

Speech of Serbian Patriarch Porfirije at the enthronement on February 18, 2021 in the Cathedral Church in Belgrade



Your Eminences and Graces Brothers hierarchs, High Venerable Archimandrites, High venerable abbesses, Venerable fathers, monks and nuns, Very Reverend fathers,

Your Excellencies: President of the Republic of Serbia Mr. Aleksandar Vucic, Serbian member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina Mr. Milorad Dodik, President of Republika Srpska Mrs. Zeljka Cvijanovic, President of the Government of Republika Srpska Mr. Radovan Viskovic, gentlemen generals – representatives of the Armed Forces of Serbia,

Your Excellency Apostolic Nuncio to the Republic of Serbia Monsignor Luciano Suriani, Your Graces Archbishop and Metropolitan of Belgrade Mr. Stanislav Hocevar, distinguished Effendi Mustafa Jusufspahic,

Ladies and gentlemen, ministers in the Government of Serbia and Republika Srpska, leaders of the Serbian people in Montenegro, in North Macedonia and Croatia; representatives of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, representatives of Matica Srpska, representatives of friendly states, representatives of the Jewish Community,

Dear friends, brothers and sisters, faithful Saint Sava's Orthodox people,

With deep humility and awe, I accept the fact that today, with this conciliar celebration of the Divine service, is perfect in our eyes, minds and hearts, and that is that by God's and the gracious consent of the hierarchs, my co-brothers in Christ, I was raised to the holy and divine, God-enhanced throne of Saint Kyr Sava – as the inspired medieval hagiographers called him – to the throne of the great archdiocese on which a worthy communicant of the apostolic seat should sit!

I pray to God and I ask all of you to support me prayerfully and actively so that I can joyfully perform the great and responsible responsibility that was set before me by this sacred act, in obedience to the Holy Synod of Bishops! As the 46th patriarch, and the 57th primate of our Holy Church, to be at least the modest heir of my great and holy predecessors! In the first place, the twelve archbishops who, led by Saint Sava, headed our Holy Church from 1219 to 1346. Then, twelve primates, of whom as many as six were honored as saints, who spiritually presided over the Serbian people until the first abolition of the Patriarchate in Pec. I am also the heir of the great restorers of the Serbian Patriarchate – Makarije Sokolovic in 1557 and Dimitrije Pavlovic in 1920. I have been appointed to preserve and renew the memory of the labour, sacrifice, many times of martyrdom for the Church of God endured by my holy predecessors, from Gavril Rajic, via Lukijan Bogdanovic, Varnava Rosic and Gavril Dozic, to Vikentije Prodanov. And how bloodless was the martyrdom of the great Serbian Church primates? It is known only to God and to them. In the spiritual heritage of all of us, fathers, brothers and sisters, a lofty life goal has been left: to follow in the footsteps of the wisdom of Patriarch German, to follow in the footsteps of Patriarch Pavle and to be spiritual children of Patriarch Irinej in the great feat of peacemaking! – His Holiness Porfirije pointed out.

Having all this in mind, before the living God and the fullness of the Church of God, before all of you who share the call of heaven, honestly, according to the primordial experience of the heavenly trumpet of the Holy Apostle Paul, I confess that I have nothing to boast about but my weaknesses and sins. However, this does not fill me with hopelessness, but with a calm hope that the prayers and supplications of all of us, and especially the prayerful intercession of my spiritual father, Bishop Irinej of Backa, and my congregation in monasticism and episcopate from the holy Kovilj family, will bring to me spiritual truth which was introduced to us by the aforementioned Apostle of the People. The Lord himself comforted him, saying to him: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (Cor. 12:9). "These words encourage me to take the holy and heavy cross of the patriarchal service on my helpless shoulders and to begin the ascent with the

graceful help of the eternal High Priest and Ascetic with the mountain of the beatitudes of Christ, illuminated by the rays of true light and pure serenity of truth. Obsessed with sacred trembling before this sublime Mystery and aware of the multitude of tasks to which we should jointly respond, I know that this ascent will be mitigated by the power of the Comforter Spirit who breathes where he wants and the power of the Gospel of Christ that gives us the power to do everything.

In that mood, I primarily want our Holy Serbian Orthodox Church, wherever it is, to live with full lungs; that every Orthodox Christian lives true freedom – freedom in the Lord Christ and that gospel values are the daily life of all Orthodox people, because it is the only possible way to testify to the truth that should be a bridge to all those who longingly, whether they are aware of it or not, looking for it. We are called to be salt of the earth, according to the words of our Lord Himself, and if in this difficult time we are not worthy of such a sublime calling, how then – fathers, brothers and sisters – will the whole earth be salted?

