DECR chairman and ROCOR First Hierarch celebrate Liturgy at Synodal residence of Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia in New York



On July 12, 2021, the commemoration day of the Holy, Glorious and All-praised Leaders of the Apostles, Peter and Paul, the chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, and the First Hierarch of the Russian Church Outside of Russia, Metropolitan Hilarion of Eastern America and New York, celebrated the Divine Liturgy at the Cathedral of the Icon of the Mother of God of the Sign of the Russian Church Outside of Russia in New York. Bishop Nicholas of Manhattan, the cathedral clergy and clergy of the Moscow Patriarchate parishes in the USA concelebrated.

Greeting the DECR chairman after the service, the First Hierarch of the Russian Church Outside of Russia said, “Your Eminence, extending brotherly greeting to you on the commemoration day of the First Hierarchal Apostles Peter and Paul, I cordially thank you for the joint prayer that we have lifted up on the festive day and for your love, attention and words of exhortation. I cannot find sufficient words to

express how special our feelings were when we celebrated the Divine Liturgy today.

“Recalling the archpastoral feats performed by one of my predecessors, Metropolitan Anastasius (Gribanovsky), the author of popular conversations with his own heart, who was consecrated as bishop this day 115 years ago at the Cathedral of the Assumption in the Moscow Kremlin, we have prayed today so that the Chief Pastor Christ may continue and multiply His mercies for the spiritual unity between the Russian Church abroad and the Russian Church at home, which we had sought with brotherly love and great efforts”, Metropolitan Hilarion of Eastern America and New York noted.

He stressed, “We believe that this unity between us will serve as a source for beneficial consolation and consolidation for all the faithful of the Russian Orthodox Church in this period so difficult for the Orthodox world”.

Addressing the First Hierarch of the Russian Church outside of Russia, the clergy and parishioners of the Cathedral of the Icon of the Mother of God the Sign, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk conveyed to them a cordial greeting and blessing from His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia. “I rejoice today with my soul and heart over this opportunity for celebrating the Divine Liturgy in this historic church of the Russian Church Outside of Russia as its heart in which your predecessors, dear Vladyka, prayed, among them His Eminence Athanasius, whom we prayerfully remembered today”, he said.

Speaking about the celebration held on that day, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk noted, “The feast of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul carries us over to the very sources of Christianity, to the first generation of Christians, when, after the Resurrection and Ascension to heaven of the Lord Jesus Christ, the apostles began preaching Christ Crucified and Risen.

In the Book of Acts of the apostles, we read how those first steps of the Christian Church were made; how the apostles sat in Jerusalem, how people brought their estates to their feet, how gradually and little by little the Church of Christ was spread. And the very first act of its own made by the church community was the election of the twelfth apostle to replace the fallen away Judas. The new apostle was elected on drawing lots; his name was Matthias, and he is mentioned in the Book of Acts only once - precisely in connection with this election.

But when we look at the Icon of the Holy Pentecost and the Icons of the Synaxis of the holy apostles, we see not Matthias but another apostle - we see on it Apostle Paul, who was not a member of the apostolic community and when the Lord Jesus Christ was alive, he was not His follower and in the first years of the Church’s existence, he was its persecutor and adversary. But God was pleased to call this persecutor and make him a great apostle and preacher of Christianity.

While the first half of the Book of Acts is devoted to Apostle Peter and some other apostles, the whole of the second halt is devoted to the missionary feats of St. Paul, which were really unparalleled: even if we just look at the map of the journeys made by St. Paul, which is often attached to the new edition of the New Testament, we will see that he covered vast distances that today can be flown over on airplane for two, three, four hours. And Paul passed all these countries on foot and that not in a comfortable sports footwear that people use to walk or run in the Central Park, but barefooted or in sandals.

St. Paul passed many kilometers to bring the news about Christ Crucified and Risen to various parts of the earth and also to explain the meaning of this news to the first Christians by sending letters to emerging Churches. Reading these letters today, we often are not aware that at the moment of their writing, there were no four Gospels as they were only in the state of being written, they were not yet the Holy Scriptures of the Church. And when St. Paul speaks about Holy Scriptures, he speaks of the Old Testament. He does not cite the Gospels because they did not existed as yet. That is to say, the earliest Christian writings to appear belonged to St. Paul.

