



Metropolitan Hilarion: Our life should be a continuation of the Liturgy and our home a continuation of the church

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On January 29, 2012, the 33d week after Pentecost, Metropolitan Hilarion, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations, celebrated the Divine Liturgy at the church of Our Lady the Joy to All the Afflicted in Moscow. He was assisted by Archimandrite Kirill (Govorun), deputy chairman of the ROC education committee, Archpriest Nikolay Georgiev, special representative of the president of the International Association of Prison Ministry (Bulgarian Orthodox Church), Rev. George Zavershinsky, dean of the Sourozh diocese's parishes in Scotland, Rev. Dmitry Ageyev, assistant to the DECR chairman, and the clergy of the church.

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Among the worshippers was Bishop Kliment of Krasnoslobodsk and Temnikov.

After the service, His Eminence Hilarion delivered an archpastoral homily, saying:

'Today, dear brothers and sisters, we heard the Gospel's story about the Lord Jesus Christ who passing by a fig tree noticed the tax collector Zacchaeus who climbed up the tree in order to see the Saviour (see, Lk. 19:1-10). The Lord said to him, 'Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today'. And Zacchaeus, full of joy because the Lord himself would come to his house, answered, 'I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.' Then the Lord uttered these words, 'Today salvation has come to this house'.

This story can serve as a lesson in many matters but it reminds us in particular of our house and that the Lord should be present in our house. Indeed, we do not doubt that the Lord is present in church. We come to church; our hearts seeks Him because we feel the presence of God here especially strongly. Here the Lord Jesus Christ offers us His Own Self in the sacrament of the Eucharist, and we take in His Body and Blood.

The church is a special place of God's presence, and it should not be forgotten that our house should be a continuation of the church and that God's presence we feel here should remain in our life also at the time when we are at home or in another place where the Lord ordains us to be. Be it in a house or in a

flat, an office or other place where we live, work, rest and where there are other people with us, the Lord will be present if we ourselves, like Zacchaeus, accept Him with open hearts. The Lord wants to be present in our life and He does not shun any human dwelling, be it a mansion of a rich man or a modest communal flat shared by several families, be it an office of a large company president or a modest office of, by a human measure, a third-rate, civil servant.

The tax collector Zacchaeus was not a great man. He was short and his profession was disdained. However, when the Lord saw his faith and that he was not shy to climb a tree, though those around him laughed at him because they were taller and could see the passing-by prophet, the Lord did not shun him and addressed to him His saving word and came to his house. This is how the Lord visits people who, with pure and open heart, come to meet Him. For the Lord, there are no rich or poor, short or tall, well-off or unsuccessful people. For Him all are equal. And even when in our country there were estates, nobility and base estate, both worshipped together in church because for the Church and God all are equal.

God sometimes opens His grace in a special way to those who, by earthly measures, are so despicable that people do not even notice them and pass them by. But the Lord never passes by a person. He always looks at his heart because for the Savior each human being is precious.

Let us think today about bringing God's presence we feel in church to our home, to our working place, to our family and our colleagues. Let us think of making our life a continuation of the Liturgy and our home a continuation of church. And then the Lord will always and everywhere be with us and will help us in our family and professional life, in our relations with our superiors and subordinates and with our relatives with whom it is so difficult to find a common language.

The Lord will come Himself and put everything in its place if only our heart is open to Him. Let us ask the Lord to give us the open heart, to be always with us and help us wherever we are, in our homeland or in a journey, in church or at home, in office or at rest. Amen'.

Metropolitan Hilarion told the parishioners that the icon of Sts Peter and Febronia with part of their relics would henceforth be kept in their church. In summer 2011, the relics of the saints were handed over to Metropolitan Hilarion by Mother Superior Tavifa of the Convent of the Holy Trinity in Murom. Their icon as patrons of family life was executed at the initiative of the church's youth club. The shrine will be kept at the side-chapel of St. Varlaam of the church of Our Lady the Joy to All the Afflicted.

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