

RESURRECTION PASTORAL LETTER 2008

+NATHANIEL

By the Mercy of God, Archbishop of Detroit and the Romanian Episcopate

To our beloved clergy, monastics and pious faithful of our God-protected Episcopate:
Grace, mercy and peace from God and from us our fatherly love and hierarchal blessing.

“Seeing the resurrection of Christ, let us worship the Holy Lord Jesus, the only one who is without sin. We venerate your cross, O Christ, and we praise and glorify your holy resurrection, for you are our God and we have no other than you, we call on your name. Come, all you faithful, let us worship the holy Resurrection of Christ, for behold, joy for the whole world has come through the cross. Forever blessing the Lord, we praise his Resurrection, because enduring the cross for us, he destroyed Death by death.”

Christ is risen! Truly, he is risen!

Dearly beloved:

The above stated hymn is sung at the Sunday Matin Service, and it is also recited during each Holy and Divine Liturgy. In the Matin Service, it is sung immediately after one of the eleven readings about the resurrection has been chanted from one of the four Gospels. The relationship is very clear: the Gospel reading is about Christ showing himself to his followers after his third-day resurrection from the dead. “He appeared first to Cephas and secondly to the Twelve...Next he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time” (1 Cor. 15:5-6). The hymn then invites us to praise and glorify and worship the resurrection of Christ, because we too, having seen today his resurrection, have eternally benefited from his sacrifice on the cross. Thus, we stand together with the disciples in bearing witness to the event that “destroyed Death by death” and brought joy to all the world.

During the celebration of the Holy and Divine Liturgy, this hymn is recited as the two portions of the consecrated Lamb, marked NIKA, or ‘He Conquers’, are placed into the holy cup for distribution to the faithful. At this time, we are reminded that we are partaking of the resurrected body and blood of our Lord and God and Savior, Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who has taken away the sin of the world. We are called to worship the Holy Resurrection of Christ. One worships only God. In worshipping Christ, we confess that we are worshipping him as Lord and God. Before receiving Holy Communion, we state: “I believe, O Lord, and I confess that you are truly the Christ, the Son of the living God who came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am first.”

Three days ago, on Holy and Great Friday, we stood at the tomb of Christ singing lamentations over his dead body, the body which was “nailed to the cross and pierced by

a lance” (Tropar of Proskomedie). Why was he nailed hands and feet to the cross, his head encircled by a crown of thorns, his side pierced by a soldier’s lance? Why was he sacrificed? “He willed to be lifted up onto the cross in the flesh, to endure death and to raise the dead by his glorious resurrection” (Tropar Tone 5).

Will we die? Most certainly, we shall all die. Christ did die, but he rose from the dead as he foretold; and, by his rising from the dead, he destroyed Death, that same Death which will lay claim to us! Will we die? Yes, we shall die, but even though we shall die, this will not be a permanent state but one of a temporary nature. When the Lord returns “to judge the living and the dead,” there will be the “resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come” in which Death will be no more!

Saint Athanasius the Great states: “Even on the cross, he did not hide himself from sight; rather, he made all creation witness to the presence of its Maker. Then, having once let it be seen that it was truly dead, he did not allow that temple of his body to linger long, but forthwith on the third day raised it up, impassible and incorruptible, the pledge and token of his victory” (On the Incarnation, C. v, 26) .

He continues, explaining that a “very strong proof of this destruction of death and its conquest by the cross is supplied by a present fact, namely this: all the disciples of Christ despise death...” (Ibid 27). “[Death] is bound hand and foot; all who are in Christ trample it as they pass, and as witnesses to Christ deride it, scoffing and saying, ‘O Death, where is your victory? O Grave, where is your sting?’(1 Cor. 15:55)” (Ibid). Thus, today, at the empty tomb, we, Christ’s disciples, despise death, deride it, and scoff at it, for today we are the witnesses to the power of Christ over Death.

Furthermore, as disciples of Christ, we must seize the joy of this day! We must also weigh carefully if indeed we do believe that Christ is risen and that Death has no power over us! Therefore, it is good and beneficial for us to recall what Saint Paul exhorted the faithful in the city of Corinth: “Brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, the gospel that you received and in which you are firmly established: because the gospel will save you only if you keep believing exactly what I preached to you---believing anything else will not lead to anything (1 Cor.15:1-2). “Now if Christ raised from the dead is what has been preached, how can some of you be saying that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, Christ himself cannot have been raised, and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is useless and your believing is useless; indeed, we are shown up as witnesses who have committed perjury before God, because we swore in evidence before God that he had raised Christ to life” (1 Cor. 15:12-17).

Dearly Beloved, we too, are disciples of Christ and witnesses; and we too, must continue to “trample on Death,” because through the cross of Christ, death no longer has power over humanity. God forbid that among us there might be some who say or act as though there were no resurrection of the dead or that there is no judgment of the living and the dead! As Saint Paul says, we are witnesses to our faith that Christ died, was buried and rose from the dead and will return to earth to establish his kingdom which will not end.

To believe in Christ is to be a Christian, and to be a Christian means we confess that Christ died and rose from the dead and was seen by his disciples for forty days, who then witnessed to his resurrection to the nations and to the nations of the world.

Stating that we are Christians, then, let us hear the invitation of Saint Gregory Nazianzen to make an offering to Christ: “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. Let us become like Christ, since Christ became like us. Let us become God’s for his sake, since he for ours became man. ...Let us give all, offer all, to him who gave himself a ransom and a reconciliation for us” (Oration I, IV, V).

In anticipation of the return of the resurrected Lord, Saint Gregory calls us to “become like Christ,” which means that our entire existence, our daily life, our words, thoughts, our deeds, must be such as to give glory and praise to Christ, because he has redeemed us from eternal non-existence and bestowed on us an un-ending existence in his kingdom. Let us remember that when we were baptized into Christ, we put on Christ; we became a new person in preparation of the new kingdom. “All baptized in Christ, you have all clothed yourselves in Christ. Alleluia!”

The final line of the hymn reflects this thought of Saint Gregory: “Forever blessing the Lord, we praise his resurrection, because enduring the cross for us, he destroyed Death by death.”

Dearly Beloved, staunch followers of Christ, on this Feast of Feasts and Festival of Festivals, we conclude our Pastoral Letter to you with these words of Saint John the Theologian: “Jesus came and stood among them. He said to them, ‘Peace be with you’ and showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were filled with joy when they saw the Lord, and he said to them, again, ‘Peace be with you’” (John 20:20-21). “You believe because you can see me. Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe” (John 20:29). Today, “seeing the resurrection of Christ,” we and the world with us are filled with joy, because our sins have been taken away and eternal life has been bestowed on humankind.

Christ is risen! Truly, he is risen!

Accept our fatherly love and archpastoral blessings on those near and those far away.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+Nathaniel". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a cross at the beginning.

+NATHANIEL, Archbishop