



Address by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill at the VIII World Congress of Compatriots Living Abroad



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On October 30, 2024, the opening of the VIII World Congress of Compatriots Living Abroad took place in the Hall of Church Councils of the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow. His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus' addressed the gathered audience.

"Dear Valentina Ivanovna! Dear Sergey Viktorovich! Dear compatriots! Brothers and sisters!

I warmly welcome the participants and guests of the VIII World Congress of Russian Compatriots who have gathered here today in the Hall of Church Councils at the Cathedral of Christ the Savior, as well as those participating remotely. Our forum has been bringing together people united by a sincere love for Russia, its culture, and its spiritual traditions for many years. You meet to share your understanding of

the situation faced by compatriots, their joys, sorrows, and problems existing in the Russian diaspora. Such a meeting, of course, contributes to strengthening personal ties, which can be a very important factor in supporting our compatriots.

I believe we all have a common mission - to pass on the great heritage we have received from our ancestors to future generations. Of course, the spiritual and cultural heritage of our people plays a central role, embodying the most important and best aspects we have inherited from our forebears. Today, we are experiencing a very complex historical period, and everyone feels and understands this. When I speak of this and use the word 'we,' in a certain sense, 'we' refers to the entire globe, the entire human race. Because in every corner of our planet, people are indeed facing challenges that previous generations could not even imagine. And a difficult situation requires us to realize a special personal responsibility for the fate of our homeland.

In the three years since the VII World Congress of Compatriots, many fateful changes have occurred. The countries of historical Rus' are going through severe trials today, as external forces strive in many ways to divide a historically united people, cancel Russian culture, detach people from Orthodox roots, destroy our historical heritage, and thus deprive us of a common future.

In difficult times, there is an acute need for faith and help from above. It is enough to recall the time of the Great Patriotic War – a country of godless five-year plans, closed churches, destroyed shrines; it seemed that 'religious prejudices' had been done away with forever. And what happened? The leader of the country addresses the people and finds no other words but to use the church greeting: 'Dear brothers and sisters!' Not 'dear comrades' – dear brothers and sisters! These were the right words because they came not from ideology, not from the demands of the political moment, but from the depths of our common history. And these words truly reached the hearts of those who listened to Stalin's speech.

Today, much is being done to ensure that our people living abroad can maintain a close connection with their homeland, both culturally and spiritually. And for me as the Patriarch, it is especially pleasing to say that the pastoral care of our diaspora is carried out today at a very high level. Our communities operate in almost a hundred countries around the world, where nearly 2,000 priests serve. Despite Russophobic propaganda, foreign churches are filled with a large number of believers seeking spiritual support in the Russian Orthodox Church. In modern realities, our foreign parishes represent unique and sometimes the only platforms for communication, interaction, and consolidation of both Russian-speaking compatriots and friendly local residents, all those who identify with the Orthodox Russian tradition.

The Orthodox faith has always been the spiritual stronghold of our people. It is both the path of salvation for the individual and a real force that unites people and helps them support each other in

difficult circumstances. Moreover, faith preserves the historical connection, the continuity of generations. In this regard, one cannot fail to mention the significance of the family, which, being the most important social institution, plays a key role in raising children, shaping their worldview, value priorities, and, of course, their attitude toward faith. In our time, there is a very harmful, pernicious misconception that children do not need to be told about God, taught the commandments, prayers, hear the Gospel, or taken to church services. Allegedly, they will grow up and figure it all out themselves. This is often said under the guise of caring for children, with a certain cunning, supposedly 'respecting their free choice,' which in reality masks one's own indifference to faith and spiritual life, a lack of interest in the realities of life itself.

However, it is obvious that a person lives and is formed in a cultural environment. And if from childhood he did not hear live human speech, he will not speak any language – he will be like Mowgli. Children will not be able to understand what they are not involved in. There is a great danger that they will live without God, that their life values and orientations will not be connected with Christianity and high moral ideals but with pragmatic aspirations, the pursuit of profit, comfort, and the priority of material beginnings. Agree that such values not only contradict what we call the national spiritual and cultural code of our people but also complicate a person's path to salvation and, I would say, make it very difficult to feel involved in the great common heritage, everything that the Motherland lives by.

Children are sometimes able to understand faith no worse than we adults, to grasp its true meaning, to reflect on it. I have been personally convinced of this more than once. It is from children and young people that I have heard very deep questions about God, about faith, asked with great interest. By teaching our children faith, passing on to them the spiritual experience of generations, instilling in them love for Russia, its history, culture, and tradition, we thereby strengthen the value foundation of our people, help our children gain a firm moral footing. And this is an investment in the future of our nation.

When talking with foreign clergy and parishioners of our churches living abroad, I try to remind them that they have a great responsibility to represent the Church and our country among people who often know little or nothing about Orthodoxy, and get their impression of Russia from media poisoned by Russophobia. That is why it is important that parishes, communities of compatriots do not turn into closed and self-sufficient communities, but are always open to all who wish to touch the beauty of our faith, the richest cultural heritage of the Motherland. But we, in turn, need to better know the history, literature, poetry, music, and religious traditions of the countries where compatriots live. Such mutual recognition can yield useful fruits in the field of friendship and cooperation. Confirmation of this thesis is the fact that today many foreigners strive to move to Russia, seeking refuge from liberal public morality. What is happening indicates that the future belongs to those who have strong faith, which gives a person the opportunity to maintain their spiritual integrity, their ability to ensure a living continuity of generations. Indeed, this process is observed – people move to Russia, and when you talk to such

families, it turns out that the primary reason is fear for the future of their children. They talk about what they are taught in schools, what ideas are instilled in them – completely terrifying from the point of view of human morality, and especially Orthodox faith. And so, fearing that such education will destroy the spiritual, cultural, national code of the child, parents not only take them out of school but leave these countries and return to their homeland.

I am convinced, my dear ones, that our common task is not only to carefully preserve the memory of the Motherland, its great past, but also to actively participate in creating its future. Our common efforts, or, as we say in church language, conciliar efforts – this is something that even in Soviet times they tried to cultivate in people, calling it collectivism. And the word 'conciliarity,' 'assembly' primarily implies unity. There cannot be an assembly if people are alien to each other, if they are hostile to each other, if they have different goals – then the assembly turns into an arena of human passions and a place of conflicts.

Of course, there are various kinds of conflicts between people. In addition to family conflicts, which have been, are, and probably will be until the end of time, because sin does not leave the human soul, there are conflicts defined by professional failure, doubts about the fairness of treatment by others, and many other circumstances. Conflicts are something constant. But living in constant conflict is impossible; conflict is destructive. Therefore, if conflicts are not opposed by the desire to overcome them by all possible means, to build unity – and I would say, the conciliar unity of our people – then conflicts can become a very dangerous and destructive force. Therefore, when the Church calls for peace of mind, peace with oneself, peace in the family, peace in society, peace in the state, it does not utter routine words – this call comes from the very nature of the Church as a force that unites people.

I am sure that even external circumstances greatly contribute to the fact that people who yesterday may have doubted the need for common conciliar action aimed at the good of the country, today are increasingly realizing their personal responsibility for the fate of the Motherland. God grant that this sense of responsibility becomes inherent in the overwhelming majority of our people. Because responsibility for the fate of the Motherland should be followed by thoughts and deeds. Today, the country needs us to be together, perhaps more than ever in recent decades – so that Russia remains a truly sovereign, truly independent, truly free country, independently determining the path of its civilizational development. And so it shall be! I warmly greet all of you!"