Metropolitan Hilarion: Easter is an opportunity to meet the Risen Christ again



On May 1st, 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: Easter services will be held at all churches of the Russian Orthodox Church tonight. Will the traditional Patriarchal service take place at the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour and will it somehow differ fr om the services that were held before the pandemic?

Metropolitan Hilarion: Easter services are never different fr om one another: the same service that was performed last year is being performed this year, and will continue to be performed next year until the end of the world. As long as there is peace, there will be an Easter service on earth.

There is an anecdote. A man comes and says: listen, why is it that whenever I come to church, everything is always the same and people yell: "Christ is risen! Indeed He is risen!" This is a joke about a man who goes to church once a year. If he went to church, say, once a week, he might have wondered: why do you always say "Lord, have mercy" and "Grant this, o Lord" at a church? Because our service doesn't change. Our services are not concerts where the repertoire changes all the time. When we go to concert halls, we try to hear something new: a new artist, new music or even old music, but in a new interpretation.

Nothing changes in the Church, everything remains the same as it was in previous years, and this is also its value for many people. But the value of the Church is not that it gives any aesthetic pleasure, but that it connects a person with God. In this sense, communication with God can be compared to the communication of a person with someone very close and dear. If you have such a close and dear person, you always want to communicate with him, you are always happy with him, you do not expect that he will change very much, become a different person or that another person will appear instead of him. In other words, you want to deepen your communication with this person. In the same way, the Easter of Christ is the same holiday that was celebrated by us many times in previous years, exactly the same divine service, even the hymns are sung by the same singers. On the other hand, it is an opportunity to meet the Risen Christ again, to realize the full depth of Christianity, to experience Christ among us.

On Easter days, we often reread the pages of the Gospel dedicated to the Resurrection of Christ. Each evangelist (there were four of them) finished his Gospel with a story about the Resurrection of Christ. Each of the evangelists tells us in their own way how unexpected, surprising, and even somewhat embarrassing this event was for the closest disciples of Christ. For example, the apostle Matthew, the author of the first Gospel, when speaking about how Christ appeared to the disciples in Galilee, does not forget to mention that some worshiped Him, while others doubted. Other evangelists also do not hide from the reader, that the disciples of Christ had doubts that He was risen, or that He was the One who rose and the One Who appeared to them. I think such doubts arise among modern people, including believers. Easter comes every year to dispel these doubts, so that we can once again feel that Christ is truly risen. That is why on Easter days Orthodox believers do not tire of replying repeatedly to the words of the priest: "Christ is risen!" with the words: "Indeed he is risen!", as if both the priest and the laity want to bear witness again, again and again, that Christ is risen, truly risen.

E. Gracheva: Last year, Easter in Russia, and in many countries of the world, was held behind closed doors. In this regard, the Church has actively developed its presence in the online sphere. Even in remote towns and villages, online broadcasts of services from churches are nove available. Have there been any positive changes during this year of the pandemic? Has the Church become more active in mastering the online space and, as a result, attracted an additional audience?

Metropolitan Hilarion: The pandemic has forced us to mobilize our human and financial resources, including to provide our parishioners with the opportunity to participate in worship services via remote communication. We always emphasize that it is not the same thing to come to church and receive communion of the Holy Mysteries of Christ or watch the broadcast of the Liturgy on a computer or via TV. However, if a person does not have any opportunity to come to church for epidemic reasons or for other reasons, it is better to watch the broadcast of the service on a computer or via TV than not at all be present at the divine service on this day. I know a lot of people, especially the elderly, who do not have the opportunity to come to churches, but constantly participate in our broadcasts.

To answer your question about whether our audience has expanded, I can't give you any figures for the entire Russian Orthodox Church, but I can give you figures for the parishes that I lead. Usually at our church in honor of the icon of the Mother of God "Joy to All who Sorrow" on Bolshaya Ordynka, up to 500 people attend the Divine Liturgy on Sunday– it can be 300-350 people, sometimes a little more, sometimes a little less, but the order is approximately the same. When we make a live broadcast of the Liturgy, it is watched by at least five thousand people, and sometimes ten or thirty thousand, that is, we see that our audience is expanding very significantly, and we are constantly receiving messages from these people. First, they send us names on chate so that we can pray: right during the Liturgy, we receive these names, we try to pray for them during the Liturgy, for their health and for their repose. Secondly, people write notes and express their gratitude. We learn that the services we perform are watched in Australia, in America, in Japan, in Ukraine, and in countries far abroad. People are constantly communicating with us via remote communication tools. I think that this is very important and valuable in our time, when digital technology is replacing real communication for many people.

