

PATRIARCHAL CONCELEBRATION BY HIS BEATITUDE AND THE MOSCOW PATRIARCH IN THE RUSSIAN CAPITAL

On 22nd January 2012 His Beatitude Theodoros II Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa and His Beatitude Kirill Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia held a Patriarchal con-celebration in Moscow.

The Patriarchal con-celebration, in which twenty-four Hierarchs of the Russian Church participated, was held in the magnificent Church of Christ the Saviour in Moscow on the occasion of the commemoration of the Holy Hieromartyr Philip, Metropolitan of Moscow. Before the end of the Divine Liturgy His Beatitude spoke, saying:

“Your Beatitude and Most Holy Patriarch Kirill of Moscow, my beloved Brother and Concelebrant in Christ,

With the Grace of the Incarnate Christ, we commune with you today in the Holy Church of the Dormition of the Theotokos in the Kremlin, and, as members of the Lord’s Body, as members of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, we give witness to the salvific Incarnation of our Lord to the contemporary world.

From the Choirs of the Saints, Martyrs and Venerable Ones, to whose honour and memory this Sunday is dedicated, the one who stands out is Saint Hieromartyr Philip, Metropolitan of Moscow and All Russia, the Wonderworker. Honouring and rewarding the memory of Saint Hieromartyr Philip, we draw close to him, we existentially experience monasticism and his ascetic ethos and we say: As the Orthodox Church we have the self-consciousness which St Philip had, who was not afraid to go against the arbitrariness of authority. We are the Church which is not afraid, as Philip was not afraid, to go against illegal acts.

The Holy Hierarch whom we honour today reveals the essence and the power of faith. Faith is not a habitual psychological conviction but a total event of regeneration in and unity with Christ towards a participation in and communion with His new Godly human nature. Only through this holy faith of Christ, who is the beginning of our unity with God, as is emphasized by St Seraphim of Sarov, can we, as did the Hieromartyr Philip, endure and pass on the witness of the Lord, to not be afraid and to realise how responsible we are for our lives as Christians, as *“we are the light of the world and the salt of the earth”*.

Today we are experiencing an extreme transitional period, we are living through critical times of a re-examination of everything. The world is in an established order of uncertainty and is anxiously seeking a new order of things. Violence and war, poverty and squalor, the crisis of principles and values lead people to despair.

It is precisely at this crucial moment, that the Church of Christ offers the world the witness of the existence of the living God and the hope of the coming of the Kingdom of God in history. At the same time witness to faith takes on a particular importance within the great history of the struggle for human rights, for respect towards humans.

Faith in Christ essentially goes through faith in personal conscience. Man, as the image of God, has heavenly roots, and is incomparably greater than the world and history. When they are putting him to death, as Holy Metropolitan Philip, he blesses his executioners, addressing their conscience. He denies violence and calls on the only revolution which does not lead to slavery: the revolution of self-

consciousness and integrity.

It is this precise peaceful revolution of self-consciousness which we are called on as continuers of the preaching of the good news of Jesus Christ, to fertilize today having as the frontispiece the unyielding faith that God is man's freedom. The presence and witness of the One, Holy, Apostolic and Catholic Church, is able to liberate the world from its apparently sole unavoidable fate and give a way out of the superficial insurmountable stalemates.

Your Beatitude,

With spiritual joy and deep emotion we are once again with You and your people. A pious and noble people, a faithful people, who, with their patriarch first, give witness for a life which is more powerful than death, gleaning splendid examples of a way of life from the productive fields of the glorious historic path of the Most Holy Russian Church, to the time of Saint Hieromartyr Philip.

Relative examples of figures who with their tears and prayers who "*cultivated the infertility of the desert*" as did St Anthony the Great, Saint Makarios and Saint Mary of Egypt, who grace the activities of the Church of the Saint and glorious Apostle and Evangelist Mark towards the imparting of the Light of the True One on the African earth that thirsts for spiritual renewal. Bearing the burden of the journey of the desert, as did the people of Israel, and accepting the call, we experience the reality of the passion and Resurrection of our Lord through the trials and the struggles of the times.

However, having as our starting point the Arch Shepherd Christ and the objective of salvation of mankind, we travel with optimism on this road of duty, the teaching of all nations to show them the Way, the Truth and the Life. Believing in the power of the Church of the God Man Jesus Christ to bring again the hope of salvation, we continue our apostolic service of presenting and revealing that God is a God of love and forgiveness, freedom and justice, peace and reconciliation.

We are also overjoyed that in this indomitable and most responsible effort of spiritual renewal of our suffering and burdened African brothers and sisters, we have the ceaseless spiritual assistance of our Sister Orthodox Russian Church, based on the firm Unity of Faith, Holy tradition and liturgical experience in the bonds of love.

For this reason we thank the Triune God who has deemed us worthy today to be with you and to participate in this feast of faith. We thank you for your hospitality of Abraham, we embrace our concelebrant Hierarchs in the Lord, and grant our paternal blessing to the noble and faithful Russian people, praying that the Lord Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Redeemer, will look down on this vineyard, of our sister Church of Russia and strengthen her to the ages of ages. Amen".

In his reply, His Beatitude the Patriarch of Russia spoke of the historic bonds between the two Churches and the joyful feelings of the Christians for the visit of the Venerable Primate of the Throne of St Mark to the Russian capital on the occasion of his receiving of the award, on 21st January 2012, from the International Institute for the Unity of Orthodox Nations, and gave him an icon.

At noon His Beatitude attended the official lunch which was hosted in his honour by His Beatitude Patriarch Kirill to whom he awarded the emblem of the Patriarchate of Alexandria, and gave the Order of the Commander of St Mark to Professor Dr Alexeev Valery Arkadevich, Chairman of the International Institute for the Unity of Orthodox Nations

That same night His Eminence Athanasios Metropolitan of Cyrene, Exarch of the Patriarchate of Alexandria in Moscow, hosted an official dinner on behalf of His Beatitude the Pope and Patriarch, which was attended by His Beatitude, His Eminence Juvenaly, Metropolitan of Kolomna, representing His beatitude the Patriarch of Moscow, Hierarchs of the Russian Church, Exarchs of the Patriarchates of Antioch and Jerusalem, His Eminence Archbishop Niphon and the Very Reverend Archimandrite Stephanos, their Excellencies the Ambassadors of Egypt, Greece and Cyprus, the Chairman of the International Institute for the Unity of Orthodox Nations and other dignitaries.

Addressing the guests, His Beatitude expressed wholehearted thanks to His Beatitude Patriarch Kirill for the hospitality, spoke with love to the Hierarchs, the Exarchs and through them to the Venerable Primates of the ancient Patriarchates of Antioch and Jerusalem, as well as to their Excellencies the Ambassadors of the “beloved homelands of Greece and Egypt, as well as of Cyprus, the birthplace of Saints”, as he said characteristically.