

Jubilee Epistle of His Eminence Hilarion Metropolitan of Eastern America and New York First Hierarch of the Russian Church Abroad

Your Graces Brother-Archpastors, Honorable Fathers,
Beloved Brothers and Sisters in the Lord!

I sincerely greet you with the 725th Anniversary of the appearance of the miraculous Kursk-Root Icon of the Mother of God of the “Sign,” and with the Centennial of the founding of the Higher Church Administration Abroad, which later was transformed into the Synod of Bishops of the Russian Church Abroad. We are not marking the events that destroyed all the foundations of Pre-Revolutionary Russia, and which hit extremely hard on our dear Mother – the Local Russian Orthodox Church – having pushed Her, together with the whole country, onto a path of great suffering, repression, martyrdom and confession. Rather, we raise up gratitude to God, Who has preserved us under the shelter of our precious Orthodox Faith, in the traditions of the glorious Russian Church. We bow down before the memory of those ascetics, who have carefully preserved and increased our Russian ecclesiastical inheritance in the Diaspora, who have sustained a spiritual flame in our people scattered across nations, and who have nurtured their flock’s talents in the difficult conditions abroad. Thanks to the grace of God, as expressed in the sacrificial labors of our predecessors, the children of the Russian Orthodox Church, dispersed among various nations, were not dissolved in the foreign masses, like splashes and droplets of water are dissolved in the ocean. Glory to God, they have not disappeared, but rather have preserved Holy Orthodoxy and through it our cultural and historical tradition!

The Holy Hierarch and Wonderworker John Archbishop of Shanghai and San Francisco says: “Our spiritual unity with the Holy Russian Church is inseparable. There is no one for whom the suffering of the Russian Church, the trampling-upon of Her Holiness, can be more

painful than for us, the sons of the Russian Church. We are bound to Her through the unity of Her God given gifts, the names of Her Saints, who are close and comprehensible to us by their way of life, their struggle, language and service: our dear Saints. Spiritually the Russian Church is indivisible: She is always the one and the same Russian Church, no matter where we are. Our church unity helps Russians remain Russians, not to lose our national character, not to be depersonalized amidst other nations, not to lose our gifts, not to betray our path and calling... In our being scattered throughout the whole world, we do not submit to the local Churches because we have enmity towards them, but because we preserve the Russian Church and the attributes of the Russian soul” (from the lecture About the Significance of the Russian Church Abroad, John Archbishop of Brussels and Western Europe, during the opening of the Diocesan Assembly in 1951).

Besides the preservation of the particular features of the spirit of our people, the beauty of the face of the Russian Church and the inner mission amidst its children, our forefathers generously shared the spiritual wealth of Holy Russia with the local inhabitants of the lands of their sojourn, which is witnessed to by the numerous citizens from Europe, North and South America, Australia and New Zealand, who have discovered the truth of Orthodoxy.

Unfortunately, this jubilee year, not to mention the past Great Lent and the Feast of the Resurrection of Christ, have been obscured by the general quarantine connected with the Coronavirus. I recall, during the most difficult days of this destructive pestilence, that one physician, who is a parishioner, wrote to one of our clergyman: “This pandemic should force us to think about much. It is a signal from on High, so that we would begin to care for the most important thing.” And the most important thing during this trial is to follow the Royal Path in life, in our mutual relations with our neighbor and in our service to the Church, avoiding panic, on the one hand, and irresponsible behavior, on the other, while entrusting ourselves and others to the will of God, which is both all-good and salvific. It is the caring and respectful interaction we

have for one another. It is regard for the preservation of unity in our church community, so that we can come out from this trial as a STRONG and GRACIOUS parish family, following the words of Blessed Augustine: “Most importantly, unity; secondly, freedom; and in all things, let there be love.”

Besides the quarantine restrictions that have influenced all spheres of our life, several political processes are taking place that are distracting us from what is most important. Today, it is very easy to become ensnared, to not travel by that path on which the Christian is called to walk, and to mistakenly accept a lie for the truth. We sense division throughout the entire world. In part, this is happening because faith has ceased to occupy the primary place in life. Not only have the Christian virtues of patience, humility and love become scarce, but even basic moral standards. We should remember that only goodness and a sincere desire to help our neighbor create the foundation upon which it is possible to build something virtuous and wise in our society. Anything else shall most certainly fall apart. Purpose in life emerges when faith in, and the striving towards, God are present, along with the ideals and values that are confessed in the Gospel of Christ. It is imperative that we learn this independently of where we live and what views we hold. Above all, we should at least remain honorable and respectable people, interacting with our neighbors well-manneredly and humanely, so that when they look at us Orthodox, they will not be ashamed to call us their friends. This is our spiritual and moral minimum.

Despite this fierce time for the entire world, we do not despair, and continue to hearken to the clear and decisive call to the podvig of our predecessors, and, moreover, of our DIRECTRESS, who shows us in Her Kursk-Root Icon the path for our humble service in today’s world. By Her intercessions and prayers, may God help us overcome the trials that have befallen us, that we, coming out of them, would receive strength and edification. May God grant that the planned celebrations and commemorative festivities be successfully moved to next year, timing them for the Centennial of the First All-Diaspora

Council (1921) and the Fortieth Anniversary of the canonization of the New-Martyrs and Confessors (1981). May God grant that while looking upon us Orthodox, in place of hatred and enmity, within the hearts of the people may settle warmth and a desire to live in a Christ-like manner and to be perfected in the virtues. This is something I also wish for all of us in this Jubilee Year! Asking for your holy prayers, I remain the first servant of the Holy Church and your continuous well-wisher,

+Hilarion,

Metropolitan of Eastern America and New York
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