



ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA
DIOCESE OF NEW YORK & NEW JERSEY

33 Hewitt Avenue - Bronxville, NY 10708
Office (914) 779-6580 Fax (914) 779-6581
www.nynjoca.org

ARCHPASTORAL LETTER FOR GREAT AND HOLY PASCHA 2022

Protocol No. 01-002/2022
Great and Holy Pascha
Sunday, April 24th, 2022

Dearly Beloved Members of our Diocesan Family:
Christ is Risen! – Indeed He is Risen!

“Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.”
(John 20:20)

Without a doubt, to see the Lord is an incomparable joy. Even the Angels in Heaven do not know a higher blessedness than to behold the Lord of Glory.

And so, for the disciples of Christ to see the Resurrected Lord on the first Pascha was especially powerful – because before that joy, they had been plunged into an abyss of sorrow, as Jesus had been betrayed into the hands of sinful men, unjustly convicted, dishonored, tortured, and killed. He had only received an honorable burial because of unexpected compassion, and even while in the tomb, He was denounced by His enemies.

How much more triumphant was their joy when amidst their secret gathering (for they were afraid), through locked doors, *“Jesus came and stood in their midst”* (John 20:19). Now, the Risen Christ was victorious over death, and, consequently, over all who stood in enmity against Him and His followers. Now, He had assumed all authority in Heaven and on earth; now, He brought the Holy Spirit; now, He truly began the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, which before He had only announced as imminent.

We today continue this joy of the first followers of Christ, for we too are the disciples of the Resurrected Lord – even if we are, perhaps, the last of them – maybe even the last because of our unworthiness, rather than our historical time. Can we not also see the Risen Savior, so that we too might rejoice with complete joy? Or, if that cannot be the case, is it possible for us to still rejoice in Him with complete joy?

To the last question, we have a consoling answer from the lips of the Lord Himself. When Thomas, in spite of the obvious eye-witness accounts of the Resurrection, did not want to believe without seeing the Risen Lord Himself, then Christ condescended to his brazen demand ... but He also praised those who do not demand to see, for *“blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed”* (John 19:29).

My beloved, how short is the road to Paschal joy! How easy it is to become blessed! Not having seen Christ in person, all we must do is believe in Him, love Him, and rejoice in Him; and then we will be blessed!

But there is more ... When the Incarnate Son of God was leaving this earthly life and the Apostles were faced with being deprived of the sweetness of seeing Him with their physical eyes, He promised them that they would be able to contemplate Him in spiritual grace instead of seeing Him in person: *“He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father,*

and I will love him and manifest Myself to him” (John 14:21). The experience of those who love the Lord shows that He appears to them, depending upon their need and their spiritual ability – sometimes in a form they can see, in His divinized humanity ... and sometimes not in visible form, although no less essentially and actually, by giving them His peace, His unutterable and glorious joy, which surpasses all explanation, His inner grace-filled light, the dawn of the never-ending day, and the glimmer of eternal glory.

Now, do we recognize the path of seeing Christ Resurrected? Each of us must learn His commandments, and keep them, and love Him with a living and active love, and His Father will come to love us also, and He will love us as well and will manifest Himself to us. This is as true a saying as any word of our Savior. Did not all those whom we learn about in the Gospel as having perceived the vision of the Resurrected Christ follow this path – that is, the path of living love?

After all, what was it that led the Myrrh-bearers to visit the tomb with fragrant oils, when they still did not have enough faith in the Resurrection (for myrrh and fragrant oils are necessary for a dead body, not a resurrected one)? What else, ***if not their love for Christ***, which did not die with His death? Their love for their Lord led them to His tomb, as did His love for them ... and so, He manifested Himself to those first eye-witnesses of His Resurrection!

What was it that gathered the Apostles and kept them in a single house on the Day of Resurrection, though their faith in that Resurrection would only come alive later? Was it fear of the Jews? It is true that this fear forced them to close and lock the doors – but if fear were the primary motive, they would never have gathered together in the first place; rather, they would have dispersed, taking different paths to safety. No! ***It was their love for the Crucified Christ***, which was alive before their faith in Him. Their love gathered the scattered sheep of the stricken Shepherd into a single group ... and His own love heard the fearful sighs of their love for Him. And so, He manifested Himself to them, coming through the locked doors of the Upper Room.

Was it not the same love for the Crucified One that shone forth in the sad glances of the travelers on the road to Emmaus, and in their ongoing conversation about the events that were so painful to remember, and so dangerous for them to speak of aloud? Their love found the Beloved One nearby and felt His nearness (even without rational thought) in the fire in their hearts, even before *“their eyes were opened and they knew Him ... in the breaking of the Bread”* (Luke 24:31-35).

My Beloved, let us accept these teachings of the Gospel. Let us seek the Resurrected Lord through living faith and active love. Following the example of the gatherings of the Apostles, let us seek Him with love in the gatherings of our Church! Like the travelers to Emmaus, let us seek Him with love through our conversations about Him at home, or on the road, with our family and our friends, with a reverent spirit ... or at least have these discussions in our own hearts. And like the Myrrh-bearers, let us seek Him with love in deeds of compassion and charity for those in need. And then, He will indeed come to love us as well ... He will illumine the eyes of our heart ... and in holy contemplation, in pure joy, and in the blessedness of a peaceful conscience ... He will truly appear to each of us Himself! And in the fear of God and with faith and love, we will be the witnesses of the most profound and joyous of all truths: ***“Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!”***

With my humble prayers, my archpastoral blessing and my sincere love,

+ Archbishop Michael

Archbishop of New York and the Diocese of New York and New Jersey