Christ is, in a word, our measure, He is our mover, but He is also our mirror. We measure ourselves by it and we are measured by it. Therefore, the patriarchal service should be primarily based on the spiritual experience of the holy people of God, on their relationship with the only new one under the sun – Christ the God-man, the Savior of our souls and bodies, the Savior of the whole world and all creation. We are called to preserve this experience, united and transformed into the church Tradition, together, but not only to preserve it, but also to make it active and current, at the same time both timeless and contemporary. Let us be inspired in this by the imperishable words of the same Holy Apostle Paul: Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. (1 Cor. 15: 1-3).

In these words of the Holy Apostle, it is clear what we have received and what we are handing over. It is not the primary task of the Church to create better living conditions. It is not the primary task of the Church to strive to solve any kind of social, political, psychological and any other problems. We come to the church for the Holy Liturgy to touch there, to sense what is most important, to touch and receive the cross of Christ, but the cross of Christ, which at the same time means resurrection. That is the basic task of the Church, that is why it exists in the world, and all this other mentioned in itself as a product of that primary determination will be illuminated by exactly that same cross and resurrection of Christ. If we have

everything and we don't have it, it is in vain, and if we have it then we got everything.

That is why it is important, brothers and sisters, to understand and feel the power of the Church that lives and bears witness to peace, announcing it to all peoples and all people of good will. To all nations – I repeat, because every man was created as an icon of God and we are all called to be one Savior in Him. It will not be that we can appropriate Christ and say that Christ is ours, that is why we are better than others. If we belong to Him, then we try to make everyone in our hearts ours through Him. Let our heart be a space in which, precisely because He dwells in it, there is not only a place for everyone, but there is a place for everyone who lives with us in love and embrace. The Christian God is, as the Holy Apostle Paul accurately calls him, the God of love and peace. And peace, as we all know well, is a presupposition of unity in love and a way to overcome the destructive forces of schism and discord, conflict and hatred.

Today, unfortunately, we live in a time when peace and unity in the Church of God, in its human aspect, are shaken. Whether it is happening far away from us or is part of our church reality, we are all called to this very service of peace and unity. The apostle exhorts us with the words: Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. (1 Cor. 1:10). For the ear hardened to the spiritual voice of the Gospel of God, this can mean that it invites us to renounce ourselves and freedom. No, that word of the Apostle invites us to a transformation in freedom. The Apostle calls us to the word and deed which will be transformed by the word of Christ, the mind of Christ; not to speak learned from human wisdom, but learned from the Holy Spirit. And as he says – spiritually proving spiritually. We are therefore called to prove our arguments spiritually, to prove ourselves spiritually, and not with words and experience and force that has its source only in this world. In that way, I myself modestly intend to, with the help of God and all of you, walk and I do not dare to say, I am ashamed, but I will say: I lead the Church that is entrusted to me. The mission of the Church is to build peace and mutual trust, by the power of the peace of Christ given to the Church. My peace I give you! said the Lord. If we have the peace of God in us, we will be reconciled with another man, with nature, and we will be reconciled with ourselves. In a word, we will be heralds of peace. Our contribution will be not primarily in what we do but in what we are. And from what we are, we will do what we should do. For such a goal, fathers, brothers and sisters, it is worth living and laying down your life.

At the same time, we are aware that the spirit of discord, or rather the demon of polarization, the struggle of various political interests, disguises itself in the garb of piety and speaks with false words of domesticated faith, spreading its poisonous breath among Orthodox Christians in the world. That is why I want to remind myself first and then all of you, once again of the cry of the Apostle, the writer of the Epistle to the Corinthians: that (...) there shall be no strife among you, but that you may all be perfected in one mind and one thought. These words of Paul: Be of one mind with one another, and may the God of suffering and consolation give us the same to think of one another through Christ Jesus, that we may unanimously, with one mouth, glorify God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, will be one of the most important tasks I want to dedicate the time of patriarchal service and the modest strength at my disposal. In order to accomplish this task, I will firmly adhere to the structure of the Church, which is nurtured and preserved in Orthodoxy, based on the Holy Scriptures and the teachings of the Holy Fathers of the Church. The Church is a conciliar organism, the Council of Saints, a heavenly community of everyone and everything that invites and includes everything in itself, rejecting nothing and no one in advance because of any earthly, ordinary human criterion. The Church is called to gather, to unite and unite, and as I have already mentioned, it serves peace and unity. That is why my patriarchal service to God and family will not follow the paths of partial interests, nor will it contain elements of modern partisanship and party involvement in politics. Starting from the fact that the service of the Serbian patriarch is the service of the first among equals, and that the being of our Church is conciliar, I will try – which I have tried to do to the best of my ability – to nurture this conciliar spirit, as the most important flower of our God-man tree.

