

ADDRESS OF THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM ON THE OCCASION OF THE 1025 ANNIVERSARY OF THE BAPTISM OF RUS.

Kyiv Monastery of the Caves, Sunday 28 July 2013.

“Your Holiness, my dear Brother in Christ and
Concelebrant, Kyril,
Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, Your Beatitudes,
Your Eminences,
Your Graces,
Venerable Fathers,
Beloved Monastics,
Esteemed Members of the Government and the Civil Service
Dear Sisters & Brothers, the precious children of the
Orthodox Church,

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the
Lord Jesus Christ! (2 Cor. 1:2)*

We greet you with these words of Saint Paul as we celebrate with you all this great anniversary of the Baptism of “Rus”. We are honoured to be here, and we thank you, Your Holiness, for the invitation that you have extended to us to participate in

this Patriarchal Divine Liturgy.

We are reminded today of the words of Our Lord Jesus Christ from the Sermon on the Mount:

You are the light of the world... let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven, (Mt. 5: 14, 16)

The light of which Our Lord speaks is nothing less than the uncreated light of the Father that has been before the beginning of time. This is the same light that shone from Mount Sinai when God gave the Law to Moses. This is the same light that shone from Mount Tabor at the Transfiguration when Our Lord appeared to the disciples with Moses and Elijah and they heard the Father say, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" (Mt. 17:5).

This light shone also from Golgotha, when the King of Glory was lifted up on the cross, and made manifest to the whole world the true meaning and cost of love. This light shone from Mount Zion on Pentecost, when mysterious tongues of flame rested on the heads of the Apostles and Our Lord bestowed on them the Father's gift of the Holy Spirit.

This wonderful, divine light is the same light of hope that continues to shine, even in our own day, from the Holy Tomb of Our Lord Jesus Christ. It was this light that inspired the first missionaries to these lands, and this is this same light that continues to bring hope to people all over the world.

The Church of Jerusalem, as the Scriptures remind us, is the Mother of all the Churches

(Gal. 4:26), and has a special care for all the Orthodox faithful around the World. We rejoice today especially in the close relationship that has always existed between the Church in Russia and the Ukraine and the Church of Jerusalem.

In a time of extreme need in these lands, our predecessors of blessed memory, the Patriarchs Theophanes III, Paisios, and Dositheos II of Jerusalem, were significant spiritual and pastoral guides to the Church here. And so the Church of "Rus" was engrafted into the ancient apostolic tradition of the Church of Jerusalem, and this intimacy our faithful people have always felt.

For centuries pilgrims from these vast lands that have been sanctified by the blood of the martyrs of the love of Christ have come to the Holy Land, touching the very ground of our sacred history. We in our turn have been strengthened by your pilgrimages to us, and we are all encouraged by the deep unity of faith that we have in our remarkable diversity of culture, history, language, and ethnicity.

Jerusalem is the home of all humanity, regardless of our origins. For, as the Scriptures remind us, there "is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus", (Gal. 3:28).

Today we mark one of the great events in human history – an event that continues to have the deepest significance for the Orthodox Church as a whole, and for the

peoples of these lands in particular. For here, in the year 988, Prince Saint Vladimir accepted baptism, and directed that the entire population also be baptized in the waters of the River Dnieper just below this square, where we are concelebrating this Divine Liturgy this morning.

All anniversaries remind us both of our origin and of our purpose, and this anniversary is no exception. The commemoration of the Baptism of "Rus" ties the present-day Church of these lands directly to the Roman Orthodox civilization of Byzantium and to the Church of New Rome, that is, the Church of Constantinople, which has always been privileged with the seniority of love and honour among us.

Tradition attests that it was the Holy Apostle Saint Andrew, a witness of the light of the resurrection in Jerusalem, the patron saint of the Great Church of Constantinople, who first brought the Christian faith to this part of the World. The seed of the Gospel were shown and grew up here and there for the next several centuries.

But it is to the sons of Thessaloniki in the Byzantine Empire, Saint Cyril and Saint Methodios, Equal-to-the Apostles, that the enduring work of enlightening the Slavic lands is credited.

With the conversion of the Empress Saint Olga, Equal to-the-Apostles, history took a decisive turn. She was the attentive grandmother and mentor to Prince Saint Vladimir, also called Equal-to-the-Apostles, who was the Constantine the Great of the peoples of Rus. Saint Vladimir eventually threw

off his former paganism to embrace the Triune God, and the story of the visit of his emissaries to Constantinople is justly famous.

