Metropolitan Hilarion: there is a place in the Church for every person with their talents and gifts



On July 24th, 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, Catherine! Hello dear brothers and sisters!

E. Gracheva: We have a special program today: it comes out on a weekend, when you celebrate your 55th birthday. On behalf of the entire channel, I congratulate you on your birthday. On my own behalf, I want to say that not so long ago I was lucky to be with you on the same trip - to Nizhny Novgorod and Diveevo. I, of course, thought that this trip would be slow-paced and that there would be more rest than work, but it turned out to be completely different. You live, of course, at a frantic pace. Not only do you fast, serve the Liturgy, hear confessions - you do what any priest does, and you combine all this with the position of the Minister of foreign affairs of the Church. What is the secret of your time management?

Metropolitan Hilarion: Firstly, I am a monk and am not burdened by my family, I have no wife and children. I devote all my time to serving the Church. Secondly, combining different ministries is a very good opportunity for a monk to switch from one task to another. Experienced mentors in spiritual life say that the most harmful time for a monk is free time, which is why on the mount Athos a monk's entire day is precisely scheduled. Monks spend many hours in worship, in obediences, and the little free time they have is also scheduled.

My life is scheduled not just by the hour, but by the minute, and it is planned for many months in advance. It helps me a lot to organize my time. Once, when I was studying at Oxford, I had a wonderful teacher - Metropolitan Kallistos, who had many students and an hour was allotted for each student. It was always a one-on-one conversation about a dissertation the student was writing. However, Vladyka knew how to structure the conversation so that in an hour everything would be discussed. At the right moment - two minutes before the end - he could “round off” this conversation, get up, say goodbye and welcome the next student. Back then it seemed incredible and I thought: how is it possible to be as punctual as a clock?

But when I became Chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate’s Department for External Church Relations, or even earlier, when I became a diocesan bishop, I realized that if one does not plan their schedule, and does not keep track of time, then it is impossible to keep up with everything that a person should be able to do. Therefore, I try to plan my schedule in order to not waste time. If there is a pause, I always have something to fill it with.

E. Gracheva: Vladyka, 1987 is the year when you became a monk. You were 20 years old, you were young, you had many talents, you composed music. Did you have a choice? You could have become a "white" priest and have a family. Why did you decide to become a monk?

Metropolitan Hilarion: At the age of 15, I decided for myself that I wanted to devote all my strength to the Church and that I did not want to be a married priest. I had some kind of a firm conviction that this was my path. You know, they often talk about the priestly vocation, that is, a priest must be a person who has a special vocation for this from God. But monasticism also has its own vocation. These are two different callings, they may or may not be combined. Most of our parish priests are family people. In my case, I felt both callings: I was attracted to both pastoral activity and monastic life. Therefore, at the age of 15 I made such a decision for myself, and at the age of 20 I brought it to life.

E. Gracheva: Vladyka, you usually make comments, even at our program, on all the events that are

taking place in the country, and not only those related to the Church. Often you make a reservation on the program: "This is my personal opinion." Does it happen that your personal opinion is at odds with the opinion of the Church? If so, what happens then?

Metropolitan Hilarion: It has never happened in my memory that my personal opinion was at odds with the opinion of the Church. I very often stipulate that this is my personal opinion in those cases when, for example, a question is being discussed on which the Church does not have an official or conciliarly expressed position, or in those cases when I answer a question that is not in the direct sphere of my competence.

For example, if we are talking about the sphere of external Church relations, then I can not make such reservations, because I, as Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations, express the official position of the Russian Church. I have the right and the mandate to do this.

The Church has other official speakers on other topics. When I have to touch on these topics, I either refer to those people, or to the official position of the Church, or express my personal point of view.

The Apostle Paul, if we remember his epistles, says in one place: “I say, not the Lord” (1 Cor. 7.12), and in another: “I do not command, but the Lord” (1 Cor. 7.10). That is, the Apostle very much distinguishes what he says on behalf of God, what he says as a representative of the Church, expressing the general Church teaching as it had taken shape at that time, and what he says from himself, expressing his own private position, his own opinion.

