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PATRIARCHAL ENCYCLICAL FOR HOLY PASCHA

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PATRIARCHAL ENCYCLICAL

FOR HOLY PASCHA

Prot. No. 244

+ B A R T H O L O M E W

BY GOD'S MERCY

ARCHBISHOP OF CONSTANTINOPLE-NEW ROME

AND ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH

TO THE PLENITUDE OF THE CHURCH:

MAY THE GRACE, PEACE AND MERCY OF CHRIST RISEN IN GLORY

BE WITH YOU ALL

* * *

Most honorable brother Hierarchs and beloved children in the Lord,

By the pleasure and grace of God, the giver of all gifts, having run the race of Holy and Great Lent and spent with compunction the Week of our Lord's Passion, behold we delight in the celebration of His splendid Resurrection, through which we were redeemed from the tyranny of Hades.

The glorious Resurrection of the Lord Christ from the dead is a shared resurrection of the entire race of mortals and a foretaste of the perfection of all, as well as of the fulfilment of the Divine Oikonomia in the heavenly Kingdom. We participate in the ineffable mystery of the Resurrection in the Church, being sanctified in its sacraments and experiencing Pascha, "which has opened to us the gates of Paradise," not as a recollection of an event in the past, but as the quintessence of ecclesiastical life, as the presence of Christ ever among us, closer to us than we to

ourselves. On Pascha, the Orthodox faithful discover their true selves as being in Christ; they are integrated into the movement of all things to the End Times, “with inexpressible and glorious joy” (1 Peter 1.8), as “children of light . . . and children of day” (1 Thess. 5.5).

The central feature of Orthodox life is its Resurrectional pulse. Philosophers have wrongly described Orthodox spirituality as “sullen” and “autumnal.” By contrast, Westerners rightly praise the refined perceptiveness of the Orthodox in relation to the meaning and depth of the paschal experience. Yet this faith never forgets that the way to the Resurrection passes through the Cross. Orthodox spirituality does not recognize the utopianism of a Resurrection without Crucifixion, nor the pessimism of the Cross without the Resurrection. For this reason, in the Orthodox experience, evil does not have the final word in history, while faith in the Resurrection serves as the motivation for the struggle against the presence of evil and its consequences in the world, acting as a powerful transformative force. In the Orthodox self-consciousness, there is no place for surrender to evil or for indifference toward the development of human affairs. On the contrary, its contribution to the transformation of history has theological basis and existential grounding and it unfolds without running the risk of identifying the Church with the world. The Orthodox believer is conscious of the antithesis between worldly reality and eschatological perfection. And so he or she cannot remain idle before any negative dimensions of the world. For this reason, the Orthodox Church has never considered the struggle for transforming the world as a meaningless matter. Our faith in the Resurrection has preserved the Church both from introversion and indifference for the world, as well as from secularization.

For us Orthodox, the entire mystery and existential treasure of our piety is condensed into Pascha. When we hear that the Myrrh-bearers “were astonished” upon “entering the tomb and seeing a young man dressed in bright clothes” (Mark 16.5), this characterizes the vastness and essence of our experience of faith as the experience of existential wonder. When we hear that “they were astonished,” this means that we find ourselves before a mystery that becomes deeper the more we approach it, in accordance with what has been said, that our faith “is not a journey from mystery to knowledge, but from knowledge to mystery.”

While the denial of mystery existentially reduces human nature, the respect of mystery opens to us the gates of heaven. Faith in the Resurrection is the deepest and clearest expression of our freedom; or rather, it is the birth of freedom as a voluntary acceptance of the supreme divine gift, namely of deification by grace. As “experienced Resurrection,” the Orthodox Church is the space of “authentic

freedom” that for the Christian life is the foundation, way, and destiny. The Resurrection of Christ is the good news of freedom, the gift of freedom, and the guarantee of “shared freedom” in the “eternal life” of the Kingdom of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

With these sentiments, most precious brothers and beloved children, filled with the complete joy of participating in “the feast that is shared by all,” having received light from the unwaning light and given glory to Christ risen from the dead and brought life to all – even as we remember during this all-festal “chosen and holy day” all of our brothers and sisters in difficult circumstances – we pray to our Lord “who trampled down death by death,” the God of peace, that He might bring peace to the world and guide our steps toward every deed that is good and pleasing to Him, proclaiming the all-joyous hymn “Christ is Risen!”

At the Phanar, Holy Pascha 2024

+ Bartholomew of Constantinople

Fervent supplicant for you all

to the Risen Lord

To be read after the Holy Gospel during the Divine Liturgy on the Feast of Holy Pascha.

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