



## **Members of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church greet His Holiness Patriarch Kirill with his birthday**

*On 20<sup>th</sup> November 2019, read out after the Divine Liturgy at the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow was the message of greetings from members of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church addressed to His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia on the occasion of his birthday.*

### **His Holiness Kirill**

#### **Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia**

Your Holiness, Holy Vladyka and merciful Father:

Please accept our heartfelt greetings on the occasion of your birthday.

This year has been marked by many momentous events. Half a century ago, at the hands of Metropolitan Nikodim (Rotov) of Leningrad and Novgorod – an outstanding hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church and zealous servant of God's altar – you took monastic vows and were ordained to the diaconate and priesthood.

Today the plenitude of the Church wholeheartedly congratulates you on these memorable dates and wishes that God, "Infinite in Power" (Sunday Midnight Office, Canon of Tone 7), strengthen you in your toilsome and lofty Primatial labours, which are the continuation of the ministry of "the glorious apostles, pillars of the Church and preachers of the truth" (Wednesday Vespers, Stikhera of Tone 7).

You have devoted your whole life to the Creator Who has provident plan for each and every thing: "having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith... and the sword of the Spirit" (Eph. 6:14-17), you tirelessly bear witness to the transfiguring power of Orthodoxy before those near and far, in word and deed showing the example of zealous service of the King of Glory to archpastors and pastors, and teaching them to "fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life" (1 Tim. 6:12), whereunto we are called.

Finding strength in the frequent celebration of divine services and participation in the Life-Giving

Mysteries of the Lord and placing utmost importance on pleasing God and cultivating the field of your heart, you work hard to help the Holy Church carry out her salvific mission, enlightening your contemporaries by the light of Christ's Truth, developing theological education, promoting youth work and providing aid for the needy, infirm and imprisoned. You testify to millions of people that we are "fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God" (Eph. 2:19), that "all things work together for good to them that love God" (Rom. 8:28), so that they may know "what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power" (Eph. 1:19).

The past years saw many of your fruitful endeavours that added a new page to the chronicle of church life.

In your capacity as rector of the Leningrad theological schools you exerted great efforts to reorganize the academy, dear to you, and to this day the school has been reaping the good fruits of your labours.

For over twenty years you served in the Smolensk diocese. As the ruling hierarch you managed, despite all difficulties, to make a substantial contribution in various spheres to the improvement of the life of this diocese, at the time one of the poorest in our Church. In that period you also represented our Church in the international arena, bearing witness to the beauty and truth of Orthodoxy before the non-Orthodox world. Through your efforts the Kaliningrad diocese, and later metropolia, was re-established, headed by you even till now.

Over the years of your Patriarchal ministry enormous changes have taken place in the life of our Church. For instance, while in 2009 there were 159 dioceses, now there are 313. The number of ruling and vicar hierarchs has increased from 200 to 391. As a caring father, you personally met with each candidate for episcopacy and had lengthy and serious conversations with them, which, undoubtedly, led to further decisions on their future service.

With your blessing new churches and monasteries are being built and those destroyed in the past are being restored in all dioceses of the Russian Orthodox Church. For ten years of your Patriarchal ministry the number of churches has increased from 29 263 to 38 649. And this dynamic still remains. Special mention should be made of your efforts aimed at constructing new churches in the city of Moscow.

By the grace of God it was you who succeeded in returning home – to the bosom of the Mother Church – the Western European parishes of Russian tradition. It was you who succeeded in healing the wound inflicted on the Church and homeland by the revolution and subsequent developments. It was you who succeeded in revealing to our contemporaries the intransient beauty of the unity in faith and love of Christ, as well as the true "unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3). The festive Divine Liturgy which you celebrated together with the head of the Archdiocese, Metropolitan John of Dubna, your

brothers the archpastors and numerous clerics in this cathedral on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of November made a blessed impression on all of us, marking the restored unity by the joint participation in the Holy Eucharist.

Verily, “how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity” – we exclaim with David the Psalmist (Ps. 133:1). However, the archenemy continues to sow seeds of discord. It is with regret that we speak about the difficulties in the relationships between the Local Orthodox Churches, caused by the recognition of the schismatic community in Ukraine by some of them. This conflict arose through no fault of ours, and we will do all we can to defend the canonical truth, notwithstanding the vain efforts made by the mighty of this world.

We believe and hope that by the mercy of God all these misfortunes will work for good and the truth of the Gospel will prevail.

Again and again we congratulate you on these memorable jubilee dates, thank you for your wise leadership and assure you of our filial love and sincere willingness to continue to zealously work under your guidance for the good of the Holy Church.

May in the years to come God Almighty always illumine your path by the light “never-waning, thrice-radiant... which alone ruleth” (Sunday Midnight Office, Canon of Tone 8), granting unto you bodily and spiritual strength and His unceasing help in your Primatial ministry.

Many years to you.

*20<sup>th</sup> November 2019*