



ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA  
DIOCESE OF NEW YORK & NEW JERSEY

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**Archpastoral Letter for Great and Holy Pascha 2018**

Prot. No. 01-002/2018  
Great and Holy Pascha  
Sunday, April 8, 2018

Dearly Beloved Members of our Diocesan Family:  
*Christ is Risen! – Indeed He is Risen!*

As the night of Great and Holy Saturday approaches the midnight hour, there is an air of great expectation. The joy of Pascha is at hand. We sing the Canon of Holy Saturday with even greater joy, knowing that the end of the Great Fast is upon us and the radiant Feast of Feasts has all but arrived. At the end of that canon, the lights of the church being completely extinguished, in the midst of that darkness we chant: *“Do not lament Me, O Mother, seeing Me in the tomb, the Son conceived in thy womb without seed. For I shall arise and be glorified with eternal glory as God. I shall exalt all who magnify thee in faith and in love”* ... and the Holy Burial Shroud of our Lord is raised from the tomb and enthroned on the altar.

Then the Paschal Vigil begins, and the celebrant comes forth with a candle and proclaims to all: *“Come ye, take light from the Light that is never overtaken by night. Come and glorify Christ risen from the dead.”* As this is chanted, everyone comes to receive the Light, and as the flame of the Paschal candle spreads throughout the church, so too does our joy and faith in our Lord’s glorious Resurrection.

This liturgical experience is more than an ancient religious tradition; it is a vibrant reminder that we are called to be the “light of the world” ... called to bring the Good News of the Resurrection to all people. The light of this Paschal candle represents the message of Christ risen from the dead, of which every one of us is to be a bearer. Our Lord said, *“No one after lighting a lamp puts it under a bushel basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father Who is in heaven”* (Matthew 5:15-16). And He tells us further, *“You will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria, and to the very ends of the earth”* (Acts 1:8). That is our calling.

We are called to follow in the footsteps of Mary Magdalene, who not only reported her experience of the Risen Lord to the Eleven ... but also traveled to the very heart of the Empire, Rome itself, and witnessed to the emperor! We are to be inspired by the myrrh-bearing women, who were the apostles to the apostles and the evangelizers of the evangelists! And we ourselves are to become apostles to our world – like the first apostles, no longer afraid and hiding behind locked doors, but courageously sharing the faith of our Savior with every one of our family members, friends and neighbors who needs the love of God in Christ Jesus and will listen to our witness.

But, if we are to be credible bearers of this Good News, the light of Christ must be kindled within our hearts. We must incarnate in our lives what St. Gregory the Theologian writes of his:

*Yesterday I was crucified with Him; today I am glorified with Him;  
yesterday I died with Him; today I am quickened with Him;  
yesterday I was buried with Him; today I arise with Him.*

Saint Gregory invites us to offer to our Savior Who suffered and died and rose again for our salvation – not merely gold or silver, woven work or shimmering and costly stones – but something far more valuable in His sight:

*Let us offer ourselves, the possession most precious to God, and most fitting; let us give back to the Image what is made after the Image. Let us recognize our Dignity; let us honor our Archetype; let us know the power of the Mystery, and for what Christ died.*

The brilliant Theologian encourages by his words and his own example:

*Let us become like Christ, since Christ became like us. Let us become Gods for His sake, since He for ours became Man. He assumed the worse that He might give us the better; He became poor that we through His poverty might be rich; He took upon Himself the form of a servant, that we might receive back our liberty; He came down that we might be exalted; He was tempted that we might conquer; He was dishonored that He might glorify us; He died that He might save us; He ascended that He might draw to Himself us, who were lying low in the Fall of sin. Let us give all, offer all, to Him Who gave Himself as a Ransom and Reconciliation for us. One can give nothing like one's own self, understanding the Mystery, and becoming for His sake all that He became for ours.*

*("On Pascha and His Reluctance," Oration 1:4-5)*

Holy Week and Pascha bring together the pious and the not so pious. The invitation for all to come together to celebrate Christ's Resurrection and our salvation is most explicit in the Homily of St. John Chrysostom on Pascha night. Whether we have kept the Fast and attended the services throughout Great Lent, or just from the start of Holy Week on, or perhaps have only shown up for the Midnight Service ... we are all invited to celebrate the Feast with joy, without fear or hesitation or guilt. No member of the Church is excluded. All our sorrows, all our failings, all our problems, all our sins ... disintegrate in the face of the Glorious Resurrection. By His Passion, Death and Resurrection, Christ has freed us all. Truly there can be no other response to this than joy and forgiveness:

*This is the day of Resurrection. Let us be illumined by the feast. Let us embrace each other. Let us call "brothers" even those that hate us, and forgive all by the Resurrection, and so let us cry: "Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs, bestowing life!"*

There is no greater liberation than forgiveness. When we truly understand the meaning of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of the Lord, when we really feel and actually live the joy of that freedom, forgiveness is the only possible response.

One might ask, "What difference does all of this make in the way I live my life?" It makes all the difference in the world. In light of what Christ has done for us, how can we remain angry with our neighbor? How can we despair over our sins or fret about our problems? Who has the right to look down on others? Who has reason to complain about being treated unfairly? Who has cause to be bitter or bear a grudge? Who can remain paralyzed by the terror of sickness, suffering, and death itself? The universe has been filled with joy, freedom, and forgiveness. The sorrows of sin have been overcome; our enslavement to the devil has been ended; and the chains of death have been shattered. On the night of Pascha, we rejoice with St. John Chrysostom and his proclamation of Christ's ultimate victory:

*O Death, where is thy sting? O Hell, where is thy victory? Christ is risen, and thou art overthrown. Christ is risen, and the demons are fallen. Christ is risen, and the angels rejoice. Christ is risen, and life reigns. Christ is risen, and not one dead remains in the grave. For Christ, being risen from the dead, is become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. To Him be glory and dominion, unto ages of ages. Amen.*

It is my sincere hope and fervent prayer that all of us will renew our personal faith in our Risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ on this Day of His Resurrection ... and in return, He Who is the God Who loves us more than we love ourselves, will bless all of you with all the good things that come from His hands.

***Christ is Risen! – Indeed, He is Risen!***

With love in our Resurrected Lord and Savior,

*+ Archbishop Michael*

Archbishop of New York and the Diocese of New York and New Jersey