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Paschal Encyclical of the Serbian Orthodox Churc



The Serbian Orthodox Church to her spiritual children at Pascha, 2022

+PORFIRIJE

By the Grace of God
Orthodox Archbishop of Pec, Metropolitan of Belgrade Karlovci and Serbian Patriarch, with all the Hierarchs of the Serbian Orthodox Church to all the clergy, monastics, and all the sons and daughters of our Holy Church: grace, mercy and peace from God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, with the joyous Paschal greeting:

CHRIST IS RISEN!

This is the day which the Lord has made;
Let us greatly rejoice and be glad in it.”
Psalm 117:24

Our dear spiritual children,

With these words from the Old Testament days, the king and prophet David enthusiastically cried out, foreseeing by the Holy Spirit the great day of Christ’s victory over death and our spiritual celebration because of that. On this great and

mysterious Day all creation is bathed in the light of eternity and with unspeakable joy sings the song of victory to the Lord who banished the darkness of sin and illumined us with the unfading rays of life. “And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it,” (St. John 1:5) – so the essence of divine revelation and our Christian testimony was summed up by the Holy Apostle, Evangelist and Theologian John who during the Mystical Supper rested his head upon Lord’s bosom and took in all the power, beauty and mystery of His life-giving Being as the God-Man.

The darkness of the grave and the shackles of death could not overcome nor restrain the Light of Light born of the Father before all ages, through Whom everything came into being — the Only-Begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, although they tried to do so in every way. From the night he was handed over to the lawless, everything was so full of unbelief and violence that the crucified Christ finally had to cry out: “My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?” (St. Mark 15:34). Seeing how the once glorious Jerusalem was shrouded in the spiritual darkness of sin, the Only-Begotten Son watched from the highly-raised Cross as the dark mouth of the tomb gaped before him in order to swallow him forever. From the stony ground of its sharp edges, the leaders of the faith and the people mockingly told the Lord to transform the Cross’ good news of salvation into a proud acceptance of the power of the fallen world: “Let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him.” (St. Matthew 27:42)

In that hour of hopelessness even the dying grunting of the crucified prisoners turned to mocking the living God, the Savior of the world: mocking Him Who came down among us out of love and illuminated the darkness of our lives with eternal light and joy; mocking Him Who, by interpreting his Heavenly Father in the ancient Jewish tradition, showed the fatherly face of God to the whole world; mocking Him Who, through his sufferings and glorious resurrection, made us children of the life-giving love of God; mocking Him Who gave the gracious power of life to His Church, “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15), against which “the gates of hell will not prevail” (St. Matthew 16:18); mocking Him Who encouraged us to be persistent proclaimers of meaning in this gloomy age; mocking Him Who like a meek Lamb (cf. St. John 1:36), was offered for our sins, and Who will be God’s last Word at the terrible judgment – the temple of the New Jerusalem, shining with the glory of God. (cf. Revelation 21: 22-23)

We are always ascending Mount Golgotha, dear spiritual children, because we are called to witness to the living God in the world and thus participate in the salvation of every creature of God. Guided by the Holy Spirit, we are, according to the Holy

Apostle Paul, children of God in whom all creation longs for deliverance from corruption and for the joy of eternal life. (cf. Romans 8:21) This sense of responsibility among us is especially emphasized today, due to the general crisis in the world and the fact that the flame of the armed conflict in Ukraine have joined those other places on the planet where there is conflict between countries, peoples and faiths. We sympathize with all Orthodox Christians, brothers and sisters; we sympathize and co-suffer with all the people of this world as we see the conflicts on Ukrainian soil and throughout the world deepen even more. The great Apostle Paul reminds us: "(God) has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth."(Acts 17:26)Therefore, we were created as one unique human race, and we are called to be one. Thus, we pray to the Risen Lord that peace be established as soon as possible and unconditionally, that suffering cease, and that all refugees return to their homes. Every war, anywhere and anytime, produces only losers and is a defeat of human dignity, a defeat and shame of every person as an icon of God.

And while wars are being waged in many places in the world, most suffering is endured by the common man. What will we, who are gathered today on the Feast of feasts, warmed by the warmth of our homes, say to those who are separated from their loved ones by a destructive power and are scattered abroad? How are we going to sing the Paschal hymn when there are so many of us hungry and thirsty for justice, so many uncomforted? May the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, whose Kingdom is not of this world, lead us to answer these questions – for "if My kingdom were of this world," as the Savior told Pilate, "My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here." (John 18:36)
At a time when Judea was also divided by the interests of Rome, Syria and Persia, the God-man Jesus showed us the meaning of these words in many ways. We only remember the healing of the demon-possessed Gadarene man, brothers and sisters, when it is said that he was possessed by a legion of demons (cf. St. Mark 5: 1-20). The scene of an untamable man who lived among graves and fought with stones day and night depicts the tragic situation of many under Roman rule and connects all past, present and future victims of global conflicts who without Christ, sooner or later, are doomed to self-destruction. Having healed a helpless man by expelling legions of enemies into a herd of unclean animals, Christ showed us that it was important for Him to bring the victim out of the grave and provide the possibility of eternal life, and only then solve external living conditions. This could only be done by the eternal Logos who dwelt among men in the fullness of grace and truth (cf. St. John 1:14). That is why He leaves that rescued man to witness to the mercy of God in the same circumstances, and that is why He finally voluntarily

leaves the regions where God proved to be more powerful than all the impurities that moved their rulers. The kingdom of Christ, therefore, is not of this world, and it is the gospel of salvation. The kingdom of Christ is not of this world, and with that power we rise for eternal life. The kingdom of Christ is not of this world, and that is why we do to each of the “least of these” in their need, without distinction. The kingdom of Christ is not of this world, and therefore let us embrace the other as the Lord himself, because only in this way will we be accepted as His.

