# Metropolitan Hilarion: people often try to blame God for what they are guilty of



*On May 8th, 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! Christ is risen!

**E. Gracheva:** Indeed He is Risen!

**Metropolitan Hilarion:** Dear brothers and sisters, Christ is risen!

**E. Gracheva:** Vladyka, this weekend marks the 76th anniversary of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War, and a year ago, on May 9, the Church of the Armed Forces in Alabin was officially opened. The place is truly unique. Can we say that it has already established itself as a house of prayer, or does it still attract people as a museum complex?

**Metropolitan Hilarion:** In the year that has passed since the consecration of this church by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill, it has become one of the most visited churches of the Russian Orthodox Church. Tens and hundreds of thousands of people come to this church both to admire its external and internal decoration, and to take part in divine services. His Holiness the Patriarch himself is the rector of this church. Divine services are held regularly, including when there is a large congregation of worshippers. Divine services were held on Holy Week and Easter. Among the parishioners of this church, of course, there are a lot of military personnel.

The church attracts people, attracts couples with children as a work of architecture located in a large park, but first of all the temple is a house of prayer. Of course, visitors come to the church to pray, to pay tribute to the heroes of the Great Patriotic War, to offer prayers for the many people who were victims of this great war, and for those who gave their lives to save our people.

**E. Gracheva:** Vladyka, you served in the army, and now you have the rank of Metropolitan. Which school, secular or ecclesiastical, do you owe more to nurturing your masculine qualities? Do you agree with the statement that a real man needs to go through the army?

**Metropolitan Hilarion:** I have been in the Church all my adult life, and I have only served in the army for two years, so the Church has had an incomparably stronger impact on me than my military service. Nevertheless, I am grateful to God that I had a unique experience of serving in the then Soviet army. I really was such a houseplant: I was brought up at home, spent my entire childhood playing music. The masculine qualities that are acquired in the army probably cannot be acquired in any other environment. In the army, I learned to shoot, and started doing physical training, since at high school I practically didn't do it. And, of course, the army is a large team consisting of people of very different upbringing, very different views.

I am not one of those who believe that every man should go through the experience of military service. I have repeatedly said this in our program and I do not hide this point of view. We have clergymen who believe that all men should be called up to join the army. Very often it turns out that these clergymen themselves did not serve in the army, and therefore they have an idealized idea of the army, or they have read the relevant literature. I was in the army, and I don't think that military service is necessary for every man. In general, I am deeply convinced that any ministry can only be successful when it is carried out according to the vocation. I think that – especially in modern conditions – a truly combat-ready army consists of professionals – those people who are ready to risk their lives to save the Motherland and join the troops according to their vocation.

**E. Gracheva:** You mentioned that you learned to shoot in the army, among other things. There was

such news that in Bratsk a priest leads a practical shooting section for schoolchildren. How do you feel about this kind of extra-curricular activity of a priest, and most importantly-how can a priest explain to children why they need to own a gun?

**Metropolitan Hilarion:** It all depends on the purpose of these classes. As far as I know, the goals there are exclusively linked with sports which are related to the education of masculine qualities in young people. Therefore, there is nothing shameful or reprehensible in this. I will even tell you that not so long ago I was invited to a military school. I was invited to a shooting gallery and was given a pistol and a submachine gun to shoot, and I was pleased to find that the skills I had acquired more than thirty years ago in the army were still there. I was just as good at getting into the top ten and even won the praise of people who are professional military personnel.

The only thing that gun ownership can be dangerous is that some people may develop an addiction to it, a craving for the use of weapons, and they will use weapons where it is not necessary to do so. I think that every person should have some kind of internal barometer, an internal force that will keep them fr om using weapons when it is not necessary, or when it can harm other people.

**E. Gracheva:** It would be interesting to see how you get into the top ten with weapons. Let's move on to international topics: the US Embassy in Moscow encourages American citizens to leave Russia and effectively closes consular services for Russians. The United States declares that our citizens can still get visas, but through third countries: through the Baltic States, through Armenia, through other European states. Exceptions will be made only for citizens traveling for life and death reasons. In all this, it is frightening that previously such actions were taken by the United States only before real military attacks to Yugoslavia, Libya, and Iraq. How do you feel about everything that is happening now between Russia and the West, in particular, Russia and the United States? How do you view all these diplomatic wars?

