



On Paschal night, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk celebrated a solemn divine service



On the night of May 2, 2021, on the Feast of the Resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk celebrated Paschal services - Midnight office, Procession, Paschal Matins and the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom - 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.

The festive hymns were sung by the Moscow Synodal Choir conducted by A. Puzakov, Russia’s Honoured Artist.

Before the Procession, Metropolitan Hilarion addressed the congregation with a homily, saying:

«I congratulate all of you, dear brothers and sisters, with the upcoming Pascha of Christ!

We will begin Easter Matins in a few minutes. We have just finished Easter Midnight Office and I will use these remaining minutes to tell you what will happen at the service, and what is the meaning of the Easter service.

Many stayed at home today. Those who are not in the church today are watching us live. I would like my word to reach them too.

The Easter service has a special structure and special significance. This service is performed only once a year. And it begins outside the walls of the church: the clergy go out into the street and go around the church to announce to the whole world that Christ is risen. It is not only here, within the walls of our church, that we glorify the Risen Lord, but we go out into the streets to bear witness to the Resurrection of Christ.

At normal times, huge crowds of people gather for Paschal services. Today, for obvious reasons, there are much fewer people, but we will still go out there, into the streets, to proclaim the Resurrection of Christ. I have a big request to everyone who is in the church: please stay inside, do not follow us on the procession, we will go out and return soon, and continue the service in the church. Stay here and wait for us patiently, with prayers to the Risen Lord.

After we have entered the church, we will celebrate Paschal Matins. The choir will perform the Easter Canon of St. John of Damascus. This is a poetic work written by an outstanding Christian poet of the 8th century, in which the Risen Lord Jesus Christ is glorified. During the Easter canon, priests and deacons will burn incense and greet all of you with repeated exclamations of "Christ is Risen!"

Upon completion of the Easter canon, I will read the Paschal Homily of St. John Chrysostom. This text is attributed to an eminent Christian theologian of the late 4th century. The Divine Liturgy is also associated with the name of this saint, which we celebrate on all days of the year, including today, immediately after the Paschal Matins.

We begin the service in white vestments, glorifying the Resurrection of Christ, and we will continue it in red vestments, glorifying the Lord Jesus Christ as the one who suffered and shed His Blood for us.

Divine Liturgy is the main service of every feast of the Church. During the Liturgy we pray for the whole world, we pray for our Holy Church, for our Fatherland, we pray for ourselves, for our loved ones. This divine service encompasses the whole world and the entire universe, and it is attended by both those who are in the temple physically and those who are spiritually in it, including believers who are watching

us live. And at the time of the celebration of the Liturgy, our deceased loved ones are also in the church, they spiritually abide with us. Angels also pray with us, and we honour their presence in Church hymns and prayers.

The first part of the Liturgy is called the Liturgy of the Catechumens, followed by reading passages from the Holy Scriptures of the New Testament. A part of the first chapter of the book of Acts of the Apostles will be read, telling about what happened to the Christian Church after the resurrection of Christ. And then the beginning of the Gospel of John will be read, which says that “in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1.1). The Word here means the Incarnate God, the Lord Jesus Christ – who was made flesh and was dwelling with us, filled with grace and truth. This Gospel reading will be performed in different languages - Greek, Latin, Slavic, English, German, French, Spanish and Japanese.

This custom has been preserved in the Russian Church since the old times and reminds us of how the Christian faith did spread. After all, we know that the Gospels were written in Greek, although the Lord Jesus Christ and His apostles spoke the Hebrew language. And then, as it spread, the Gospel was translated into new languages: Latin, Syriac, and in a later era - into European languages. Thanks to the works of Saints Cyril and Methodius, the Gospel was translated into the Slavic language, and so our ancestors could hear the Holy Scriptures in their own language.

Further, the Liturgy will be celebrated as usual. Those who know the order of the service will understand its meaning. As for those who are not familiar with the sequence and symbolic meaning of the Liturgy, the most important thing is to understand that each Liturgy is a remembrance of the Last Supper. And not just a remembrance - we are actually present at the Last Supper, which is performed by our Lord Jesus Christ. The priest or bishop who leads the Liturgy celebrates this Sacrament not with his own power and not with his own hands - the Lord Jesus Christ Himself acts through him. All the believers who have gathered for the service are invited to participate in the Last Supper, that is, in the Communion of the Holy Mysteries of Christ. Today we will partake of the Holy Mysteries of Christ, believing that it is not simple bread that we take, but the Body of Jesus Christ, and not a simple wine that we taste, but the True Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Through this sacred Sacrament, the Lord Himself enters into our body, into our human flesh, in order to animate us by His presence, to unite us with Himself. That is, we unite with God not only through prayer, not only through the memory of Him, but above all through the Sacrament of Holy Communion. We unite with Him through this Sacrament spiritually, mentally and physically - with all our human nature.

The peculiarity of the Paschal Liturgy is that the Royal Doors do not close. This is another symbolic testimony that Christ was resurrected and that He opened the Kingdom of Heaven for every person. You will see everything that takes place at the Altar, including the communion of the clergy.

During the communion of the clergy, the Easter Epistle of His Holiness Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus' will be read. In this message, His Holiness the Patriarch annually addresses the entire Church, talking about the events that have taken place, calling for prayer and congratulating all Orthodox Christians on the feast of the bright Resurrection of Christ.

I call all of you, my dear ones, to pray earnestly and with concentration. We have something to pray for this Easter night. The disaster that fell upon us last year, is not yet unfortunately over. The coronavirus pandemic continues, people are contracting this disease, many are dying, and the Church calls on us to pray fervently that this disaster will end as soon as possible. At the Divine Liturgy, we, as we do it all days, will offer a special prayer for the speedy end of this epidemic.

I also urge you all to pray for the peace in the whole world. We hear how the clouds are gathering around our Fatherland. We receive disturbing news from foreign countries. We have every reason to pray that there will be no war. Our country has been living in peace and prosperity for 76 years. There are not so many left of those who remember what war is and what disasters it brings to people. Many people say: "We do not need to be afraid of war, because Russia has always won wars." But, first of all, Russia did not always win. Secondly, we must remember at what cost these victories were given - at the cost of many millions of human lives, and not only the soldiers who died, but also the civilian population.

Therefore, our prayer for the peace of the whole world, for the welfare of the Holy Churches, for our Fatherland, for its authorities and army should be sincere and heartfelt, not formal. The Church calls us to turn to God with this fervent prayer, because we love each other, we love our Fatherland, and we are not indifferent to what is happening around us.

I would like to cordially congratulate all of you on the upcoming feast! May the Lord on this Paschal night give gracious consolation to each of us - both those who are in the church today and those who stayed at home. May everyone enjoy this feast of faith and feel the joy of the Resurrection of Christ. Amen».

During the Paschal Matins, Metropolitan Hilarion read the Paschal Homily of St. John Chrysostom.

The Easter Gospel (John 1.1-17) was read by Metropolitan Hilarion and his fellow clergy in Greek, Latin, English, German, French, Spanish, Church Slavonic, Japanese, and Russian.

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.

After the communion verse, Hegumen Filaret (Tambovsky) read out the Paschal Message of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia to the archpastors, pastors, monastics and all the faithful children of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Metropolitan Hilarion blessed the Artos after the prayer before the ambo.

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