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Message of Archbishop Anastasios, Easter 2019

ORTHODOX AUTOCEPHALOUS CHURCH OF ALBANIA

EASTER 2019

+ Anastasios
Archbishop of Tirana, Dürres and all Albania

Hope without limits

“In Hope Rejoicing” we exclaim Christ is Risen!

My brethren, the Resurrection offers immeasurable hope. Hope based on the joyful news that the inexorable enemy of man, death, is vanquished. Christ has trampled down death. “O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory? Christ is risen and you are overthrown. Christ is risen and life rules;” St. John Chrysostom together with the entire Orthodox Church cries out “… For Christ, having risen from

the dead, has become the first fruits of those that slept. To Him be the glory and the dominion forever. Amen".

The event of the Resurrection of Christ encompasses all human life with a life-giving light. In arduous conditions, the experience of the resurrection sustains us, that we may "rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead" (2 Cor. 1:9). The human mind cannot conceive of the miracle. The heart however, intuitively feels this truth and leaps within us singing "Christ is Risen". Concurrently the Resurrection strengthens the hope that every mortifying energy which oppresses our lives will be neutralized. It reinforces the hope that ultimately injustice, jealousy, corruption, dark interests that usually go together with devious lies and unscrupulous arrogance, will be defeated; all of which exterminate peace and lead society to wretchedness and decline. As a redeeming cascade of light, hope is radiated in all directions; especially on the resplendent feast of Easter. It envelopes the faithful in light, it also silently touches the good-intentioned souls who move around the fringes of faith.

Christian hope does not proceed from an ill-defined optimism, it is not related to a utopian illusion. It is undergirded by the certainty that there is a God Almighty, Creator and Provider of the universe. A Personal God of love who "so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). The resurrectional hope does not refer to some indefinite idea, but is connected to one Person, the Theoanthropos Jesus Christ, who voluntarily suffered terrible tortures, was crucified, and who finally defeated death. The exclamation "Christ is risen" does not denote that God is risen – Divinity does not die – but that the God-man Christ is risen and that together with Him, He co-resurrected human nature, which He received "of the Holy Spirit and Virgin Mary".

The Apostle Paul clarifies: "But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:20-22).

With this boundless hope, the Church proceeds onward singing the resurrectional paean: "Christ is risen from the dead, by death trampling down upon death, and to those in the tombs He has granted life". She repeats in doxological jubilation: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3). This hope strengthens Her members – all of us – in our daily struggle to bear the manifold sorrows, slanders, illnesses, failures, poverty,

the deep pain caused by the passing away of dear persons. Paschal hope also strengthens and comforts us that, through enlightenment by the crucified and risen Christ, redeeming outlets will be found for the various political, ecclesiastical, personal, and social impasses that afflict us. We continue therefore, “in hope rejoicing, in tribulation being patient, in prayer being constant” (Rom 12:12).

However, there are concrete prerequisites for the activation of this hope. First is confidence in what Christ has revealed, that which the Church firmly announces, which has eternal and ecumenical authority. The conviction that the risen Christ was given “all authority in heaven and upon earth” and that consequently history is not shaped by the plans and actions of those in power at the time, but rather the eternal God of justice and love has the final say. The Risen Christ promised us His continuous presence in our lives: “and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age” (Matt 28:20).

The resurrectional hope is accompanied by peace and joy. “The peace of God, which passes all understanding” (Phil 4:7), as Christ defined it before His Passion (“My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you” (John 14:27)). He offered His peace after His Resurrection as an intrinsic feature of His disciples and Apostles: “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you” (John 20:21).

Christ is Risen, my brethren! Let us sum up this resurrectional greeting in the words of the Apostle to the nations: “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Rom 15:13). In other words: the God of hope came to fill the souls of all of us with an immense joy and peace that emanates from faith. So that we may have abundant hope with the power of the Holy Spirit. Not just a little hope, but an overabundance of hope which overflows so that we may offer it to others. And all this is not accomplished by means of our own skill, but through the presence and grace of the Holy Spirit.

Let us wish one another that the Crucified and Resurrected Lord, the Head of the Church, grant us this boundless Paschal hope.

Christ is Risen!

— Source: ORTHODOX AUTOCEPHALOUS CHURCH OF ALBANIA