2022 Archpastoral Letter for Pascha
of
His Eminence, the Most Reverend Archbishop Stephen

To the Very Reverend and Reverend Priest, the Reverend Deacons and Subdeacons, and to all of our much-loved Children of the Italo-Greek Byzantine Orthodox Catholic Church, I greet you in the joy of the Resurrection:

Christ is Risen! Truly He is Risen!

The first Holy Week — almost two thousand years ago — saw world-changing events happen with bewildering speed. Jesus received a King's welcome in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, by Friday, He had been crucified to death, but on Easter Sunday His disciples were proclaiming his Resurrection.

In that first Holy Week, the last week of our Lord's life on this earth, the first Christians made little sense of what was happening. The apostles fled from Gethsemane, Peter denied Jesus three times and the Lord died almost alone with just his Mother, St John and one or two others standing at the foot of the Cross. But on Sunday morning, Darkness gave way to Light. Sorrow became immense joy. Despair turned into hope. Death was destroyed and the gates of Paradise were opened to mankind once again.

Easter Sunday changed everything. Mary Magdalene, filled with love for her friend Jesus, went to the tomb to anoint a dead body, but there was nothing to anoint. All she found was an empty tomb, with grave clothes scattered about. Hope and love had triumphed over paralysis and despair.

Mary was the first witness to the empty tomb, and she shared her excitement and joy with the apostles. Like Mary Magdalene, we too find the tomb empty, and we shiver with hope and expectation. Like her, we run to tell our brethren the good news, that Christ is risen from the dead as He foretold.

Life for us now has new meaning. No more do we need to fear death, for Christ has broken the bonds of death and made a way for us to salvation and eternal life. All that is left for us to do is accept His invitation to follow Him and become like Him so that we may dwell forever with Him in Heaven.

Today, the Lord has fulfilled what was spoken by the Prophets. He has kept His promise and remained faithful to His word. And because of His mighty works, because of His dispensation and love for mankind, every new generation of Christians discovers and proclaims the crucified and risen Lord.

At His Last Supper our Lord told His disciples: "I have set you an example, that you should do as I have done for you... Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them (John 13:15-17).

In these challenging days we need to support each other and, especially, look after and pray for the vulnerable and elderly. Every act of kindness, in imitation of our Lord, reminds us that we are truly blessed by God.

This is where resurrection begins and delves into the victorious love that emanates from the Spirit of the Living Christ, carries the divine and humane breath onto humankind, and transforms the face of the earth. It begins with the love we experience in our daily life. When we love, we become witnesses of the Resurrection, we pass every day from death to life (1 John 3:14), and the Spirit prompts us to live a new life, so that we make those around us live as well.

Dearly beloved, the Risen Jesus remains our unwavering hope during the cycles of anxiety we experience daily in our lives. With the Corona virus still with us and impacting our lives on a daily basis, holding onto Jesus with faith is the only vaccine that can save us from the virus of fear, pain, and death; and that can protect us from the evil virus that afflicted our humanity and our history, from a virus of a life without meaning and without purpose.

Today, while the pandemic continues to shift from one wave to the next, and we watch as war ravages many of our brothers and sisters throughout the world, especially in Ukraine, Jesus continues to call upon each of us to bear witness in the example of the women at the tomb (Matthew 28:10) ... "Do not be afraid, go tell my brothers that you have seen me! Tell them that my tomb is empty! Tell them that fear, sadness, despair, and death have been defeated forever! Tell them that I am alive! Tell them that life still has a meaning and that the “New Humanity has been born here".

My children do not be afraid. Rejoice and be glad for this is the day that the Lord has made. The Lord is risen from the dead and given life to the world. He has trampled down death by death and invites us to new life in Him. Let us praise and exult Him throughout all the ages.

May the Risen Christ fill your hearts with joy. May the glory of the Resurrection wipe away fear and despair from your hearts and may the Light of the Risen Christ shine brightly in you always and forever.

Christ is Risen! Truly He is Risen!

Paternally,
Archbishop Stephen