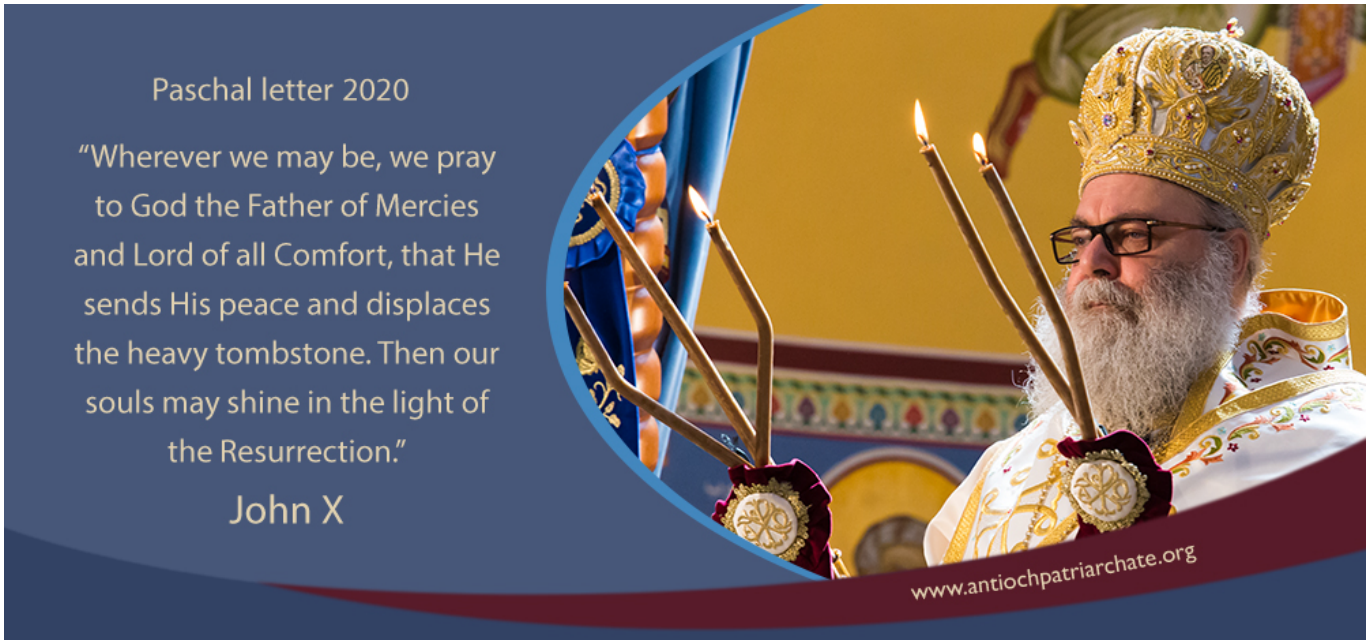
21/04/2020

His Beatitude Patriarch of Antioch and All the East John X issues Paschal letter 2020



By the mercy of God Almighty

John X

Patriarch of Antioch and All the East

to

My brothers, Pastors of the Holy Church of Antioch

My sons and daughters, everywhere across this Apostolic See

*"Let us love the Bridegroom, O brethren, and prepare our lamps, shining with the virtues and a right faith; that, like the wise virgins of the Lord, we may be ready to enter with Him into the wedding feast. For as God He granteth unto all the Bridegroom's gift; an incorruptible crown."**[1]*

This is the Church's prayer on these days of Holy Week, uttered by the

hymnographer, where she addresses every soul that longs for the thresholds of Resurrection. We hereby extend it to you my brethren, for thorough reflection, while you accompany us in prayer from the corners of your homes and the cores of your souls. Today, a few steps away from Resurrection, we call on you to accompany the Bridegroom, the One who dwells in the empty tomb. We invite you to contemplate Christ Jesus, whom the hymnographer designates as the Bridegroom of the soul. Let us put everything aside. Let us put all the worries and epidemics of the whole world; let us, for a moment, lose sight of worldly communication and media. There, in the depths of our soul, let us behold Christ, who is treading the path to the Golgotha and the Resurrection. And let us love Him. Let us wash Him, sprinkle Him with the myrrh of our love for Him, with the fragrance of our love for each other. Let us shed before Him our tears of love and gratitude, for He is suffering the Passion for the sake of our salvation.