Let us turn to love, dear spiritual children, because the voice of the angel himself above the empty tomb of Christ directs us to this: “Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here; He is risen!” (St. Luke 24: 5-6) Let us cultivate the knowledge that “our citizenship is in heaven”, as the Apostle Paul says, “and from it we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ”(Philippians 3:20). Let us also be aware that the primordial methods of deceiving us with passions and fears in the abuse of the mass media can easily make us people of enslaved mind and suppressed conscience, strangers to our heavenly destiny. Let us beware of the apparent security of a global anthill that wants to make us impersonal prisoners of self-sufficiency. Spending time in the belief that the virtual world of unhealthy imagination and the consumption of material goods can achieve true well-being means being doomed to a life without dignity and freedom. In a world that refuses to be soaked in the light of divine love, labors and sacrifices are not understood as the way of Christ’s Golgotha, as the cross through which resurrection will come by God’s grace, but as terrible obstacles to personal peace and security. May our deep fidelity to the cross-bearing and resurrectional destiny of our Serbian people in the way of Saint Sava preserve us from that, and may our decision to follow the New Testamental way of Kosovo lead us to eternal meaning. The earthly kingdom is but for a little while, but the heavenly one is always and forever!

In recent months, many of our doctors, health workers and many other people who have found themselves with difficult and responsible duties have shown immortal acts of self-sacrificing love for God and the fatherland. Looking at the saints of the Church of Christ and imitating their holy ancestors, they walked and continue to walk the path of Christ-like virtues, the path of love that contains and conceives everything, by which the disciples of Christ and the people of God are known. “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends ” (St. John 15:13) – that is how the Lord Christ bequeathed to us the path of true life and peace, outside of which life’s difficulties are an arena of nonsense.

In the joy of the Resurrection, with special pastoral care and responsibility, we send

our paternal greetings and prayers to our sisters and brothers in the homeland and abroad, wherever Orthodox Serbs live, and especially to those in Kosovo and Metohija, our spiritual and national cradle, telling them that we know their temptations and struggles, but that their Mother Church will always be with them, as it has been up to now. Today we are with you in spirit and prayer wherever you live. May every Orthodox home be illumined by the light of the Risen Christ and overshadowed by the power of the joyful song: “Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing Life!”

May this day in which we are born to eternal life be blessed by God and be happy for all! With these wishes and prayers to the Risen Lord Christ, we wish you every true good and we greet you with the most joyous greeting:

Christ is Risen! — He is Risen Indeed!

Given at the Serbian Patriarchate in Belgrade at Pascha 2022.

Your intercessors before the Resurrected Christ:

Archbishop of Pec,
Metropolitan of Belgrade-Karlovci and

Serbian Patriarch PORFIRIJE
Metropolitan of Dabro-Bosnia CHRYSOSTOM
Metropolitan of Montenegro and the Litteral JOANIKIJE
Bishop of Srem VASILIJE
Bishop of Banja Luka JEFREM
Bishop of Budim LUKIJAN
Bishop of Banat NIKANOR
Bishop of New Gracanica-Midwestern America LONGIN
Bishop of Canada MITROPHAN
Bishop of Backa IRINEJ
Bishop of Great Britain and Scandinavia DOSITEJ
Bishop of Zicha JUSTIN
Bishop of Vranje PAHOMIJE
Bishop of Sumadija JOVAN
Bishop of Branicevo IGNATIJE
Bishop of Zvornik-Tuzla FOTIJE
Bishop of Mileseva ATANASIJE
Bishop of Dusseldorf and Germany GRIGORIJE
Bishop of Ras and Prizren TEODOSIJE

Bishop of Western America MAXIM
Bishop of Gornji Karlovac GERASIM
Bishop of Eastern America IRINEJ
Bishop of Krusevac DAVID
Bishop of Slavonia JOVAN
Bishop of Austria and Switzerland ANDREJ
Bishop of Bihac-Petrovac SERGIJE
Bishop of Timok ILARION
Bishop of Nis ARSENIJE
Bishop of Buenos Aires and South Central America KIRILO
Bishop of Australia and New Zealand Metropolitanate SILUAN
Bishop of Dalmatia NIKODIM
Bishop of Osek-Polje and Baranja HERUVIM
Bishop of Valjevo ISIHIJE
Bishop of Budim and Niksic METODIJE
Bishop of Zahumlje and Hercegovina DIMITRIJE
Vicar Bishop of Moravica ANTONIJE
Vicar Bishop of Remesiana STEFAN
Vicar Bishop of Toplica JEROTEJ
Vicar Bishop of Hvosno JUSTIN
Vicar Bishop of Mohacs DAMASKIN
Vicar Bishop of Marcha SAVA
Vicar Bishop of Hum JOVAN

THE ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF OCHRID:

Archbishop of Ochrid and Metropolitan of Skoplje JOVAN
Bishop of Polog and Kumanovo JOAKIM
Bishop of Bregalnica MARKO
Vicar Bishop of Stobi DAVID

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