These two apostles - Peter, whom the Lord called the rock and to whom He said, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. (Mt. 16:18), and Paul, who was called later than other apostles were, but who, as he himself says, worked more than others did in preaching Christ (see, 1 Cor. 15:10) - are glorified by the Church as first hierarchs.

At the same time, we know that, though Ss Peter and Paul met rarely and were buried after their martyrdom in different places, still both the Eastern and Western Churches have always honoured their memory on the same day. And though later the Western Church exalted St. Peter to create a doctrine on the primacy of the bishop of Rome, which was ostensibly passed on from St. Peter, the liturgical feast of the apostles even in it is still remains the same. That is say these two apostles are indissolubly tied in the memory of the Church.

It is not accidental that in Holy Rus' many churches were built devoted to Ss Peter and Paul, but we have no churches devoted only to St. Peter or only to St. Paul. Why? Simply because their memory is celebrated on the same day, the patronal feast of the Ss Peter and Paul Church always falls on the commemoration of the two apostles, never on one of them.

Today we glorify these two great apostles, two preachers of Christianity, and admire their efforts and apostolic feats. We glorify them as those who have brought to us the news of Christ Crucified and Risen, and we glorify St. Paul in a special way as the one who was the first to give a theological meaning to what other apostles saw with their own eyes.

Reading the Gospel, we see that the apostles had little understanding of what was happening around them. The Lord Jesus Christ uttered parables, and disciples asked Him, Declare unto us this parable (Mt. 15:15). Christ worked wonders but their spiritual eyes remained closed, so very often the Lord denounced their lack of understanding. And only after the Holy Spirit descended on the apostle on Pentecost, they, remembering what they saw, they began to realized what exactly happened and Who was really the Lord Jesus Christ: not just a man, not just a great prophet, but God Who became man, God Incarnate Who came to save each human being.

It was St. Paul who was destined to explain in the theological language this striking miracle of God's descent in flesh into the world. And we still base our theology precisely on what he preached to us. Celebrating the Liturgy of St. Basil the Great during Great Lent, we read remarkable and long deep prayers that this saint has left to us and could see that they are compiled from nothing else by the words of St. Paul. Precisely this apostle laid the theological foundation of Christianity, and therefore, his feat is priceless.

We glorify him together with the one who was called from the very beginning and who was the actual head of the apostolic community in the first years of its existence".

Addressing the First Hierarch of the Russian Church Outside of Russia, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk said, "I would like to cordially greet you, dear Metropolitan Hilarion, on this feast and to thank you for the opportunity to pray together with you today and to celebrate the Divine Liturgy in this wonderful church in which so many events have happened in the life of the Russian Church Outside of Russia.

"We can feel our unity through the Divine Liturgy which we celebrate together. We rejoice that once existed division emerged not for church causes but causes of political nature has been overcome already in our time, before our eyes. And today, we spiritually rejoice in our unity.

We live in an epoch when, unfortunately, a schism is being created in the Orthodox Church because of the actions of the Patriarch of Constantinople, who has uncanonically recognized the Ukrainian schimatics. Today, this schism, instead of being healed, is growing deeper to capture more and more new Churches. However, our Holy Russian Orthodox Church remains untouched by this schism. We continue preserving our unity and our Church in the sacred boundaries that have not been created by us - they have been built for centuries and it is not us who are to devastate them.

Therefore, in praying for the unity of Holy Churches of God, we pray that those who have fallen away from the unity may return to it. At the same time, we rejoice that our Holy Church remains indivisible and unshakable"

In memory of the common service, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk presented the First Hierarch of the Russian Church Outside of Russia with a pectoral icon, which used to belong to the vicar of the ROCOR Diocese of Eastern America, Bishop John (Legky) of Rockland.

After the Liturgy, the archpastors continued the talk at a common meal, discussing issues of mutual concern. In particular, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk informed the ROCOR Fist Hierarch about the progress made in preparations for the Bishops' Council of the Russian Orthodox Church planned to take place this November.

DECR Communication Service

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