We are called in the quietness of the heart, from the corners of our homes, to light up our hearts before the Lord of the hearts, as we pour the oil of patience before His divine Light. We are called to pour out the oil of mercy and charity, and to light our lamp of Pascha, first and foremost with the oil of repentance and with the quietude of the heart, in contrition before the Crucified Lord. We are called to quench the heart with the dew of prayer and to purify the soul from all conceit, presenting it to Him, to Christ, as a pure bridal chamber. On Holy Friday, we are called to reflect how the dawn of the Resurrection followed the bitter wailing. So much wailing and restlessness affect us times and again: wars, distress, epidemics! However, our consolation is that the Lord wipes out every tear from our eyes, looking down from the height of his Cross and embracing our hearts with the light of His Glorious Resurrection.

Christ is our new Pascha; He is the Bridegroom of the virgin soul that expels all the worries and worldly vanities from her depths and heart. Hence, she may acquire Christ as the Bridegroom who sanctifies the inner being and pours out His mercies. Let us be aware and keep in mind that the Lord loves the souls that long for Him and pours out His peace over the whole world. Let us know in our hearts that the Resurrection is first and foremost a resurrection of the soul, filled with love for God and the neighbor. The present circumstance is but an occasion to express our love for the Bridegroom of the soul and our love for His creation. Wherever we may be, we pray to God the Father of Mercies and Lord of all Comfort, that He sends His peace and displaces the heavy tombstone. Then our souls may shine in the light of the Resurrection.

We pray today for all those who are in suffering and pain, for the hungry and those who worry about their destiny. May the Triumphant Christ resurrect them from

distress. We also pray for the departed who died during the new epidemic and for those who are struck by it; may they be cured. We pray for those who watch over the recovery of the sick and for those who work day and night to fight it. May the Almighty Lord protect them with His care and providence. We pray for peace in the East and all the world, and for the return of all the kidnapped, including our two brothers, the Bishops of Aleppo, Youhanna Ibrahim and Paul Yazji, who were abducted during this season, seven years ago. We repeat again and again that it tears our hearts, even more than the kidnapping, to see the global and international indifference for their cause, which represents only a slight example of the displacement, killing, terrorism, and kidnapping suffered by the human being of the East.

From the Church of Antioch, the message of the Gospel went out to the world two thousand years ago. It is the Church of Antioch who brought the light of the Gospel to the world. Our ancestors were first and foremost messengers of love and faith. They were messengers of the Resurrection and joy. They poured into their lives and extended to all whom they encountered the joy of the gospel of Resurrection, the hope of Resurrection and its victory, at all times and places, despite the circumstances and adversities. Besides, they were always on good terms with their neighbors. They did not melt down as a minority, nor did they segregate themselves, confining their horizons to a glorified past or a blessed present. They never got inebriated by some protection obtained here and there. Rather, their strength stemmed from the power of their faith in Christ; their hope was woven from the unity of their testimony to Him, from their adherence and loyalty to Him throughout the ages. We hope to always remain united, joining our acts and hearts, despite the adversity that besets us.

Today we pray the Lord of Life, our Lord Jesus Christ, to embrace the souls of those who preceded us into the hope of Resurrection and eternal life. We address our payer to the Crucified Christ, the Master of hope and the Lord of Resurrection, the Bridegroom of the soul, the Merciful Providence, may He send his divine consolation to our hearts and to the hearts of all humankind, who is seeking the dawn of Resurrection from every ordeal.

We extend the peace of Pascha to you, our children in the homeland and overseas; may the Glorious Christ crown your life with the hope of Resurrection so that, in the winter of these times, the spring of His salvation shines with bountiful days of heavenly joy and divine consolation comes your way. Then we shall sing with united tongues and hearts:

Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and on those in the

tombs bestowing life!

From our Patriarchate in Damascus

April 17, 2020

[1] From the service of Matins for Holy Tuesday.