experienced such economic growth and recovery that Western observers spoke of an economic miracle. He says that in general, the war was successful for Russia and it should have won this war. It shows how our opponents and so-called allies acted during the war. It shows that Germany could not have won this war without the revolution in Russia. The revolutionary movement in Russia was fueled from the outside – primarily from Germany, but other countries were also interested in this revolution, in particular, Great Britain.

But the most important conclusion that he draws, I think, is this: revolutionary sentiments were maturing inside Russia. For example, the State Duma in 1916-17 was generally mostly revolutionary-minded. They say that the tsarist regime was repressive, but this is absolutely not true, because the drama was being played out in front of people, and those whom the emperor could simply put behind bars were free, propagating revolutionary ideas. In the end, they achieved this revolution. I think this is a very timely reminder that we should all value stability and not think about changes in our society that can be achieved by revolutionary means, because every revolution leads to victims and tragedies, the scale of which is completely invisible to the people who are preparing and implementing the revolution.

E. Gracheva: Traditionally, Russians make pilgrimage trips to Israel, Greece, and Cyprus on the eve of Easter. Do you now recommend making trips to Europe, to those countries with which we have open air traffic? What advice would you give?

Metropolitan Hilarion: I do not advise anyone to go on foreign trips and pilgrimages, because now is not the right time for this. Now you need to stay at home and go to a nearby church. I hope that the time for pilgrimage will still come when the quarantine restrictions will be relaxed and, finally, this terrible deadly virus will leave us or significantly decrease. But until then, I do not think one should go on a pilgrimage abroad. If one really wants to go on a pilgrimage, then there are many holy places and

monasteries in Russia wh ere one can go, pray, take Communion and get great spiritual benefits.

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 questions from viewers that were sent to the website of the Church and the World program.

Question: Vladyka, how often do you receive Communion? Do you also go to confession?

Metropolitan Hilarion: I receive Communion at every Divine Liturgy I celebrate. If I celebrate the Liturgy every day, as I did during the Nativity Fast, then I also receive Communion every day. I also go to confession regularly, like most clergymen.

Question: My husband left the family. Can I marry my son's godfather?

Metropolitan Hilarion: According to the canonical rules of the Orthodox Church, spiritual kinship prevents carnal kinship. Therefore, marriages of the godfather with his godchild, as well as marriages of the godmother with her godson or the godfather with the godson's mother and the godmother with the godchild's father are not allowed. These canonical rules date back to the era of the Ecumenical Councils, and they were clarified by the Holy Synod of the Russian Church in the 19th century. The main point of the explanations is that spiritual kinship is recognized, and marriages in this kinship are prohibited only between the following persons: between the godparent and the mother of the godchild, between the godparent and the father of the godchild. This explanation is based on the fact that the actual godfather is a person of the same sex as the godson. If you are a woman and you have a godfather and a godmother, then you are spiritually related only to the godmother. And if you are a man, and you also have a godfather and a godmother, then you are spiritually related only to your godfather. So it turns out, Victoria, that you can't marry your son's godfather.

Question: We fast four times a year. And in addition to fasting, there are also fasting days – Wednesday and Friday. Why did the Church set them as fasting days? What's the point of them? Aren’t there too many fasts?

Metropolitan Hilarion: Wednesday and Friday are days in the church calendar that are dedicated to remembering the Savior's sufferings, which is why they are fasting days. Four long fasts set in the eve of

great holidays: a 40-day Nativity fast in anticipation of Christmas; Lent (Great lent), which in fact lasts 49 days including the Holy week, before Easter; the Apostles' Fast in anticipation of the feast of saints Peter and Paul, and the Dormition fast in anticipation of the Dormition of the Theotokos.

All these fasts are established by the Church for our physical and spiritual benefit, but no one says that the observance of all of them is a mandatory requirement for every Christian. In practice, not all Christians perform all fasts. Some perform only those fasts for which they have enough spiritual and physical strength. How many fasts to perform and to what extent – this is a question that every Christian should solve in a dialogue with his confessor. All sorts of indulgences are possible here, especially for the elderly who have illnesses, for pregnant women and other categories of believers.

Question: How to tame pride?

Question: How to not envy more successful and well-off people?

Metropolitan Hilarion: I'll try to answer two questions at once. Pride and envy can be avoided if each person puts himself not before the judgment of other people, but before the Judgment of God. As soon as we start looking at other people, how they live, how they dress, how they talk, how they treat us, we immediately sin in relation to these people: with some people we are envious, with others - proud. However, if we place ourselves in our conscience before God, if we first care about our relationship with God, then our relationship with people will be built accordingly.

We need to understand that we are affected by various external factors, that is, demons can affect us. As the holy Fathers said, there are demons of despondency, demons of pride, demons of gluttony, and demons of other sins. Each of these demons tempts a person, and they can tempt the same person at different times. Various demons can attack a person, but that is why there is the art of spiritual struggle, which the holy Fathers speak about and which the Church calls for, so that we can get rid of these demonic temptations and repel them.

Another way to get rid of pride and envy is to try not to compare yourself with other people. Each person has their own path, talents, abilities and opportunities. Sometimes other people's abilities are superior to ours, and sometimes we are superior to other people in some ways. But our superiority to other people is not a cause for pride, and their superiority to us is not a cause for envy.

Question: I have a friend who believes that he is surrounded by demons. He claims that in our age, demons have become more inventive, they creep up on him from afar and try to inflict painful blows, get into his soul. According to him, the demons write him some letters on the Internet. What would you

recommend here? Whom should I contact? Is this a real demonic posession or a mental disorder?

Metropolitan Hilarion: I think your friend should go to a priest and speak with him, tell him about his ordeal, so that the priest can assess whether it is a demonic posession, a mental illness, or a sober assessment of what is happening around the person.

Demons do exist, but many people just don't notice them. Demons do affect a person, but many people just ignore this effect. The Christian life is a struggle of a person with his passions and lusts, as well as a struggle against demonic attacks and temptations. It is very important to distinguish what relates directly to the spiritual or religious life from what may be associated with deviations in the mental state of a person. If such deviations exist, then it is necessary to apply not only to the priest, but also to a psychiatrist.

I would like to conclude this program with the words of the Apostle Paul from his epistle to the Galatians: " Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.” (Galatians 5:26)

I wish you all the best. Take care of yourself, take care of your loved ones, and may the Lord protect you all.

DECR Communication Service

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