

Archiepiscopal Encyclical on Great and Holy Pascha April 16, 2023



Unto the Most Reverend and Right Reverend Hierarchs, Pious Priests and Deacons, the Monks and Nuns, Presidents and Members of Parish Councils, Honorable Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, Members of Leadership 100, the Day and Afternoon Schools, Philoptochos Societies, the Youth, Greek Orthodox Organizations, and the entirety of the Christ-named Plenitude of the Holy Archdiocese of America:

Who will roll away the stone for us? (Mark 16:3)

My beloved sisters and brothers in the Risen Lord,

We have finally arrived at the mystery of mysteries, and we approach the Tomb with the holy Myrrh-bearing Women. With them we ask: “Who will roll away the stone for us?” The guards have scattered, the garden is empty, and we have brought all our potions and ointments to complete His anointing for death. But He is the Anointed One — the Christ — and He has no need of any anointing. He has no need of the stone being rolled away in order to leave death behind. As the young man said to them when they went inside: “He is risen! He is not here!” So, then, why was the stone rolled away?

My beloved Christians, the stone is rolled away in every telling of the story, but not so that the Lord can emerge, but so that we might submerge. The tomb is opened so that we might enter and die to ourselves — to our egos and selfishness. And then we may say, as is chanted in the Paschal Liturgy: “Yesterday I was buried with you, O Christ; and today, I arise by Your Resurrection” (Ode 3). The tomb is our place of transformation. The tomb is the very center of our hearts, where we can fulfill the ancient saying: “If you die before you die, then you won’t die when you die.”

Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, let us not ask “who will roll away the stone for us?” Let us make the effort to roll it back ourselves! God will send His Angels to help us if we are struggling. But it is within the tomb of dying to ourselves, and

dying to this world, that we are reborn in the Resurrection. The stone is heavy, laden with our sins and our heartbreaks, but God forgives all and asks us to do the same. Forgiveness is the power that lifts the stone and paves our way to love. There is a very real resurrection to be had in this life, which leads to life everlasting. The arising in our hearts of love, compassion, and mercy for everyone and everything is the sign that we are truly the children of the Resurrection. May this Pascha reveal to you this mystery of mysteries — this gateway to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Χριστὸς Ἀνέστη! Christ is Risen!

† ELPIDOPHOROS

Archbishop of America

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