**Metropolitan Hilarion:** I look with great concern at the development of the situation: the stories with the expulsion of diplomats, with the reduction of embassy staff. I think that if all this does not stop at some point, it can lead to very sad consequences. You know, unfortunately, many people now have lost the idea that war is evil. We have been living in a situation of peace for 76 years. There are fewer and fewer people who still remember the war, and they are being replaced by young people who are sometimes very militant. Even some politicians now claim that Russia has always won all wars, we are not afraid of anything, "whoever comes to us with the sword will die by the sword." In the current situation, these are rather irresponsible statements, even if they are made for populist purposes. Because, first of all, if we look at our history, Russia did not win all the wars. Secondly, even where Russia seemed to win the war, for example, in the First World War, Russia was on the winning side, but in fact, participation in this war led to the collapse of the Empire, to millions of victims. Third,

even if it is a question of winning a war, we must remember what our goals are. It is not clear at what cost these victories were given.

Therefore, to say that we are not afraid of war, that we will come out of the war in any case victorious, because we have always won, is a very irresponsible statement. Especially at the present time, when the whole world is a powder keg, when a huge arsenal of nuclear weapons has been accumulated and when, in the absence of deterrents, the use of weapons can lead to a global catastrophe. Therefore, I hope that the politicians on both sides of this conflict will do everything possible to leave it, to lead the negotiations in a peaceful direction and to ensure that, as it has happened more than once in the past, we would avoid an all-out clash and global war. Here we can recall the so-called Caribbean crisis, when the world was on the verge of a global catastrophe due to the actions of politicians, but then political leaders still had the courage and wisdom to stop this next round of the arms race. I hope that this wisdom will continue today.

**E. Gracheva:** In continuation of the topic of diplomatic wars and possible negotiations on their settlement. Vladimir Zelensky voiced the idea of organizing a meeting between him and Vladimir Putin in the Vatican. The Vatican has already responded that it is ready to act as a platform. But here a reasonable question arises: two Orthodox countries are going to the Catholic Vatican to settle their problems and issues. Wouldn't it be more logical to fly to Jerusalem and hold these talks with the participation of the Patriarch of Jerusalem?

**Metropolitan Hilarion:** No matter what how I answer your question right now, there are bound to be mass media outlets that will take out some of this answer and say that the Russian Church is offering this or that place for negotiations.

I want to make a reservation right away that we do not offer anything. We have great respect for Pope Francis. As you know, Patriarch Kirill met with him personally five years ago. For my part, I can say that I have met him at least ten times. As a person, I like him deeply. But I also have no less respect for the Patriarch of Jerusalem, and I have also visited Jerusalem many times, communicated with him many times, and have always been amazed by his wisdom, calmness, and devotion to the holy places of the Christian world.

In this situation, the question arises: why, in fact, should there be any intermediaries here, whether it is the head of the Catholic Church or the head of this or that Orthodox Church? If we talk about the religious factor, then the Orthodox believers of Russia and the majority of Orthodox believers in Ukraine have one Patriarch – the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia. This should not be forgotten by Ukrainian politicians, who are trying to build their policy in such a way that the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which is in unity with the Moscow Patriarchate, is generally removed out of the equation. I think that the

question of wh ere this meeting will take place is not so important now. The most important thing is that it takes place in the foreseeable future, that the presidents discuss the problems that really divide the two countries, and that ways are found to heal them, which the faithful of our Church in both Russia and Ukraine pray for every day.

**E. Gracheva:** Thank you very much, Vladyka, for commenting on this latest news for us.

**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, please explain what humility is and how to apply it in practice. I notice that if I get away with something and don't define the boundaries of what is allowed in communication with myself, or just keep quiet, then people get impudent. How is it possible to combine humility and the ability to stand up for yourself? Or, perhaps, humility and quiet downtrodden behaviour are two different things?

**Metropolitan Hilarion:** Humility and quiet downtrodden behavior are certainly different things, in many ways even opposite. What is humility? Humility does not consist in assuming a humble appearance, walking with a bowed head, lowering our eyes low, or using special words to emphasize our humility. All these are external attributes that very often do not correspond at all to what is happening inside a person.

