

Epistle of His Holiness, Patriarch Kyrill, regarding 1000th Anniversary of Repose of Holy Great Prince Vladimir

Most reverend archpastors, reverend priests and deacons, monks and nuns, dear brothers and sisters in Christ!

This year, the whole Russian Church, and with it the whole Orthodox world, celebrates the 1000th anniversary of the repose of the Holy Equal-of-the-Apostles Great Prince Vladimir.

What did this man bring us? Why is it that, after so many centuries, we triumphantly celebrate his memory? The Holy Hierarch Hilarion of Kiev remarkably expressed the nature of the prince's feat in his renowned "Sermon on Law & Grace:" *"All countries, and cities, and peoples," he writes, "honor and glorify each its own teacher, who has brought them to the Orthodox Faith. Let us also, according to our power... praise the one who did such great and wondrous things, our teacher and preceptor, the great prince of our land Vladimir."* His wise decision changed the whole course of our history, because he brought us the glad tidings of Christ, the Savior of the world – the Unsetting Sun of Righteousness, Who with His Divine Light illumines the human being. Thanks to the Holy Equal-of-the-Apostles Vladimir, our people came under the protection of a fervent Intercessor and speedy Helper – the Most Pure Virgin Theotokos, who spreads Her pure omophorion above our land. It was thanks to this holy ruler that the Russian Church was founded, which for more than a thousand years has been bringing the people the word of life, love, and peace, and in which we, like our ancestors before us, obtain the Kingdom of Heaven.

Having received the Faith from the Eastern Roman Empire – Byzantium, Russia fully joined both in Divine Revelation, and in the great cultural tradition of the age, creatively adopting and developing it further. Like the Equal-of-the-Apostles Emperor Constantine, Prince Vladimir was not afraid to stand in opposition to the views of his army and noblemen – the ruling class of Ancient Rus', which bound the pagan cults with power, wealth, and growth. Nor was he afraid of the anger of the crowd, incited by

the pagan priests and ready to make blood-sacrifices. Like Moses, who had heard the Lord's call to "Bring My people out of Egypt" (Ex. 3:10), Prince Vladimir lifted Rus' up from pagan captivity and put her on the radiant path of confessing Christ as Lord and Saviour. This man, equal to the Apostles, became one of those who embody the Orthodox ideal of righteous authority, guided by authentic values that lead man and society to God, to life according to His commandments. The baptizer of Russia, as we know, took care not only for the piety of this newly enlightened people, but also for their education and for helping those in need.

The Holy Hierarch Hilarion, praising the Great Prince of Kiev, noted that St. Vladimir "drew not just one person from the delusion of idolatrous falsehood, not ten, not a city, but this whole land." These words were spoken in the 11th century, when the miracle of the Baptism of Rus' had taken place only recently. After this, ten centuries of Christian history followed. Over this time, the Lord showed forth among our people many saints, and culture and civilization took form. And everything that we live and experience today, our very worldview, has as its basis the fateful decision of Prince Vladimir to turn to the true God, and to bring the people with him.

Established in the font of the Dnieper were the foundations of a new, Holy Rus', and of our spiritual unity. Over the ensuing centuries, attempts were made to annihilate Orthodoxy and to sow dissension and civil discord among our peoples, to entice them with false ideas and promises of imminent earthly happiness and material prosperity. But by the grace of the Lord, Holy Rus' lives hitherto in our hearts, for to this day our nations have a shared Faith and Church, shared holy sites and relics, and countless examples of Christian struggle and shared history.

Today, we are also experiencing difficult times, when foolish people try to divide us, to deprive us of peace and harmony, to sow enmity and hatred between brothers. Such people, acting on the basis of momentary sentiments and selfish ambitions, adopt dangerous decisions with long-term and sometimes indelible effects. But wise people realize that their

lives and good deeds can become part of God's plan for the salvation of the world. That is why they always remember eternity, and extend their gaze to history, learning its lessons and answers to the most pressing issues of our time.

We must all search out these answers, overcoming the negative informational noise created by mass media. And we can find them in examples of great individuals, who had a benevolent impact on the development of our peoples and are ranked among the saints by the Church. One of these is the Equal-of-the-Apostles Prince Vladimir, who placed as the foundation of the life of the peoples of historical Rus' the salvific faith in Christ.

By his prayers, may the Merciful Lord, the Lover of Mankind, help us to stand steadfast in Orthodoxy, being attentive to ourselves, like His apostles, "by pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by love unfeigned" (II Cor. 6:6).

Amen.

+KYRILL

Patriarch of Moscow & All Russia