

RESURRECTION PASTORAL LETTER 2011

“Do not be afraid; it is I, the First and the Last; I am the Living One, I was dead and now I am to live forever and ever, and I hold the keys of death and of the underworld.” (Rev. 1:18)

Dearly beloved:

Christ is risen! Truly he is risen!

We have come together as a body to celebrate the victory of life over death, of light over darkness, to laud the Victor, to rejoice with our Illuminator, Jesus Christ! We have come together, you and I, to celebrate the Lord's victory over sin and death by which we have been saved, each from our own sins and from eternal death, the result of sin. For in being baptized in Christ and having thus put on Christ, we entered into the tomb with him two days ago on the Great and Holy Friday. Now, on this day of Resurrection, we burst out from that dark tomb into light with him today; he the Victor and Illuminator, and we, both the prize and the enlightened.

The Lord Christ says: “I was dead and now I am to live forever and ever.” But Christ is eternal with the Father and the Holy Spirit in essence and only when he “came down from heaven and became incarnate through the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary,” taking to himself our mortal nature, was he seized, stolen by death. He ever sat and sits at the right of the Father. Furthermore, he has taken our human nature and polished it, restored it, lifted it to what it was in Paradise where our nature and all creation was at peace with its Creator. We sang on Great Friday: *“For my kinship with Adam was no secret to you; and by your burial, O Lover of man, you recreated me in your image”* (Ode I, Matins of Great Saturday). Oh, how unfathomable is the wisdom and love of God for mankind! That which was lost is redeemed by him who made us - he who loved us before we loved him and who called us to him before we knew to speak his name.

Today our nature is renewed, the nature in which we live out our daily lives, the one in which we give glory to God and embrace our brethren. While he has today overcome death and lives forever, we yet must live out our lives by his grace overcoming sin. He gives us hope in calling us to future glory!

Thus, today through Christ, the nature bestowed on Adam who besmirched it, has been restored and sanctified by him who took it to himself from the virginal womb of her who is “More honorable than the Cherubim and more glorious beyond compare than the seraphim.” In a poet's song, Jesus says to his mother: *“Do not lament for me mother, the son you conceived without seed and now see in the tomb, for I will rise and be glorified, and those who with faith and devotion praise you, them as God will I raise up to glory!”* (Ode 9, Matins of Great Saturday). Again we are reminded of our call to future glory through his resurrection in the flesh.

Saint Clement, Bishop of Rome wrote in the first century: *“Know this: in what were you saved, in what did you see again, if not when you were in this flesh? We must therefore guard the flesh as the Temple of God. For as you were called in the flesh, so you shall also rise again in the flesh. If the Messiah, the Lord who saved us, though he was spirit at first, became flesh and so called*

us, in the same way we will receive the reward in this flesh. So let us love one another, so that we may all come into the kingdom of God” (2 Clement, 9: 1-6). Here then is our call to serve one another, conditional to our entering into the kingdom.

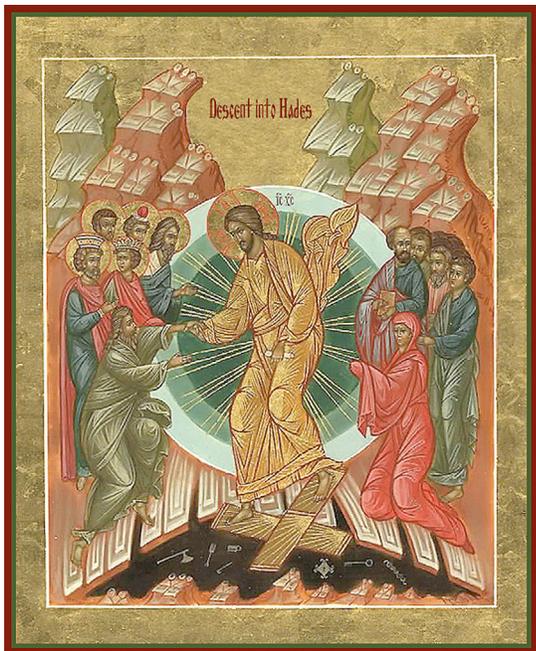
He, the Lord Jesus, says that he is the First and the Last and holds the keys of death and of the underworld. Surely, we want to live in his presence now, in the presence of him who has this power and who invites us to be partakers with him of the same life forever and ever! Surely, he will take the keys of the kingdom of new life and lead us in, for he does not call us to him and then withdraw his gracious invitation! Our lives are an “RSVP” to his invitation!

Another of the Apostolic Fathers, Ignatius of Antioch, who was martyred in Rome in the year 107 A.D., testifies thus: *“For I know and believe that after the resurrection he (Jesus) was in the flesh. And when he came to the people around Peter, he said to them, ‘Take, handle me and see, that I am not a bodiless phantom. And at once they touched him and believed, being mixed together with both his flesh and his spirit. For this reason they scorned even death and were found to be above death. And after his resurrection he ate with them and drank as a fleshly being even though he was spiritually united to the Father”* (Letter to Smyrna, 2:1). It was for his absolute belief that Christ had risen in the flesh, in his earthly body that gave St. Ignatius the strength to face his martyric death. This is truly the apostolic faith.

Beloved in our Risen Lord, it is the resurrection of Jesus that alone gives meaning to the limited life of each of us born into this world. It is his invitation for us to not be afraid that leads us through the darkest nights. It is his proclamation that he is the beginning and end of creation that brings forth from us our unrestricted response of faith, hope and love. It is his statement that in his hands are the keys of life that move us to love him unconditionally and our neighbor as he commanded. “And he shall come again to judge the living and the dead.”

Let us continue to celebrate the resurrection of him who is “First and Last,” not only today but every day of our lives, and let our own lives be true reflections of trust and hope in him who holds the keys of the kingdom.

Christ is risen! Truly, he is risen!



+ Nathaniel

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**by the mercy of God, Archbishop of Detroit and of
the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America**