At the same time, we always emphasize that even if you were unable to attend one or several services and watched them in the broadcast, be sure to find the opportunity to come to the church to receive Communion, because there is no substitute for this. And if you can't come to church to receive Communion at all, then invite the priest to your home to take Communion there.

E. Gracheva: Vladyka, it would also be interesting to ask you about the Easter traditions that both Orthodox and Catholics have, because a number of skeptics believe that these traditions have their roots in paganism. For example, anthropologist Crystal de Costa claims that in the Roman Empire, Christianity adopted the pagan rites of conquered peoples in an attempt to help them adapt. For example, egg staining is a purely pagan ritual. There is also an opinion that the very origin of the word "Easter" (Ostern) takes its roots in the name of the pagan holiday Ostar. What do you think, Vladyka, is there a connection between our two Churches' easter traditions and pagan rituals?

Metropolitan Hilarion: The fact that Christians borrowed some pagan traditions, that Christian

churches were built on the site of pagan temples, and that some holidays were set on the same dates as the pagans ' holidays, is not new and not a secret to anyone. If you visit Rome, you can see Christian churches with three levels: first there is a temple of the VI century or XII century, this temple has a crypt of the IV or III century, that is, it is an early Christian temple, on top of which a new temple was built, and under the crypt there is another temple – a pagan temple.There is nothing surprising in the fact that Christians worshiped God in the same places wh ere pagans worshiped their pagan gods. Christians wanted to help people adapt to the new reality their faith offered them, while not breaking with customs that might not contradict their new Christian identity.

I think that the arguments about the etymology of the word Easter can be very different and the one that you have given is unlikely to have any real grounds. If we talk about the word "Pascha", it goes back to the Hebrew “Pesach", which means"transition". Pascha was originally a Jewish holiday commemorating the passage of the Jews across the Red Sea, when they were chased by the chariots and cavalry of Pharaoh. When the Jews had passed over the bottom of the sea, then the Egyptian troops entered and drowned in it. In memory of this event, the Passover holiday was established.

Since our Lord Jesus Christ was crucified on the feast of Passover, Christians from the very beginning, associated the celebration of the Resurrection of Christ with the event of the crossing of the Red Sea by the Israeli people. The entire Easter celebration was reinterpreted as a kind of preparation for the Resurrection of Christ. This symbolism of Easter as a transition is even reflected in the Orthodox worship. There is an early Christian work that I once translated from Greek into Russian - the poem of the Holy Martyr Meliton of Sardis "On Easter". It is the earliest known liturgical monument of the Christian Church and it dates back to the II century. The main plot speaks of what happened in the Old Testament: the crossing of the Red Sea, and from this crossing the author gradually moves on to the story of the Resurrection of Christ.

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: This time, Easter falls on the May holidays, which our fellow citizens traditionally spend on vacation. There are also those who go abroad. What should one do? How must one celebrate the Resurrection of Christ, especially if there is no Orthodox church nearby?

Metropolitan Hilarion: First of all, not so many people have gone abroad this year. Secondly, many of

those who did are located in places wh ere there are Orthodox churches. Almost everywhere wh ere our compatriots go on holidays now, there are Orthodox churches nearby. If you are very far away and there is really no way to come to church, but you would still like to feel the joy of the Holy Easter holiday, then turn on the TV or the Internet and watch the broadcast of the Easter service, which is performed by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill at the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour. Thus, even if you are far away, you will be able to join in the Paschal joy.

Question: Why is the daily cycle of worship broken in the Russian Church? In Lent, matins are served in the evening, and Vespers is served in the morning. How did this happen and what, in your opinion, are the ways to resolve this discrepancy?

