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Message By His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew at the Beginning of Holy and Great Week



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Brethren and children in the Lord,

Once again, Holy and Great Lent has come to a conclusion. Today, we joyfully celebrated the resurrection of Christ's intimate friend, Lazarus, which serves as a prefigurement of the "common resurrection." Tomorrow, we shall enjoy the feast of Palm Sunday, when we shall chant: "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest!"

So we are entering Holy and Great Week with compunction and humility, having run the course of a Great Lent that was different from previous ones. The pandemic of the novel coronavirus has changed our daily life and our church life. The churches are closed to our faithful. The sacred taste of Holy Communion is missing from their senses. They do not see the face of their brothers and sisters in church.

They are deprived of the moving services and the fragrance of incense. All of this surely evokes a sense of alienation. We stay in our homes in order to protect ourselves from the lethal virus; yet we are absent from “the Father’s home” in whom as Orthodox not only do we feel “at home” but which “is our home.”
Nonetheless, we were obliged to make this agonizing decision, extending these rules to apply also to Holy Week. For the protection of everyone without exception. The cassock of the Patriarch ought to have covered your lives once more, just as it did many times through the history of the martyric Throne of Constantinople.

Dear brethren and children, you should rest assured that if you are hurt by the closed churches, your Patriarch is distressed and troubled. However, I reassure you that there was no other way. At this critical time of the pandemic, doctors and medical scholars propose the mandatory measures enforced by the state. We, too, must contribute to the protection of our neighbors. Naturally, we pray to the God of love, the physician of our souls and bodies, that He might strengthen the sick in their suffering and support the difficult work of doctors, nurses, and all those who self-sacrificially strive to address this immense problem. This unprecedented crisis has revealed the power and value of love and solidarity, which transcend all human standards and bear the seal of Divine grace.

We must acknowledge and accept that these measures do not affect our faith. They do not at all diminish the centrality of the Temple or of its sacred services in the lives of our faithful. These temporary restrictive measures are not decisions against the Church. They do not pertain to our identity as believers, but only to our identity as human beings that “bear flesh and dwell in the world.”
Indeed, we too continue to implement these extraordinary measures consistently. In our Tradition, Pascha is not the only “chosen and sacred day.” The entire life of the Church is Pascha. Resurrection is “the glory of the Church” and “the treasury of the Kingdom.” The Resurrection is the entire faith, ethos and culture of Orthodoxy. Every Divine Liturgy is Pascha. Resurrection is every humble chapel, every sacred temple. The Saints and Martyrs of the faith, the sacred icons that we venerate, as well as every act of love and charity: all of these exude the fragrance of the Resurrection. The lives of our faithful are a daily Pascha. We know the meaning of the Resurrection, because we know the meaning of the Cross. We are the Church of the Cross and the Resurrection. We have experience from the Cross and the taste of the Resurrection, which is why we resoundingly proclaim: “Behold, through the Cross, joy has entered the whole world.”

Thus, this Holy Week and Pascha, beloved Christians, your Patriarch and the clergy of the Phanar will pray more intensely for all of you. Here, in the great Monastery of

Orthodoxy, we shall deposit your names with love in the Cup of Life. You are “those who are absent for legitimate reasons,” for whom we implore the Lord: “Save, O Lord, Your people and bless Your inheritance.” You will not receive the “Holy Light” by candle on Pascha, but it will still kindle your hearts. Open up your hearts on that radiant Night of the Resurrection in order that the light of the sleepless lantern of the Holy Great Church of Christ may shine in them. Freely “empty yourselves of yourselves” in order to be illumined by the unfading light of the risen Christ. And then, you too will become “the light of the world,” as our Lord desired for those who follow Him.

Brethren and children, this time shall quickly pass; the pandemic will subside; By the grace of God the wounds will be healed. I pray that all of us will emerge from this crisis, having discovered the dimension of depth in all things and having experienced the “good transformation,” having understood the power of the communion with God, who is “life and light,” and having appreciated the value of the divine gifts of health and life, of sacrifice and renunciation of individual rights for the sake of love.

Holy Week opens before us. Behold, the Bridegroom comes. Behold, we are ascending to Jerusalem, while the Lord is descending to be crucified. Today, He hangs on the Cross. We hymn Your saving Passion, O Christ, and we glorify Your Resurrection. The extreme humility of the Cross brings the victory of the King of glory. We wish you all a fruitful struggle, a favorable journey with Christ on the salvific way of the Cross and the Resurrection. Many years to all! And blessed Pascha!