Metropolitan Hilarion: Thinking of the Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos, we strongly understand the meaning and significance of death for each person



On August 28th, 2021, on the feast of the Dormition of Our Most Holy Lady Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, the Chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, celebrated the Divine Liturgy at the Moscow church of "Joy to All the Afflicted" icon of the Mother of God on Bolshaya Ordynka street.

Clergymen of the church assisted the archpastor.

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.

At the end of the Divine Liturgy, the Archpastor addressed the audience with the following sermon:

"In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit!

There are two worlds and two realities: the spiritual world and the material world, the spiritual reality and the material reality.

Often, people living in the material world perceive everything they see and everything that happens solely from the perspective of the material world. They observe the life of nature and believe that everything happens in nature due to natural laws that have developed as a result of evolution. They observe people's lives and think that the relationship between them is purely pragmatic, or is due to family ties or some kind of mutually beneficial relationship.

One can live their entire life in such a way that the reality of the spiritual world would remain completely closed to this person. And all his thoughts, emotions and feelings would be connected exclusively with the reality of the material world, and everything that happens to him, and everything that happens around him, would be perceived exclusively from a materialistic point of view, without seeing any spiritual reality behind it. One of the viewers asked me a question on my TV program: "I don't understand why I should believe in God, when everything I have achieved, I have achieved by my own efforts, and God has never helped me in anything." To this person I replied: "If God had never helped you in anything, you would not have achieved anything. If you were born sick instead of healthy, you wouldn't be able to do what you did. If God did not initially give you the conditions that enabled you to achieve success, if you did not have the appropriate gifts, abilities, physical and spiritual strength, then you would not have achieved anything in life."

Very often people do not notice or do not want to notice the spiritual reality, believing that the whole meaning of life is to get the most out of life here on earth, to achieve success, career growth and think that if all this has happened, then life has been successful. But for every person, there comes a time when, whether they want to or not, they will have to face a different reality. And that moment is death.

People who live exclusively by material ideas do not like to think or talk about death. They try to ignore death in their lives and in the lives of others, because it prevents them from enjoying life.

The Christian Church gives everyone a completely different perspective of life. It does not deprive anyone of anything, it does not say: you must forbid yourself this or that. The Church only reminds us of what is sinful and what can lead to destruction, and what is salvific and will lead to eternal life.

Often we hear from preachers that human life here on earth is a preparation for eternal life. But this does not mean that we should live in this world as if we are writing a draft, whereas there, in eternal life,

we will start writing a clean copy of our lives. This does not mean that here we should deny ourselves the pleasures that are not sinful, that we should not enjoy the earthly life, except for everything that is connected with sin.

But at the same time, the Church opens up a different perspective, gives us the opportunity to see the spiritual beyond the material: beyond the phenomena of nature, beyond the beauty of the natural world, beyond the sunrises and sunsets, to see the One Who is the Artist and Creator of all this, and to glorify God, who created such wonderful beauty, as the Psalmists glorified Him.

When we read the Psalms, we see the poetic feeling of these works of ancient poetry. King David and the other psalmists knew how to see the beauty of nature, but behind this beauty they saw its Creator – God.

In the same way, the Church teaches us to see in each person not just our relative or acquaintance, or co-worker, or a person to whom we owe something or who owes us something, but to see the image of God. And to treat each other not only for reasons of kinship or pragmatic nature, but also as the Lord Himself treats us, to try to see in each and single one of us the image of God.

The Church of Christ teaches us that death is the transition to eternal life, which awaits every person. However, the quality of this eternal life will directly depend on how a person had lived his earthly life.

Looking today at the image of the Most Holy Theotokos, Who reclines beautifully on Her deathbed, we strongly understand the meaning and significance of death for each person. As life goes, so does death. It is no coincidence that the Holy Scriptures say that "the death of sinners is evil" (Psalm 33:22, Septuagint). There are many cases when the Lord revealed in the last moments of a person why was this person punished with such a terrible death. Although we know that not every death that is terrible by human standards is a punishment for anything, it's just that people die very differently. But in every death there is the most important thing – the transition to eternal life.

When we look at the Most Holy Mother of God, at how She spent Her last years, months and hours, we understand that it is precisely for such a death – Christian, unashamed, peaceful – that we ask and pray to the Lord every time during the Divine Liturgy and other Church services.

We ask God that our death may become the crowning achievement of our entire path, give meaning to our life and justify what we have done and are doing in this life; that our death may become the transition to eternity, so that even here, in our earthly existence, we may know our Lord Jesus Christ, partake of His Divine Light and of the Heavenly Kingdom that He has prepared for each person.

The Lord said: "In my Father's house are many mansions" (John 14:2). There are enough mansions for everyone, if only everyone wants to settle in the heavenly abode. And to stay in it, we must "book" a place for ourselves here and now, as, for example, people who prepare in advance for a vacation, book plane tickets, hotel accommodation and meals, realizing that seats can be sold out.

In the same way, we must take care of our future life - first, through prayers, through participation in the Church's Sacraments, and, secondly, through "using worldly wealth to gain friends" as the Lord told us in one of His parables (Lk. 16: 9). The wealth that we need – material or spiritual – is not ours, we received it to share with our neighbors. And this wealth, not earned by us, we can share here on earth, so that later, when we come to the other world, we can find friends who will say: we have already prepared a place for you here, because you were with us on earth, and now you will be with us here, in another reality.

This is not at all easy to perceive with the human mind. However, every time a person dies, we come into contact with a different reality. And through the death of loved ones, the Lord constantly reminds us of the other world, for which we must prepare and in which all of us must reserve a place.

Let us pray to our Most Holy Lady, Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, that She would help us to live our lives as She did: in standing before God, in serving the Lord, in the unceasing prayer. May the Mother of Light honour us at the and with what we pray for at every divine service – a Christian, unashamed and peaceful death. Amen.

I congratulate you all on today’s feast! God bless you all!"

DECR Communication Service

Source: https://mospat.ru/en/news/87925/