There, in the celebration of the Divine Liturgy in the Church of Hagia Sophia, the emissaries encountered heaven on earth, and so not just the faith, but the bright culture and the mind of Byzantium came to Rus'. This faith, culture and mind have profoundly shaped and formed the Christian civilization of these Slavic lands, even to our own time, and have given you a unity that transcends the many ethnic differences that the Orthodox Church in this part of the world embraces.

Central to the Byzantine culture and mind that you have inherited is the attitude that we find in many of the Church Fathers, and especially in Saint Basil the Great, that as the missionaries brought the Gospel to new lands, instead of eradicating the culture and the practices they found, they Christianised them. Thus they enfolded the soul of the people of Rus' whom they converted into the life of the Church.

This was the God given genius of Saint Cyril and Saint Methodios, as well as of Saint Olga and Saint Vladimir, and it lies at the heart of the enduring witness of the Orthodox faith in these lands.

As we re-count the extraordinary blessings that this noble Byzantine tradition has given to the Church here, on this anniversary we also remember the many trials that the Church and the peoples of these lands have endured over the centuries. The

memory of these trials, some of them still fresh for many of us, must not make us forget or abandon our original inheritance of faith and culture.

Quite the contrary: such trials must send us back always to our roots, to the life-giving wells of the spiritual riches of the Gospel and Tradition that sustain the life of the Church in all its vigour, and to God himself. As Saint Paul says, we know "that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been-poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us", (Rom. 5:3-5).

In this way, we shall live and present to others an Orthodoxy that is not simply a gift to us, but a gift for the life of the world.

Let us remember the words of Our Lord Jesus Christ with which we began:

You are the light of the world.

This Patriarchal concelebration with the representatives of all the Local Orthodox Churches is a blessed challenge to us all. We do not simply look to the past; we must look to the future, for Our God is the One "who is and who was and who is to come", (Rev. 1:8).

In the face of all the challenges of the present age, from poverty, to war, to violence, to discrimination, and all forms of division and inhumanity, the Orthodox Church has a God-given apostolic mission and a moral obligation to witness to love, reconciliation, peace, unity, and communion. We are called to be the light of the world in a time

when advancing globalization makes new demands on us all. We must, as the Scriptures say, keep alert and stand firm in our faith, be courageous, be strong, doing all things in love, (cf. 1 Cor. 16: 13).

We cannot shrink from being alert to this mission to be the light of the world. We must make our united voice as a Church, as it will be expressed in the Pan Orthodox Synod for which we all fervently pray, a reality not for our own sake only, but for the integrity of the ministry of the Gospel. We must learn to live afresh the glory of Christianity in all its expressions as they are embodied in the divinely-inspired Canons of the Church.

In our own day many Saint Olgas and many Saint Vladimirs come to us looking for the life-giving message of the Gospel, but they go away disappointed. They come searching for the Incarnate Light, but they find only shadows. They come to drink from the water of life, but they cannot get near to the fountain.

We must be honest with ourselves that this is all too often true, and we must be careful not to be like the Pharisees against whom Our Lord gave a stern warning: "Woe to you ... for you lock people out of the kingdom of heaven. For you do not go in yourselves, and when others are going in, you stop them" , (Mt. 23:13).

The Church is given by God for the salvation of all, and it is our responsibility to ensure that the gates of salvation are held open to all who seek "the true light, which enlightens everyone." (ln. 1:9).

Today we re-commit ourselves to this God-

given mission. We gather here in the shadow of this holy place, which has given to the Church and to these lands saints, martyrs, *startsy*, holy bishops, and humble monks, who were in their generations, and continue to- be today, the edification and consolation of the faithful, and lights to the world.

They pass this joyful burden on to us, so that the saving Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ may be preached to the ends of the earth. We remember, as Saint John Chrysostom tells us, that we venerate the martyrs most genuinely, when we imitate their virtues. May we never shrink from this vocation.

May God strengthen us in this mission to respond with boldness to the commandment of Our Lord Jesus Christ to be "the light of the world." And may the Most Holy Mother of God, the Ever-Blessed Virgin Mary, Saint Cyril and Saint Methodios, Saint Olga and Saint Vladimir, and the many saints who rest here in this holy Lavra, pray for us, that we may walk in their footsteps as the faithful heirs of the true promises of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen".

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III,

Patriarch of Jerusalem.