Modern relations in society, as well as modern politics, understood as the struggle of different parties, often carry a lot of inconvenience, unfortunately, and inappropriate relations and activities. I do not see the struggle of groups that unite for mutual rivalry as politics in the original sense of the word. Politics, in the original sense of the word, in antiquity, where it appeared as a concept, was considered a concern for what is common, a concern for a common life. All citizens participated in that care and all shared the responsibility for the society, for what is common. Not only do I want to, but I also deeply feel that I have to deal with this type of politics, just as every man is obliged to do it to the extent that it is given to him and in the place where he is.

On this occasion, I would like to greet our people around the globe and send them the blessing of God's power and prayers of encouragement and support whenever

and wherever they are. In my prayers, the Orthodox Serbs in the suffering Kosovo and Metohija will be in the first place, who are in inseparable unity with our people in the entire Republic of Serbia, but also with our believing people living in Montenegro and Republika Srpska, in Bosnia and Herzegovina as a whole, but also in all other countries where our people live.

Indeed, the greatest concern of me and our Church is still our long-suffering Kosovo and Metohija, our spiritual Jerusalem, as Patriarch Irinej of blessed repose said. For Serbs, Kosovo and Metohija are simply not just a myth, because the myth belongs to the world of imagination, and we can lose and win there. Kosovo is a covenant for us, and that Kosovo covenant is tied to the New Testament, which is based on holiness. Hence, for us, Kosovo is actually a thread, an umbilical cord that connects us with our spiritual-historical cradle, with the essence of our identity. We are in Kosovo and Kosovo is in us, our shrines, the Cyrillic alphabet and the Kosovo covenant. Kosovo is the heart of Serbia, today's young generation sings, and the heart, according to the Holy Fathers, is an organ of life and love, so in our Kosovo there is a place for everything. Everyone can and should fit in the heart. For all the people who will adore the beauty of Decani, in which I unworthily took my first vows – monastic vows, and the beauty of Gracanica, Devic and Sokolica. For all those who will be made wiser by the Patriarchate of Pec, incensed by red peonies, blessed by Stefan of Decani.

I will continue, as long as I can serve our faithful people in my dear Croatia, which has become my second homeland, a people whose deep faith, strength and love I have met and who will be a role model for me in the years to come. The same goes for Slovenia. The same love and care for me and all of us is deserved by the Orthodox in the Republic of Macedonia, who have been guarding some of the most beautiful monasteries built by our ancestors for centuries; and our people have built wonderful monasteries all over the world and throughout Europe, Canada, America, Australia. They will all be in my prayers, they are in my heart.

In particular, fathers, brothers and sisters, I want us to remain sober and ready for every good deed and sacrifice in this difficult time of the general pandemic, caused by the spread of the SARS – KOV – 2 virus. by laying down their lives and strength they fulfilled the greatest commandment of Christ about love. To be strong, but also sober! Let us not be overwhelmed by fear and let us know that every physically healthy person can be a much worse virus in this world! Looking at each of us in his heart, he can actually say that man is the only virus in the world. The only one who makes various imbalances in the harmony that God created. Let the example of this pandemic, which spread so quickly, show us how interconnected

and aware we are of each other, and how only with mutual attention can we overcome this terrible plague, primarily the plague of sin and disease that threatens us from within.

In July 2014, I said in Zagreb, and I do not give up, that with all my being, modest strength, but with the strength and power of God's grace, I will work on connecting people, building bridges and establishing dialogue with everyone. Through that dialogue in Zagreb and elsewhere, I gained friends, and I am deeply convinced that the Serbian Church and the Serbian people gained them. I will try to be worthy of those people in Zagreb, Ljubljana and other cities of the Diocese of Zagreb-Ljubljana, who were close to me, my priests and the Serbian people, who accepted us as friends and more. When needed, they publicly represented us and defended us in times of trouble if they ever existed. I will try to be such a friend as I have gained in Croatia and Slovenia, according to the same key to my brothers, regardless of which nation and religion they belong to and who live in countries where we Orthodox Serbs are the majority. Therefore, I ask you and all of us fathers, brothers and sisters to continue to do so, praying to our holy ancestors and heavenly intercessors to help us in this, and to reach eternal life here and now with such hope!

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