Humility is born in a person when he puts himself in the face of God, when he compares his life with what the Lord expects of him, when he reads the Gospel and asks himself: do I live as the Lord has commanded, or otherwise? And if a person sees the gap that separates his present self from what he would like to be, then this person has humility. This humility, among other things, is manifested in his relationships with other people, because a person begins to see his own shortcomings more sharply than the shortcomings of other people. And as a rule, if a person does not have humility, then everything happens the other way around. He is very sensitive to the shortcomings of others, but completely oblivious to his own shortcomings. Concerning such people, the Lord Jesus Christ said in the Gospel: "Why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not feel the log in your own eye?" (Mt. 7:3).

**Question:** Does a person who has committed a sin remain a sinner for life? Can any sin forgiven? Are there any sins that cannot be redeemed?

**Metropolitan Hilarion:** The Lord says in the Gospel: "Every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven to men, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven to men; if anyone speaks a word against the

Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but if anyone speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this world or in the world to come" (Mt 12: 31-32). This means that there are pardonable and unforgivable sins. At the same time, we know that there is a sacrament of confession that is open to every person, and every Christian, no matter how grievously he has sinned, has the opportunity to come to confession and repent of his sins. If a person has repented, then this sin is forgiven to a person. We have an example from the Gospel, when one of the two robbers who were crucified with Jesus turned to Him and said: "Remember me, Lord, when you come into Your Kingdom!" (Lk. 23.42). And the Lord answered Him: "today you will be with Me in Paradise" (Lk. 23.43). And this robber, apparently, did nothing good and was crucified for serious crimes. But his plea for forgiveness to Jesus was answered: his sin was forgiven.

**Question:** When I was 10 years old, my father started drinking, and I prayed that God would help him stop drinking. But God didn't help. Why didn't the Lord answer the child's prayers? I prayed from the bottom of my heart. Did he want our family to suffer from my father's alcohol addiction?

**Metropolitan Hilarion:** It seems to me that very often we try to blame God for what people are guilty of. You have prayed for your father, and God has certainly heard your prayers. But there was also the will of your father or his inability to give up this alcohol addiction. Maybe it was already a physical disability: some people who suffer from alcohol or drug addiction are unable to overcome this addiction at all. God has heard your prayers, and He has helped you and is helping you now. It's just that people are not puppets in the hands of God. They don't live like in a puppet theater, wh ere the dolls are tied with strings. If you pull the string, the doll raises its hand, if you pull the other, the doll raises its other hand, if you pull the third, the doll lowers its head. God doesn't treat us like that, He gives us freedom. Very often, people abuse this freedom, and then start blaming God for what happens to them or others around them.

**Question:** For 25 years, I have prayed to God and asked Himf for a child, day and night, every day. I’ve only had one husband and never cheated. Wealth and money have never been important to me. I’ve always come to the aid of others. God didn't hear my prayers, didn't see my tears. I was left deaf and blind. I'm not there for Him. Why? What did I do?

**Metropolitan Hilarion:** Your questions can be answered by a priest, to whom you will turn and sincerely ask them. The most appropriate context for getting answers to these questions is the sacrament of confession. If you come to confession, you will definitely remember something that you are guilty of or have sinned against. I don't want to make any guesses right now. You have to go through your own soul, your past, and see if there were any mistakes there. If you have committed them, then repent for them. If you think that God did not hear your prayers, then you are mistaken. God hears everyone's prayers, but the Lord does not always give a person what he asks for.

If you didn't have a child of your own, why couldn't you adopt someone else's or take a child from an orphanage, as many married couples do? Moreover, I will tell you from my own long-term pastoral experience: now there are many married couples who suffer from infertility for various reasons, including because the woman once had an abortion. But it often happens (I myself have repeatedly witnessed such situations) when a married couple who had not had a child of their own for a long time adopted a child, started raising him, and then the woman became pregnant and gave birth to her own a child, and now there are already two or more children in such a family. Children who are physically descended from these parents grow up with foster children, and the parents do not make any distinction between them. This is the true Christian way. It's never too late to go down this path, even now, 25 years later. You can always adopt a child, and you will have the happiness that you have been deprived of for a long time.

I would like to conclude this transmission with the words of the Apostle Paul from the First Epistle to the Thessalonians: "Pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. "(1 Thess. 5.17-18).

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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