

RESURRECTION PASTORAL LETTER 2010

+ 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.

“The Lord God says this: I am now going to open your graves and raise you from your graves, my people. And I shall put My spirit in you, and you will live...it is the Lord God who speaks.”

Ezekiel 37:12,14

Christ is risen! Truly, he is risen!

Dearly Beloved:

What a glorious day this is! The mercy of God is great and his love is everlasting! He has looked upon his people and smiled on us and put his spirit into us to celebrate this day of brightness which surpasses the light of the celestial bodies. Today, darkness is no more, and death has been crushed and annihilated, for God has opened our graves and raised us into unending life! For his love is everlasting!

In the Book of Genesis, we hear it stated that “*God said, ‘Let us make man in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves...’*. *God created man in the image of himself, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them.*” (Gen. 1:26, 27.) This man, made in the image of his Maker, however, chose to think of himself as self-sufficient (he and his wife); and thus putting themselves in place of their Creator, they found themselves, in fact, insufficient and mortal.

Having turned from God who is Life and the Source of life, man and his wife found that the result of turning from the source of life is death. Hearing from the mouth of God these words, “*For dust you are and to dust you shall return,*” man travailed his days on earth under the quest of restoration with his Creator God (Gen. 3:19). God, however, did not leave man alone in his quest but bowed the heavens to come and carry this burden for his children.

The Messiah, Christ the Eternal Word of God, came to restore that image of God in all humanity and to raise mankind up from the dust from which it is taken, to eradicate, to pull out from its roots, the “sting” of death, and to bestow on humanity a new and unending existence in the presence of him “through whom all things were made.” The Resurrection from the dead of our Lord and God and Savior, Jesus Christ is the true triumph of Life over death. Jesus, Only-begotten Son of the Father, born of the Holy Virgin Mary, took on our human nature, so that he could “*refashion in us the image broken by passion,*” meaning, the passion or failing of the first man. “*And finding the wayward sheep lost in the mountain, he (Jesus) took it on his shoulders and carried it to the Father.*”

God, through his prophet Ezekiel stated: *“I am now going to open your graves and raise you from your graves.”* Saint Constantine the Great, the first Christian Emperor, in the early 4th Century (To the Assembly of the Saints), reflects this prophecy of Ezekiel when he speaks about the *“renovation of bodies long since dissolved.”* He says: *“That light which far outshines the day and sun, first pledge of resurrection, and renovation of bodies long since dissolved, the divine token of promise, the path which leads to everlasting life... is arrived ... and the predictions of the prophets were all fulfilled.”*

Saint Ambrose of Milan in the same century, reflecting on the death of his brother, says: *“What grief is there which the grace of the Resurrection does not console? What sorrow is not excluded by the belief that nothing perishes in death? . . . So, then, if death frees us from the miseries of this world, it is certainly no evil, inasmuch as it restores liberty and excludes suffering. . . . For now we know in part, and understand in part, but then it will be possible for that which is perfect to be grasped, when not the shadow but the reality of the Divine Majesty and eternity shall begin to shine so as to be gazed upon by us with unveiled face.*

The Divine Majesty is of course the Holy Trinity in whose image we were made and to which we shall return in the presence of God in the reality of his “unveiled face”; and we will “live again, it is the Lord who speaks.” Through his boundless mercy, this fellowship with God is an unending relationship in love. This is the relationship which the first man and woman rejected. This is not simply a restored relationship, but a new relationship based on the obedience of Christ to the Father.

Saint Cyril of Alexandria in his 4th Lecture (On the Ten Points of Doctrine), On the Resurrection of the Lord, says: *“Did Jonah come forth from the whale on the third day, and has not Christ then risen from the earth on the third day? Is a dead man raised to life on touching the bones of Elisha, and is it not much easier for the Maker of mankind to be raised by the power of the Father?”*

The reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is hereto testified in reference to the Old Testament experiences of the Prophet Jonah and to the raising of the dead man through contact with the bones of the Prophet Elisha (2 Kings 13:21). Both of these events took place not through any power of the prophets but through the power of God working through them.

In a long poem (On Pascha), only a few lines of which are here quoted, Melitios of Sardis makes the analogy that there is only one perfect sacrifice to God the Father: Jesus Christ the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”. . . *“a speechless lamb was precious, but it is worthless now because of the spotless Son; the temple below was precious, but it is worthless now because of the Christ above. . . . The Jerusalem below was precious, but it is worthless now because of the Jerusalem above; the narrow inheritance was precious, but it is worthless now because of the widespread bounty.”*

The sacrifices of the Old Law are no more; the one and only ever true sacrifice, the Lamb who came forth from the Virgin’s womb, once and for all time, for all the “ends of the inhabited earth.” Who is most precious to the Father but the Son through whom the Spirit of Truth came upon the apostles on the Fiftieth Day after the Resurrection? Jesus reaches into the earth, into the

graves to raise our fallen nature to the heights of heaven. When God promised to open the graves and to empty them, he was promising in Christ Jesus who is the “first fruit of those rising from the dead,” whose grave was the first opened to the universal resurrection. Look at the icon of the Resurrection! See the Lamb of God, Christ the Destroyer of Death reaching down into Hades, grasping out of its clutches Adam and Eve and the righteous as he tramples greedy Death!

Leo the Great of Rome (Homily 71: On the Lord's Resurrection, Great and Holy Saturday) reminds us that we must all become partakers in Christ's Resurrection life. *“We must strive to be found partakers also of Christ's Resurrection, and 'pass from death unto life' while we are in this body. We must die, therefore, to the devil and live to God: we must perish to iniquity that we may rise to righteousness. . . . As we have borne the image of the earthy, so let us also bear the image of Him Who is from heaven, we must greatly rejoice over this change, whereby we are translated from earthly degradation to heavenly dignity through His unspeakable mercy, Who descended into our estate that He might promote us to His.”* Thus has Christ fulfilled Adam’s quest for restoration.

Being thus encouraged by the words of the prophets of old and being satisfied by the reality of the empty tomb, confirmed by the witness of the apostles and great cloud of saints through the ages, we are called by God to remember daily that we are individual and collective witnesses to the Resurrection and graced to live a new life through baptism in the death and resurrection of our Lord, anointed by the Spirit and sustained by his glorious and precious Body and Blood.

St. Leo continues: *“Let God's people then recognize that they are a new creation in Christ, and with all vigilance understand by Whom they have been adopted and Whom they have adopted. These thoughts, dearly beloved, must be kept in mind not only for the Paschal festival, but also for the sanctification of the whole life... so that rising ever anew from all downfalls, we may deserve to attain to the incorruptible Resurrection of our glorified flesh in Christ Jesus our Lord. . .”*

This day’s celebration of the Resurrection must be a daily celebration for those who put their hope in God. This hope gives us joy in our daily lives. Our daily lives lead us to eternal life. Eternal life is bestowed on us by him who said: *“I am now going to open your graves and raise you from your graves, my people. And I shall put My spirit in you, and you will live...it is the Lord God who speaks.”* Amen!

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.

+NATHANIEL, Archbishop