

AN INTRODUCTION TO THIS YEAR'S PASCHAL LETTER

We are sharing with you the 1953 Paschal Letter of +Archbishop Valerian. Only eight years earlier, the Second World War was declared over. Meanwhile, Atheistic Communism continued its global march, grasping control of power in Eastern Europe, enslaving millions, including his beloved native land, Romania.

He began by referring to the concern of the Myrrh-bearing women whose *"hearts were burdened with care...who will roll the stone away..."* He goes on, *"In realizing their limited strength, they felt the need for someone stronger to come to their aid."*

The Archbishop continues saying: *"This ... is so very much like that of men in our own days. Christendom today approaches the day of the Lord's resurrection with concern and many questions."*

Dearly beloved, while reading this Letter, I thought it applicable today, not because it gives us a historical picture of the celebration of the Resurrection only in the context of 1953, but because it is the reality of fallen and wounded human nature in every generation, "... to be burdened with care." "The answer to all this, dear Christians, must be sought in the great happening which was the resurrection of the Savior."

So it is. The answer to the concerns of this year, as every year, is the Resurrection. As you read Archbishop Valerian's Pastoral Letter, say a prayer for this great bishop of our Episcopate in America.

+ NATHANIEL, Archbishop

ARCHBISHOP VALERIAN'S PASTORAL LETTER - PASCHA 1953

Holy Scripture tells us that after the sufferings the Savior underwent on Golgotha on behalf of the human race, His holy body was placed in a new tomb against which the soldiers placed a huge stone, so that no one would reach him. On the third day after this entombment, a group of women who had followed Jesus from Galilee, out of love and trust in Him, prepared and brought ointment to the cemetery to anoint the Lord's body.

Their hearts were burdened with care. They, who had come with Jesus the teacher and who had believed that He truly was the Son of God, had been witnesses to His suffering on the cross and had seen how the Man of God had been crucified and buried. Having forgotten the prophecies, these women were full of sorrow. They asked: How was it possible that He, who came into the world to save it, had allowed himself to be crucified? Echoing in their ears were the words of the thief deriding the Savior: "Are you not the Messiah? Then save yourself and us." But even so, with all this on their hearts, their great love for the great teacher was not overcome, and they desired to at least take care of the tomb, anointing the body with ointment as was the custom. At the early dawn, on the way to the cemetery, they said to one another: "We are on our way, but who will roll the stone from the entrance of the tomb?"

Poor women! In realizing their limited strength, they felt the need for someone stronger to come to their aid. They didn't know who and how, but still they continued forward. And so they arrived at the cemetery; and to their surprise, they found the stone rolled from the

entrance to the Lord's tomb. Then the angel said to them:

"Why look among the dead for someone who is alive? He is not here; He has risen." (Luke 24:6)

And the angel commanded them to go to tell His disciples that Jesus had risen, but they "ran away from the tomb, because they were frightened out of their wits; and they said nothing to a soul, for they were afraid." (Mark 16:8)

Beloved Faithful,

This encounter of the women in holy Scripture is so very much like that of men in our own days. Christendom today approaches the day of the Lord's resurrection with concern and many questions. Fear and trembling have seized many souls. We approach the holy tomb on this great day of resurrection with doubts and vexations; millions on millions of men fallen in slavery and misery ask, "How is it that God has left us only tears and suffering, and how does He allow unbelievers to have the power to suppress us?" On the other hand, those grasping power, the suppressors, those who literally worship material things, see nothing in the Lord's resurrection other than old superstition and believe that they are charged with dominating heaven and earth. Christians filled with the fear of God, forget this colossal stone which suppresses Christianity and ask as did those women, who will roll it away, for human strength alone cannot accomplish it.

The answer to all this, dear Christians, must be sought in the great happening which was the resurrection of the Savior. Christendom must not forget that the trial and crucifixion of the Savior brought concern and discouragement to the apostles themselves. Peter denied him, the others fled, the women were frightened and thought that there was no hope, no way of salvation. Nevertheless, the Savior, fulfilling the scriptures, rose from the tomb, sealed as thoroughly as it was, and bestowed new life on the disciples and on the entire world. This preaching was not in vain, and the world was once again illuminated with light.

All the suffering, all the afflictions, and all the concerns of today's world can be healed by listening to the words spoken by the angel to the women: "Do not look for the living among the dead, Jesus has risen." The Lord's resurrection remains as an eternal testimony for the humble and the great, the weak and the powerful, for God cannot be killed nor joked about, nor excluded from human affairs. No stone exists, no steps, no tomb nor diplomacy able to hinder divine justice as it flows on its course. No tears exist, which He will not wipe away, no chain of slavery which He is not able to break, nor is there any injustice which will be overlooked.

The cross on Golgotha was necessary in order to save the world from the ancestral sin; the sufferings of the wounded world were taken up by the Son of God and healed through His passion; and the resurrection which we celebrate again, was necessary to show us that after the dark comes light, after suffering comes rejoicing.

The sole request is that our thoughts and deeds be truly based on the teachings of the Savior, as we are directed by the prophet Isaiah of old who cried out:

"Pay attention, come to me; listen, and your soul will live. With you, I will make an everlasting covenant out of the favors promised to David. See, I have made of you a witness to the peoples, a leader and a master of the nations. See, you will summon a nation you never knew, those unknown will come hurrying to you" (Isaiah 55:3-5).