



## **Interview of chancellor of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church Metropolitan Anthony of Borispol and Brovary**



*The chancellor of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Anthony of Borispol and Brovary, gave an interview to the Newsone, a Ukrainian news TV channel.*

**- How is the Ukrainian Orthodox Church preparing for the 2021 Procession with the Cross?**

- Just in the same way as in previous years. The faithful in their parishes in dioceses are forming groups of pilgrims for coming to the capital city, and we here, in the Metropolis of Kiev, deal with organization of all the necessary activities. And their range is broad - from accommodation of visitors to negotiations with the authorities concerning the procedures involved in the Procession with the Cross.

I would like to note that we have given special attention to quarantine measures. First, the church authority calls all the faithful who feel unwell to refrain from the trip to the capital city. Secondly, in all the buses in which people from dioceses will ride to Kiev, their temperature will be measured. It is also

required that pilgrims should actively use medical masks.

In addition, we very much rely on the effective work of those state bodies who are to ensure the safety of our march. Indeed, considering the difficult situation, which has recently developed on the political plane, as well as the focus of certain forces on stirring up the social situation, anything may happen.

In the first place, I mean the threats of provocations aimed at informational discretization of our Church. Regrettably, in previous years we encountered such things. For instance, when the actions of a particular provocateur, who pink-slipped the prayer march with forbidden political symbolic, were presented by some mass media as the attitude of the whole Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

We hope that this year nothing will cast gloom over our great feast. Indeed, our common course and our common interest is that hundreds of thousands of faithful hearts may at one time turn to the Lord with a prayer for Ukraine and our people. The power of such a prayer is truly immense.

**- Will you send an invitation to V. Zelensky to take part in the Procession with the Cross?**

- We have no such tradition to send invitations to high officials. And the point here is not even in the norm sealed in the Constitution about the separation of Church and State.

Participation in a common prayer should always be a call coming from heart. If someone of the supreme statesmen, being Orthodox, feels such a heart call, we will always be glad to support it.

The most important thing is that it should not be “a duty” or a formality. Indeed, it is not a political rally or a meeting.

What is important here is sincerity and faith. If it is there, any person, be he a minister or an ordinary worker, will be heard by God.

**- Do you expect delegations from other Orthodox Church to come for the Procession with the Cross?**

- Yes, present at the prayer march will be official delegations of the Churches of Antioch, Serbia and the Czech Lands. They will include both bishops and priests with lay people.

What is interesting is that in many ways the initiative to come for our Procession with the Cross comes from representatives of other Local Churches themselves. For instance, a group of pilgrims from Montenegro came to us for the Day of the Baptism of Rus'. For them, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church's Procession with the Cross is already an event of pan-Orthodox significance and scale.

In this light, one can say that many believers from other countries are delighted to come to Kiev to share the joy of common prayer to God with their brothers and sisters.

**- What will the forthcoming Procession with the Cross be devoted to?**

- This year it will be devoted to the idea of faithfulness to holy Orthodoxy.

On one hand, it should be noted that it is an aspect held very dear by all of us, Ukrainians. Indeed, it is in the struggle for Orthodox faith and in its defense that our identity, our collective and national identity was formed.

Let us recall history. What did certain forces do - the forces who, at a certain stage, possessed a part of the territory of our country? They tried to smear our identity, to make us a part of their own people, to dominate over us not only from outside but also from inside. To do it they made various steps but the principle one was an attack on our Orthodox faith. Indeed, it was believed that if we rejected it, they would be able to achieve our assimilation. Actually, the point was not only a religious but also political, cultural, etc. recoding of the consciousness of the Ukrainian people.

Our ancestors were well aware of this and that is why they struggled for the faith to the end. Precisely for this reason we have now to safeguard and cherish with all our might what the previous generations of the Ukrainians even gave their lives for.

Of course, it is a very difficult task. Since the church schism sown in our country has brought forth a harvest of enmity, conflict and various plans to destroy the canonical Orthodoxy. Moreover, at this stage this schism is used to replace the genuine Ukrainian Orthodox Church, forgetting that it is impossible to replace pure water by dirty water without damaging the spiritual health of the whole nation.

That is why the theme of faithful to holy Orthodoxy is so important. If we fall away from it, if we yield to the temptation to replace God by a new golden calf with various political and ideological concepts looming behind it, then our destiny will be to become a dry branch torn away from the life-giving vine, which is Christ. And, as is known, a dry branch has only one destiny. And it is unenviable.

On the other hand, it is worth remembering what is happening outside our country.

And the point here is not even that particular Local Churches are drawn into the swamp of the recognition of the Ukrainian schism, which threatens to divide the whole world Orthodoxy. Before our eye the forces who have legalized the Ukrainian schism are forming their own version of 'orthodoxy'. And this version is truly fearful since it blows the cold of not only enormous pride but also that of the falling away from the true faith.

What is the true worth, for instance, of the recent words of the head of the Greek Archdiocese in the USA, Archbishop Elpidophoros, that many paths lead to God? By this the hierarch publicly placed all religions on the same level, equalized them, and this, according to the Orthodox doctrine, is a plain heresy.

Against the background of these and other steps made by Fanar, a natural question arises: where will the Patriarchate of Constantinople lead the Ukrainian Orthodox faithful to, if on many points now he openly rejects the foundations of the Orthodox faith? I am sure that everybody understands the rhetorical nature of this question and the reason why the idea of faithfulness to holy Orthodoxy is so pressing now.

### **- In what quantitative and qualitative state does the Ukrainian Orthodox Church approach the 2021 Procession with the Cross?**

- Thank God, our Church, for all the pressure of the last years and violations of the rights of our faithful continues developing and growing.

It is especially gratifying that churches are gradually built for the communities which suffered raiding attacks by the "OCU£" supporters. The latest example is the blessing of the church in the Bushcha village, Rovno region, on July 24, which has been built in place of the church seized in 2019 with the use of force and breaking of locks.

As for figures, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church has 110 bishops, 53 dioceses, 12 456 clergy, 12 374 communities, 4548 monks and nuns, 255 monasteries.

The changes and final figures for 2021 will be summarized in my report by the end of this year.

- **How many people do you expect to see at the forthcoming Procession with the Cross?**

- In this matter, we have never pursued figures. Whatever number of people would turn out, what is important is that it will be a conciliar prayer, that all with one prayerful impulse will ask God for mercy towards our native land.

Certainly, the factor of pandemic and its consequences may bring in certain corrections as to the number of participants in the prayer march. However, it is not important. Indeed, last year we had no opportunity at all to hold a Procession with the Cross. But this year, the Lord has granted us this mercy.

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