

PASTORAL LETTER 2024

RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD AND GOD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST

Christ is risen! Truly, He is risen!

“Lastly, Jesus showed himself to the Eleven themselves while they were at table. He reproached them for their incredulity and obstinacy, because they refused to believe those who had seen him after he had risen. And He said to them, ‘Go out to the whole world; proclaim the Good News to all creation.’”

Mark 16:14-16

Beloved Spiritual Children in Christ:

Reverend Clergy, Venerable Monastics and Devout Faithful of our God-protected Episcopate:

May God our Father and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ
Bestow on you his grace and peace, and from us, hierarchal blessings!

Dearly Beloved in our Risen Lord:

Why do we, too, find it difficult to believe the wonderful promises made by our Creator to us? The Apostles were with the Lord Jesus from the beginning of his preaching until his burial. They heard his words, witnessed his actions, and trusted in his mission until the cross and burial. How often Christ had told them of his forthcoming death and burial; how often he also reminded them that, like Jonah, he would rise from the tomb in three days. This was his promise throughout his preaching, yet the Apostles were obstinate and incredulous in believing those who had seen him. Those who saw him first were the women disciples who had gone to the tomb and Cleopas in Emmaus. Thus, the Lord himself appeared to the Eleven to embolden them to bear witness to the world of the divine promise of eternal life.

Until then, they only saw Christ in his humanity; after his appearance to them, they witnessed the fullness of his preaching of the future divine gift of eternal life for all humanity. Saint Theophilus of Antioch reminds us: *“When you have put off mortality, and put on immortality, then will you see God worthily...But you do not believe that the dead are raised...And why do you not believe? Do you not know that faith is the leading principle in all matters?”* (To Autolytus, Bk 1, ch. 3)

The Eleven had the blessing of seeing the risen Lord to embolden their faith so as to go out and share with us the truth of the resurrection of all humanity. Nevertheless, it was only after Pentecost, the Descent of the Holy Spirit, that they were strengthened enough to go forth to all nations. Saint John Chrysostom, in his Homily (82) on the Gospel of Saint Matthew, encourages

us: *“Let us then, in everything believe God, and contradict him in nothing. Though what is said seems to be contrary to our thoughts and senses, let his word be of higher authority than both our reasoning and sight.”*

Belief in the bodily resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of our faith as the Apostle Paul, in his First Letter to the Corinthians, Chapter 15, also instructs us: *“Now if Christ raised from the dead is what has been preached, how can some 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...For if the dead are not raised, Christ has not been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, you are still in your sins...But Christ has in fact been risen from the dead, the first-fruits of all who have fallen asleep... Just as all men die in Adam, so all men will be brought to life in Christ...”*

Soon, we will recall the Apostle Thomas, who was not present when the Risen Lord appeared to the others. To his disbelief, Christ showed his hands and side and said, not only then to Thomas, the “Doubting Thomas,” but to us in our time: *“You believe because you can see me. Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe.”* (Jn 20:29)

Dearly beloved Orthodox Christians, let us listen to Saint Theophilus and Chrysostom, to the Apostle Paul, but primarily to our Risen Lord. In the Creed, we state, “I believe in the resurrection of the dead and the age to come.” So let our lives be lived in the expectation of the resurrection in the age to come. Let us confess our belief that Christ is risen and we shall rise with him, and thus we can cry out: “Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death and bestowing life on those in the graves.

In the Risen Christ,

Let us say, “Lord, open my mind!” and “Lord, open my heart!”


+NATHANIEL

By the mercy of God, Archbishop of Detroit
and the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America and Canada
Orthodox Church in America