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Encyclical for Holy Pascha 2020 by His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew



† 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
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Dearest brother Hierarchs and beloved children in the Lord,

Having arrived at Holy Pascha and becoming partakers of the joy of the Resurrection, we praise the Lord of glory, who trampled down death by death and resurrected with Him the entire race of Adam, opening for us all the gates of paradise.

The splendid Resurrection of Christ is the confirmation that what prevails in the life of the world is not death, but the Savior who abolished the dominion of death. Formerly known to us as the Word without flesh and subsequently as the Word who assumed flesh for us on account of love for humankind, who died as man and was

risen with might as God, He is the Savior who will come again in glory to fulfil the Divine Economy.

The mystery and experience of the Resurrection constitutes the core of the ecclesiastical life. The radiant worship, the sacred mysteries, the life of prayer, fasting and ascesis, pastoral ministry and good witness in the world – all of these emanate the fragrance of Paschal joy. The life of the faithful in the Church is a daily Pascha, “a joy from above,” “the joy of salvation,” as well as the “salvation as joy.”[1]
This is why the services of Holy and Great Week are not gloomy but filled with the victorious power of the Resurrection. There, we discover that the Cross does not have the last word in the plan for the salvation of humankind and the world. This is foreshadowed already on the Saturday of Lazarus. The raising from the dead of Christ’s intimate friend is a prefigurement of the “common resurrection.” The hymn “Today is hung upon the wood [of the Cross]” comes to a climax in the invocation “Show us, too, your glorious Resurrection.” Before the Epitaphios, we chant “I magnify your Passion, I praise your burial, together with your Resurrection.” And during the Paschal service, we resoundingly declare the true meaning of the Cross: “For behold, through the Cross, joy has come into the whole world.”

The “chosen and holy day” of Pascha is the dawn of the “eighth day,” the first-fruit of the “new creation.” The experience of our own resurrection, the great “miracle of my salvation.”[2] It is the lived affirmation that the Lord suffered and was led to death for our sake and that He rose from the dead for us “foreshadowing for us the resurrection for boundless ages.”[3] Throughout the Paschal period, we hymn with unparalleled poetry the anthropological meaning of the resplendent Resurrection of Christ, the Passover of humankind from slavery to genuine freedom, “the progression and ascension from below to the above and to the promised land.”[4] This salvific renewal in Christ is realized in the Church as a dynamic extension of the Eucharistic ethos in the world, as “speaking the truth in love,” as synergy with God for the transfiguration of the world, so that the world may be rendered an image of the fullness of the final revelation of the divine love in the Kingdom of the last times. Living in the risen Lord means proclaiming the Gospel “to the ends of the earth,” in the manner of the Apostles; it is the witness in practice of the grace that has appeared and the expectation of the “new creation,” where “death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more.” (Rev. 21.4)

Faith in the Resurrection of Christ and in our own co-resurrection does not deny the painful presence of death, pain and the cross in the life of the world. We do not

suppress the harsh reality or secure for ourselves, through faith, a psychological assurance before death. However, we know that the present life is not life in its entirety, that here we are “sojourners,” that we belong to Christ and that we are journeying to His eternal Kingdom. The presence of pain and death, no matter how tangible these may be, does not constitute the ultimate reality. That lies in the definitive abolition of death. In the Kingdom of God there is neither pain nor death, but never-ending life. “Before your precious Cross,” we chant, “death is terrifying for human beings; but after your glorious Passion, humankind is terrifying for death.”[5] Faith in Christ grants us power, perseverance and patience to endure trials. Christ is the one who “heals us from every illness and delivers us from death.” He is the one who has suffered for us and has revealed to us that God is “always for us” and that God’s love for us belongs intrinsically to God’s truth. This hopeful voice of divine love is echoed in Christ’s words to the paralytic “take courage, my child” (Matt. 9.2) and to the woman with the issue of blood “take courage, daughter” (Matt. 9.22), in His words “take courage; I have overcome the world” (John 16.33) before the Passion, and to the imprisoned Apostle of the Gentiles, threatened by death, “take courage, Paul” (Acts 23.11).

The present pandemic of the novel coronavirus has demonstrated how fragile we are as human beings, how easily we are dominated by fear and despondency, how frail our knowledge and self-confidence appear, how antiquated the notion is that death comprises an event at the end of life and that forgetting or suppressing death is the proper way of dealing with it. Limit situations prove that we are incapable of handling our existence resolutely, when we believe that death is an invincible reality and insurmountable boundary. It is difficult to remain human without the hope of eternity. This hope lives in the hearts of all doctors, nurses, volunteers, donors and all those generously supporting their suffering brothers and sisters in a spirit of sacrifice, offering and love. In this indescribable crisis, they radiate resurrection and hope. They are the “Good Samaritans” that, at the risk of their own lives, pour oil and wine on wounds; they are the modern-day “Cyrenaeans” on the Golgotha of those lying in illness.

With these thoughts, most honorable Hierarchs and dearest children in the Lord, we glorify the name of the Risen Lord which is above all names, the source of life from His own light, who illumines the universe with the light of the Resurrection. And we pray to Him, the physician of our souls and bodies, who grants life and resurrection, that in His ineffable loving-kindness He may condescend to the human race, in order to grant us the precious gift of health and direct our steps on the straight ways, to vouchsafe the divine gift of our freedom in the world, foreshadowing its perfection in the heavenly Kingdom of the Father and of the Son

and of the Holy Spirit.

Christ is Risen!
At the Phanar, Holy Pascha 2020

† Bartholomew of Constantinople
Your fervent supplicant to the Risen Lord

1.The Journals of Father Alexander Schmemann 1973-1983 (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2000), 137.
2.Gregory the Theologian, On the Holy Pascha, PG 36.664.
3. Gregory Palamas, On the Holy Ascension, PG 151.277.
4.Gregory the Theologian, op. cit., 636
5. Doxastikon of the Vespers of September 27.