THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH
Department for External Church Relations

Metropolitan Hilarion: Holiness is a constant striving to imitate the Lord Jesus Christ



On June 27th, the 1st week after Pentecost, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, Chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for external church relations (DECR) and rector of the Ss Cyril and Methodius Institute of Post-Graduate Studies (CMI), celebrated the Divine Liturgy at the Church of the Beheading of St. John the Baptist in-the-Woods. The church is a part of the Patriarchal Chernigov Metochion, which houses the CMI.

Among the archpastor's concelebrants were the head of the doctoral department of the CMI, Archpriest Alexy Marchenko, the vice-rector for educational work of the CMI, Hieromonk Pavel (Cherkasov), clergymen of the Metochion.

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.

In his sermon at the end of the divine service, Metropolitan Hilarion said the following:

“In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit!

On the first Sunday after the Pentecost, the Church commemorates all the saints.

On the feast of the Pentecost, we remembered how the Holy Spirit descended on the apostles, and they spoke in tongues, and everyone from different nations began to recognize their dialect; how the illiterate Galilean fishermen became bold preachers of the Resurrection of Christ.

And today, on the 1st Week after Pentecost, we remember how the Holy Spirit continued to work in the Church throughout the two thousand year period of its history. The Holy Spirit descended on the disciples of the Savior and inspired them to preach Crucified and Risen Christ. During the following centuries, up to the present time, the Holy Spirit has been acting and will continue to act in the Church. Thanks to His action and the assistance of people, the Church has never become impoverished and will not become impoverished in saints.

Saints in the Church have lived in both ancient and recent times. The saints still live on earth. And as long as the Church of Christ is on earth, it will reveal the world of the saints, for the ideal of holiness, which was manifested in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, inspires people in our time, just as it inspired the Lord’s followers in the days of His earthly life and in the Apostolic era.

The Pharisees and scribes thought that holiness meant that a person did not come into contact with anything unclean, be it unclean food or unclean people, or unclean places. In order for a person to protect himself in every possible way from any kind of defilement, he would observe the many prescriptions of the Law of Moses and the oral tradition that was strung on this written law over the centuries. And this, the Pharisees believed, was the holiness of man.

The Lord Jesus Christ saw hypocrisy in this so-called holiness. And he denounced the scribes and Pharisees of His day because they outwardly looked pious and righteous, but inside they were filled with robbery and lies.

The kind of holiness that was manifested in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ and which the Holy Church of Christ manifests throughout the centuries is fundamentally different from what the Pharisees and scribes preached. They preached outward piety, whereas the Lord draws our attention to the inner man, to our heart. The Lord says that defilement comes not from the fact that we come into contact with

something external, but from the fact that evil thoughts, adultery, fornication, theft and all kinds of crimes are ripening inside us. Ripening in a person's heart, they defile him from within.

Christian saints are people who were not always distinguished by outward piety. From the outside some of them seemed completely nondescript, unsightly and even impious, like, for example, some holy fools for Christ. But they took care to cleanse the depths of their hearts so that they could always be with God. They opened themselves to the grace of the Holy Spirit, which descended on them and had a transforming and cleansing effect. And, above all, thanks to the grace of the Holy Spirit, they became saints.

By the action of the Divine grace, holiness was acquired by people from different nations, belonging to different classes - both the rich and the poor, of noble and artistic origin. These were both monastics and laymen, both married and unmarried, those who had authority over people and those who did not have any power. Each of them in its place displayed an image of holiness, which did not depend on a person's position in the Church, on a rank he possessed, whether he was a Patriarch or a simple monk, a bishop or a simple priest, whether he was awarded Church honors or lived his life imperceptibly. ...

We know that many holy people are venerated in the Church as saints of God. Their memory is celebrated daily in the Church, and their names are present in the Church calendar. But over the centuries, the Church has manifested many saints about whom, for various reasons, people did not know: either because God was not willing to show people their feat, or they themselves were hiding from fame, or for some other reason. For example, the Monk Silouan the Athonite was honored to be numbered among the saints due to the fact that his disciple, Archimandrite Sophronius, told the world about his life. He wrote a book about him that became famous. Thanks to this book, the veneration of the Monk Silouan began to grow, and in the end it came to his canonization - first in the Patriarchate of Constantinople, and then in the Russian Orthodox Church.

But there were also many other ascetics at the same time on Mount Athos and beyond, about whom the world did not know. No one wrote a book about them, but they shone with a feat of virtues, although few knew about them, or no one knew about them.

Every spiritual labor of a person is valuable to the Lord. Whether others find out about him or not is not decisive. A saint is not one who labors to become a saint. He is busy with completely different things. He cares about cleansing his heart and his soul from passions, from sinful thoughts. He prays for himself and for his neighbors - for the living and the dead. He trusts in the mercy of God and appeals to God that the Lord would send him the Holy Spirit, so that the Holy Spirit would enlighten him from within.

When a person achieves holiness, he himself never considers himself to be a saint. Because, beginning

with the Apostle Paul, who said that “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the first” (1 Tim. 1:15), this is how the saints saw themselves. They considered themselves the first of sinners, and this was not a hypocritical or rhetorical confession of their sins, but a feeling that the Holy Spirit gave them. For the more the inner man is purified, the more he sees his shortcomings, sins, and how far he is from the ideal of holiness, which was inscribed by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Holiness is a constant striving to imitate the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a daily, hourly, every minute work on oneself. Holiness is a person's willingness to follow Christ, wherever He leads him, even to death on the cross, the feat of the Cross. Holiness is not only something that is acquired through the efforts of a person, but, above all, it is bestowed by the grace of God.

On the Feast of All Saints, we will glorify the holy people of God whom the Lord gave to His Holy Church, to the best of our ability to imitate their feat, and ask the Lord that the grace of the Holy Spirit would descend on us, cleanse us of all sinful defilement and deign to be partakers of the Kingdom of Heaven. Amen.

Happy Feast to all of you! God bless you!"

DECR Communication Service

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