Metropolitan Hilarion: It's quite a long story. Our matins gradually "moved" to the evening. This was due to the practice of performing so-called all-night vigils, which were performed not during the whole night, but in the evening hours. And the all-night vigil includes vespers and matins, which joins it. If the all-night vigil were to be held all night, then, indeed, everything would begin in the evening, and end in the morning. But since such all-night vigils are not performed at our Russian monasteries (with rare exceptions), and they have never been performed at parish churches, then gradually matins were moved to the evening to join vespers. This is how this tradition developed.

How can we correct this situation? At some parishes, the situation is already corrected by the fact that Vespers with the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts is served not in the morning, but in the evening. This practice of serving evening Liturgies is now becoming quite widespread.

Question: Can you tell me if the Russian Orthodox Church recognizes the "Dreams of the Most Holy Theotokos"?

Metropolitan Hilarion: "Dreams of the Most Holy Theotokos" is an apocrypha of late origin, and the Church does not recommend either reading it or using it.

Question: I love to watch your programs and thank God that He sent us such a smart and kind priest! I'm married to an atheist. When I married him, my husband was a believer, but then he lost faith. We have a baptized son, but my husband forbids me to tell him about the faith and take him to church - he believes that religion only harms the child. What should I do? What words should I use to make my husband change his mind?

Metropolitan Hilarion: As a wife and mother, you have a duty to keep the peace in the family, but at the same time, as a believer, you have a duty to raise your child in the faith. I know many cases when in Soviet times the husband was an unbeliever, and the believing wife found some opportunities and ways

to tell the child about the faith, take him to church, give him communion, even if the husband did not know about it.

Raising a child in the faith is your first and foremost duty. You can sacrifice a lot for this. Of course, if possible, you should not go into conflict with your husband, because, again, it is your responsibility to keep the peace in the family. But at the same time, one should not sacrifice one's religious beliefs. The best thing you can do for your child is to raise them in the faith.

Now a lot of people think that the most important thing is that the child gets a good education, that he has a lot of money. But how many have there been such people who were born into a rich family, received a good education, but did not find their place in life, and most importantly - did not find the meaning of life? Religion, faith is something that can give meaning to your child's life, something that will give him a solid spiritual and moral foundation for the rest of his earthly path. Therefore, try to do everything possible to raise him in the Christian faith, even despite the opposition from your husband.

Question: Am I a murderer from the perspective of the Orthodox Church if I facilitated the abortion of my wife or girlfriend (actively persuaded her to have an abortion, dissuaded her from giving birth, gave money for this procedure, etc.)? And her pregnancy was solely my fault.

Metropolitan Hilarion: If everything is as you described, then yes, you are a murderer, because abortion is considered murder by the Church. All co-conspirators are responsible for it, including the woman who performed the abortion, the man who induced or forced her to do so, if such coercion took place, as well as the doctor who performed the operation. Everyone is responsible for abortion, and everyone involved in this crime is guilty of the sin of murder. Therefore, if you are a believer, first of all, never repeat such things again, and secondly, go to confession and repent of this in front of the priest.

Question: The Church is constantly speaking out against homosexuality. What's wrong with two people of the same sex living together and not bothering anyone? On what grounds does the Church interfere in someone else's personal life and impose its own values?

Metropolitan Hilarion: I would like to make it clear that the Church never interferes in one's personal life, much less in someone else's, and does not impose anything on anyone. The Church addresses only those people who are its members, and it answers the questions that are put to it. If a religious person comes to the priest and says that he is a homosexual, lives in a same-sex partnership, then the priest will tell him that this is a sin, and this will not interfere in their personal life. If non-believers live like this, then no one interferes with their personal life. The Church does not have access to it and is not going to receive this access from anyone.

The Church does not impose its values on anyone. People who do not want to listen to the voice of the Church - do not listen to it. But if people address questions to the Church, if they ask me, as, for example, I am constantly asked on this program what the Church's position is on this, that or a third issue, then I answer it. In answering this, I do not interfere in anyone's personal life, because both membership in the Church is voluntary, and acceptance of those regulations that are normative for the Church is also voluntary. The Church does not impose anything on anyone. The Church exists for those who he want to hear her voice and live according to the values it preaches.

I would like to conclude this transmission with the words of the Apostle Paul addressed to Timothy: "The law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is [a]contrary to sound doctrine," (1 Timothy 1: 9-11).

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

Source: https://mospat.ru/en/news/87169/