



ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA  
DIOCESE OF NEW YORK & NEW JERSEY

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## ARCHPASTORAL LETTER FOR GREAT AND HOLY PASCHA 2023

Protocol No. 01-002/2023  
Sunday, April 16th, 2023

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

If we were to visit a grave in any cemetery in the world, we would find beneath the sod the remains of the deceased. And on the gravestone, we would find the name of the person and usually the date of the person's birth and the date of his or her death.

– ***With one exception!***

If we visit the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, there we would find the one grave, the only grave in the world, that is different. It is the Tomb of Our Lord. It contains no remains; it is empty. There is no monument over the grave, no date of birth or date of death. Inside is but a single banner upon which is written two words in Greek: ***Christos Anesti! – Christ is Risen!***

*“Christ is Risen!”* – This is the cry that re-echoes over and over again among us today and throughout the Paschal Season. Notice, we use the present tense in that declaration. We don't say, “Christ was risen”. Rather, we declare the Resurrection to be a reality today. This is an event that transcends both time and space. Christ is risen today, and He is among us.

Since the Church uses the present tense for the Resurrection of Christ, we do well to examine what this event means for us today. It tells us that we have a living, reigning Lord. **Christ is risen.** He is alive now, at this very moment. Jesus, the Lover of mankind, is with the Father and the Spirit in the glory of Heaven, and we are to turn to Him in all our needs.

The Resurrection tells us that Death has been vanquished by Christ. The open sepulcher of the Lord laid bare all the secrets and terrors of Death. Death now has a new name and a new meaning: Death is now the “falling asleep” in the bosom of Our Lord and Savior.

The Resurrection tells us that we, along with all those whom we have buried in the good earth, shall one day arise as Jesus did. *“Because I live,”* Christ said, *“you shall live also”* (John 14:19). The Lord is reigning in His Kingdom now, preparing a place for us, so that we might one day be where He is.

The Resurrection tells us that someday all things shall be made right, and perfect justice will be measured out to all. The Resurrection puts the seal of Divine approval on all that Our Lord said and did. What He claimed, is true. This shows that He is truly "*the Christ, the Son of the Living God*" (Matthew 16:16).

Our human language is barely able to depict the glory of this day. Yet the Holy Fathers of our Church have composed beautiful expressions of the Resurrection of Christ that we celebrate today.

Saint John Chrysostom tells us: "Let all pious men and all lovers of God rejoice in the splendor of this feast. Let us all come, the first and the last ... the rich and the poor ... the table is richly laden; eat royally at it ... Let no one grieve over his poverty, for the universal kingdom has been revealed. Let no one weep over his sins, for forgiveness has shown forth from the grave. Let no one fear death, for the death of our Savior has set us free."

Saint Gregory the Theologian writes: "Yesterday I was in anguish with Christ on the Cross; today I am glorified with Him. Yesterday I was buried with Him; today I arise together with His arising."

And Saint John of Damascus adds: "A blessed Pascha is revealed to us today ... a Pascha that opens for us the gates of Paradise."

May this Pascha be a renewal of your relationship with the Risen Savior, the God Who loves us more than we love ourselves, Who proves His love for us by His Sacrifice on the Cross for us and our salvation: "*Greater love than this has no one, that He lay down His life for His friends ...*" (John 15:13).

May this Feast of Feasts be an opportunity for you to witness and share your faith and joy in the Resurrected Christ with others, especially those who do not have Him as their Lord.

May this celebration of the emptying of that Tomb in Jerusalem be a hope-filled reminder to you that, one day, like the Holy Sepulcher, all the graves will be opened ... all those fallen asleep will arise ... all traces of sickness and sorrow and death will be banished forever ... and the Kingdom of God will be fully realized.

And may this re-experiencing of Christ's Victory over Death be another occasion for you and your loved ones to receive the bountiful blessings that come from the hands of the Crucified Savior Who is resurrected from the dead. *Christ is Risen! – Indeed He is Risen!*

With my humble prayers, my archpastoral blessing, and my sincere love,

*+ Archbishop Michael*

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