

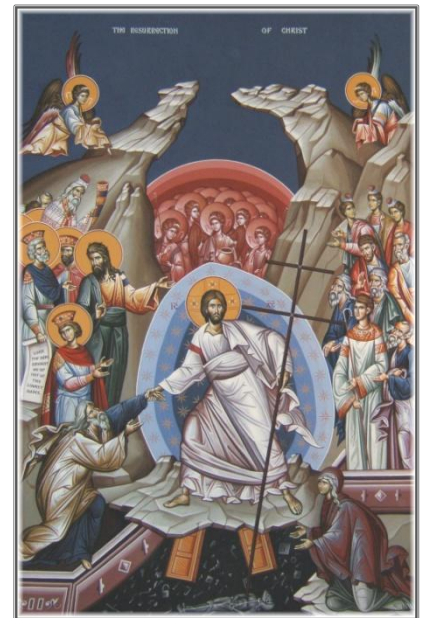
**ARCHPASTORAL LETTER ON
The Feast of the Glorious Resurrection
Holy PASCHA
Sunday, April 15, 2012**

Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!

Dearly Beloved in our Risen Savior:

“... he saw and believed” (John 20:8)

Without a doubt, the horrors of His Trial, Passion, Crucifixion and Death took their toll not only on Our Lord but also on the people around Him. All but one of Jesus’ closest disciples fled out of fear; they were scattered without their Shepherd. The pious women who had followed Him throughout His ministry were filled with sorrow, agony on their faces and tears in their eyes. And the countless people whom Jesus had helped and healed -- the blind, the deaf, the dumb and the lame, the lepers and the greatest of sinners -- were nowhere to be found; they had abandoned their Healer and Savior. Even to this day, the same is true. In the words of Saint Paul, “the Crucified Christ is a stumbling block to the Jews and folly to the Gentiles” (I Corinthians 1:23).



So profound were the events of Great and Holy Friday, that even when Our Lord did what He said He would do -- “... and on the third day I will rise again” (Matthew 27:63) -- still, the horror and sorrow of the Crucifixion prevented people from seeing and believing the joy of the Resurrection on that first Pascha. Mary Magdalene could not see beyond her tears that the One in the Garden was Christ Himself; He had to speak to her personally, He had to call her by name, “Mary,” before she could believe. Peter and the other Apostles were so terrified that they could not accept the witness of Mary Magdalene; Christ had to come through the locked doors of the Upper Room where they were hiding before they could believe. And Thomas, the champion of doubters, would not take for true the words of his closest friends; he demanded to put his fingers into the nail prints in Jesus’ hands and put his hand into His spear-scarred side before he would believe.

There was, however, one notable exception to this pattern of doubt -- one icon of unflinching faith in the Risen Christ. It was the Beloved Disciple, Saint John the Theologian. When Mary Magdalene had first come to him and Peter on that radiant Pascha morning to tell them what she had experienced, they ran to the Tomb to “check out” her story. John, being younger, reached the Tomb ahead of Peter, but

waited for him before going in. The Scripture says that Peter went in and saw the linen cloths lying there, and the napkin which had been on the Lord's head, but he did not know what to make of them. The Beloved Disciple, Saint John, however, went in after Peter, and in the words of the Gospel, "... he saw and believed" (John 20: 8). What did John see that made him believe? Only the Empty Tomb.

This story, as simple as it is, is one which reflects the purest of faith. For three years this young man had been taught the Word of God from the Greatest of all Teachers. During that time, he had become so close to the Lord, that the Bible calls him "the disciple whom Jesus loved." And, on many an occasion, John had heard the same prophecy Jesus had told the other Eleven – namely, that He would be betrayed into the hands of sinful men, and they would crucify Him, but He would rise on the third day. And so, that first Pascha when he came to the Empty tomb, in his mind John remembered, in his heart he was stirred, and in his soul he was convinced that Christ had risen from the dead even as He had said. For this disciple, the Empty Tomb was enough! "... *He saw and believed.*"

So profound was his faith in the Resurrected Christ that it forever changed his life. The youngest of the Twelve would be guided by the Spirit to become the most brilliant of all, to write the most spiritual and deeply theological piece of all of Scripture -- the fourth book of the Gospels -- and to become known as "John the Theologian." The boy who was once called one of the "sons of Thunder" would so love being united with the Savior that he would record for us the discourse of Jesus on the Holy Eucharist that enables us to become one with Christ our Savior. The apostle who once coveted a place of honor at the right or left of the Lord would humbly share with the world all of the details of his discipleship in the Fourth Gospel, so that we all "might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing [we might] have life in His Name" (John 20:30).

Our Church presents Saint John to us as a model for our faith. Because we cannot see the Risen Christ in person as did the Eleven when He came through the doors that were locked ... because He is not here on earth now to speak to us as He did with Mary Magdalene then, calling her by name ... the Church, as our loving Mother, reads to us the words of the Scriptural witness in our divine services ... so that we would know what the Beloved Disciple knew ... and She offers us the replica of the Empty Tomb at midnight on Pascha ... to confirm our faith as it did for Saint John. She wants us to "believe" even as he did. And the reward that will be ours for our John-like faith will be what the Lord Himself promised: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe" (John 20:29).

The Church wants us to become like the Beloved Disciple was after Pascha: to live richly in our spiritual life, communicating with the Lord every day in prayer, as John did in person; to grow in God's Word, by reading what Saint John and the others wrote in the Scripture; to come intimately close to the Lord in the Eucharist, as we are directed in the discourse in John's Gospel; to live a lifestyle of moral purity and service to Christ, as did the only one of the Twelve to live to a ripe old age and die a natural death, the very last of the apostolic witnesses on earth; and, yes, to forever be reminded in our minds, be stirred in our hearts and be convinced in our souls of that good news of greatest joy: "Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!"