I try to be very careful about this. If I really express my personal or private opinion, then I always stipulate it, so that later no one would say that this is the opinion of the Church. Although, unfortunately, for our media that doesn't really matter, because whenever I say something – they always write: "The Russian Orthodox Church has declared ...", "The Russian Orthodox Church has called for ...", "The Russian Orthodox Church demands ...", etc. They do it even when I say that I am expressing my personal position.

E. Gracheva: What is your understanding of a career growth at your position?

Metropolitan Hilarion: Career growth is a very dangerous thing, especially for a monk. If a person accepts monasticism in the form of career growth, then, unfortunately, very often it ends in great disappointment. In my life, career growth happened without my will. Basically, I owe my career growth to one person - His Holiness Patriarch Kirill. I was a simple hieromonk when I came to him, it happened almost 26 years ago. I had just returned from Oxford and he offered me a job at the Department for External Church Relations. More than half of my life has already been associated with this Synodal

institution. It is thanks to Metropolitan Kirill that what you call a “career growth” has taken place in my life.

I can tell you one secret. When I started working at the Department for External Church Relations, several years had passed and I felt that I was burdened by a large number of trips and participation in all kinds of conferences. I once complained about this to Metropolitan Kirill. We were flying together in an airplane and I said: Vladyka, I want to confess to you the difficulty that I am facing now. I told him: there are two great loves in my life - the love for the Altar and the love for theology, for church science. Because of this constant external Church activity, because of these trips, I cannot fully satisfy either one of these loves. I do not have enough time for theology, I devote little time to Church and worship. I would like to somehow rebuild my life so that it still fits these aspirations of mine. Metropolitan Kirill listened to me very attentively and then said: I want you to be a bishop, and I will do everything for this. This, of course, was like a bolt from the blue to me. Least of all I thought about becoming a bishop. However, it was his will, and he consistently carried it out. After I had become a bishop, he initiated all my further appointments to all positions.

Therefore, if we talk about a Church career, then, in general, I owe it entirely to him.

E. Gracheva: Vladyka, as the head of the Department for External Church Relations - the Church Ministry of Foreign Affairs - what are the main challenges you see in front of you now?

Metropolitan Hilarion: The main challenge that has been thrown down to us is the anti-canonical, robbery actions of Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, which we faced in 2018 and which split the entire Orthodox Church. This split is deepening due to the actions of the Patriarch of Constantinople.

Of course, we could not help but react to this. We broke off communion with the Patriarch of Constantinople. This is a great tragedy, but, as I have already said many times, including on our program, this split is developing outside the boundaries of our Church. We grieve for him. We pray for Patriarch Bartholomew and for other hierarchs who evaded schism or supported schism, but we thank God that schism did not touch our Church. Our episcopate in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova and other countries that are part of our canonical space and beyond, is of one mind and solidarity. During all these years, our Church has not lost anything, no part of its canonical territory. We did not lose any parishes except those that were forcibly seized by Ukrainian schismatics, however, a large number of new parishes had already been built there.

Not so long ago, our Church had grown with another structure - the Archdiocese of Western European parishes, which for a long time was a member of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, and now is a member of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Therefore, our main common Church task is to strengthen our unity. The direct task of the Department for External Church Relations is to defend our sacred borders and to prevent encroachments on the legacy that has been formed over the centuries. We did not create it and it is not for us to ruin it.

And what happens outside our Church, of course, will remain on the conscience of those people who commit these acts. These actions have already disgraced them here and, of course, they will answer for this in the age to come.

E. Gracheva: I don't remember who the author of this phrase is. Someone said that envy is the root of all mortal sins. It all starts with envy. Do you have a lot of envious people? If so, what is the object of their envy?

