



## **Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk: the Council by no means should become a cause of division**

On June 12, 2016, 7-th Sunday of Pascha: The Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council, the chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, celebrated the Divine Liturgy at the church of Our Lady the Joy to All the Afflicted-in-Bolshaya-Ordynka in Moscow.

In his sermon after the service, Metropolitan Hilarion said in particular,

“Today we are facing the prospect of convocation of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church. There have been many disputes and bewilderments around it. And tomorrow the Holy Synod is to decide at its session whether our Church will or will not participate in this Council.

“It has happened so that the preparation of the Pan-Orthodox Council has been carried out for 55 years. However, it was not an interrupted process half a century long as at times the Council was prepared, at the other time the preparation came to a standstill, then it began to be prepared again. And the closer we are approaching the Council the clearer we see that there is no unanimity and conformity of opinions on some issues among the Churches. Thank God, these are not theological issues – there is no heresy today for which an Ecumenical Council should be convened. All the heresies were rejected and overcome with the help of God by the fathers of the seven Ecumenical Councils. However, there are various questions posed by the Church and answers are to be given to them. And we see that the absence of unanimity has already led to the situation in which three out of the fourteen generally recognized Local Churches have refused to attend the Council. These are the Churches of Antioch, Bulgaria and, recently, Georgia. So now we have to decide whether we will or will not participate. It is a crucial decision that to a great extent determines the further destiny of the Orthodox Church: whether we will live in peace and harmony or in conflicts, disputes and quarrels with other Local Churches.

“We know that the Holy Spirit has always worked and will work in the history of the Church. And we believe that the Holy Spirit will prompt the right decision to us. We know that if the Council is convened to affirm the Orthodox faith in one mind and one heart, then everyone will assemble and no one will refuse to come. If it happens so that Churches, one after another, refuse to attend, it means that something has happened in preparing the Council, which has made everyone to become vigilant and reflect on whether we can now, at this stage in church life, make with one mind and heart decisions on the questions on the agenda.

“Throughout the 55 years of preparations for the Pan-Orthodox Council, we have affirmed that it should be a factor of the unity of the Church and by no means become a cause of division. If we feel that the preparation has not yet been completed, that some questions have not yet been clarified, then it would be better to postpone this Council rather than to conduct it in haste and especially without the participation of several Local Churches. A Council cannot be pan-Orthodox if a particular Local Church does not attend it, the more so that there are already three such Local



## Churches.

“All this is to be thought over and considered tomorrow after praying to God and asking the Holy Spirit to help us in making the right decisions. But whatever decision may be made, we know that the Holy Spirit always guides His Church, that the people of God are the guardians of the Orthodox faith, that the Supreme Authority of the Church is installed by God to be custodians of church unity. Therefore, we will calmly accept this or that decision with prayer to God and will hope that the Church will continue living and developing, as the Lord Himself said about it: I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it (Mt. 16:18)”.