Metropolitan Hilarion: Probably there some people like that. Sometimes they even show themselves. But, to be honest, it bothers me very little. I think that in the Church there is a place for every person and every person has the opportunity to fully reveal their abilities, talents and gifts. We have no reason to envy each other.

Saint Simeon the New Theologian said that in the future Kingdom of Heaven there will be different degrees of bliss, as Christ Himself said: "In the house of My Father there are many mansions" (John 14.2). But each person, in his degree of bliss, will not feel the difference between himself and another person, that is, for each person, his own degree of bliss will be, as it were, the highest. I would very much like for us in the Church to have the same thing: so that in the Church every person would feel as if he is carrying the service that God has entrusted to him, and would not claim to be something more. On the contrary, he would make every effort to carry out the ministry that is entrusted to him in the best possible way.

E. Gracheva: Vladyka, I know that you have already sent your new book to be printed, it is called "Saints of Our Days" and is dedicated to the holy elders with whom you happened to be personally acquainted. Of course, I cannot but ask: how do you explain the fact that in such a country as Russia, with such a strong, powerful Christian Orthodox tradition, the institution of eldership has come to a standstill? If we read our classic literature, it was commonplace. To go to an elder, for example, in Optina Pustyn, would be as normal as to visit a family doctor. Now we have, perhaps, one or two people who are popularly called elders. Why is that? There are no priests whom people would trust so much? Or do people themselves no longer believe in the institution of elders?

Metropolitan Hilarion: It seems to me that the elders never existed in the Church as a kind of formalized institution. There were never many elders. There were always few of them, they were very

few. We are now talking about the Optina elders. There really were a lot of them, but there were a lot of them over a period of one and a half hundred years. There was a certain continuity between the elders: one died - he passed on his disciples to others.

The elders whom I saw and who lived in Soviet times, about whom I speak in my book, were elders despite the fact that the Church lived in extremely cramped conditions. And they themselves lived in cramped conditions. Nevertheless, in their ministry they revived a tradition that was almost interrupted during the years of persecution: in the 1920s and 1930s. In particular, I describe our wonderful confessors: Father Kirill - confessor of the Trinity- Sergius Lavra, father Ioann Krestyankin. But even in this book I am talking about other people, of whom three have already been numbered among the saints: the Metropolitan Zinovy (Mazhuga), who was an elder and a bishop at the same time, he lived and served in Georgia; St. Gabriel (Urgebadze), whom many now venerate not only in Georgia, but also in Russia; and then Archimandrite Sophrony (Sakharov) who was recently canonized in the Church of Constantinople.

These people, regardless of whether they have already been canonized or will subsequently be canonized, and some of them, perhaps, will not be canonized, for me they are true bearers of holiness. In many respects, thanks to them, I was inspired by both the ideal of monastic life and the ideal of pastoral service. Therefore, for me they are saints, and that's what I called my book. I do not divide these holy people into canonized and uncanonized.

When you and I recently visited the Diveyevo monastery, we heard a story about how saint Seraphim talked with Motovilov, who came to him, and how during their conversation the face of St. Seraphim shone like the face of Christ on Mount Tabor, and the fragrance spread around. A similar incident happened in my life when in my youth I talked with a priest, a monk. He took my word that I would not disclose his name, so I cannot do it. I was 13 or 14 years old, I talked with him, he was speaking, and I then saw how at that moment started to transform: his face began to shine with dazzlingly bright sunlight, although the conversation took place late in the evening.

Of course, such events cannot be erased from memory, such meetings are engraved in the memory for life.

E. Gracheva: Thank you very much, Vladyka. Once again, my congratulations.

Metropolitan Hilarion: Thank you, Catherine.

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: Hello, Metropolitan Hilarion! I am 27 years old, I have been attending Church since adolescence, I studied at a theological school, but in recent years I have grown very cold towards the faith. There is no longer the enthusiasm that was there before. Can you advise a book that could soften my petrified heart?

Metropolitan Hilarion: First of all, of course, I would like to advise you to read the Gospel as often as possible. Try to read one chapter of the Gospel daily. However, read not just mechanically and not like a familiar text that you studied at a theological school, but try to open your heart towards Christ. Try, when you read, to imagine how all this happened, what is described there, wh ere you would be if you were near. Most importantly, think about how all of this might relate to your own life. After all, the words that Christ speaks are addressed to every person, including you. Maybe you do not hear God's call for you. Maybe God tells you something, invites you to fulfill it, but you do not fulfill it. Such insensibility does not come to a person all of a sudden, it is always, as a rule, a consequence of the person's lifestyle. Perhaps there is something in your lifestyle that prevents you from hearing God's responses.

To hear His responses, one must turn to God with prayer. If for some reason you cannot pray according to a prayer book (it happens that a person reads prayers, and they seem to pass him by), then find a way to turn to God in the way you have just turned to me on the program, and talk to Him as if He hears you, even if you do not feel that He hears you. Sooner or later, you will certainly receive an answer.

Of course, besides the Gospel, there is a great deal of Christian literature. The shelves of bookstores are literally filled with Orthodox literature now: there are works that are theological in nature and also books with various kinds of stories from the life of the Church. It is even very difficult for me to offer you anything specific. If you have not read the book "Elder Silouan" by Hieromonk Sophrony (Sakharov), then read it - maybe it will reveal something to you. This book consists of two parts. In the first part, Father Sophrony describes a remarkable ascetic of our time – St. Silouan the Athonite, and the second part present to us the notes of St. Silouan himself. There are people who are more suited to the first part of the book, and there are those who are more responsive to the second part of the book. If you haven't read it, read it. If you have read it, re-read it. And this book, I think, will be followed by others that can help you.

Question: The Scripture says that "For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away." But at the same time

“blessed are the poor,” that is, those who have nothing, and according to the first postulate, what they have will be taken away from them, especially their spirituality. Is that really a blessing?

Metropolitan Hilarion: It seems to me that you have somehow arbitrarily combined two phrases, and you are quoting them inaccurately. The Lord says: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5.3). Not just beggars, not just those who are deprived of material wealth, but those people who are humble. This is whom He calls blessed.

And the words “to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away” (Matthew 25:29), are said in a certain context: they are said in the context of the parable of talents. This parable says that a person should not bury his talent in the ground, he should not hide it. If the Lord gives us some talents, then we must use them in business, that is, for the benefit of other people. The word "talent" itself indicates initially a monetary unit, a unit of weight. Silver was measured by talents. So, a person who buried his talent in the ground, that is, did not use it for the benefit of other people, will also lose that what he believes he has. And the person who gives himself to other people will receive more and more from God. This is the law of spiritual life. This is what these Gospel words are about.

Question: Vladyka, how does the Church treat people who are neither believers nor atheists, but who, in principle, do not care whether God and the devil exist? For example, I treat religion and God with complete indifference. I don’t feel the need to turn to God in principle. And the second question: which religion is the most correct one and by what criteria can it be verified?

Metropolitan Hilarion: First, I will answer your second question. I think it would be strange if I did not name Orthodox Christianity as the most correct religion. I tell you that the most correct religion is Orthodox Christianity. Why? Because Christianity is a God-revealed religion, that is, a religion that was not invented by people, but which God Himself brought to people through His Only Begotten Son - the Lord Jesus Christ. Why Orthodox Christianity? Because it is the Orthodox Church that has kept the teaching that was taught by Christ and the apostles in its purity. In some other Christian denominations this teaching has been distorted, but in the Orthodox Church it has been preserved without distortion.

If we talk about people who are generally indifferent to religion, then I personally feel sorry for such people. I hope that the very fact that you are watching our program and wrote to me, testifies that you are, apparently, not completely indifferent to religion. I really hope that you will get to know Orthodoxy better, get to know it more deeply, love it and become a truly religious person.

I would like to end this broadcast with the words of the Apostle Paul: “Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers. ”(1 Tim.

4.16).

I wish you all the best and may the Lord bless you all!

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