



Paschal message by Patriarch Irinej

CHRIST IS RISEN! INDEED HE IS RISEN!

*Today is the Spring-time of our souls,
For coming forth from the tomb,
Christ shines like the sun, Dispelling the gloom of our sins!
We will sing out to Him, for gloriously has He been glorified!*
(Paschal service hymn)

When an early spring arrives after a long and cold winter, all of nature and God's creation rejoices in the sun and its warm rays and energy which illuminates and warms everything and all things without exception. Everything then glorifies the Lord, the Giver of sun and spring. So do we, dear brothers and sisters and our dear spiritual children, after a cold and terrible winter of sin, especially after the killing of the God-Man Jesus Christ on Holy Friday on Golgotha, seeing today the Resurrected Christ, do we joyfully exclaim and sing: Today is the Spring-time of our souls! Christ – the Sun of life from the East – has risen and shone from the tomb. He has expelled a dark storm of our sins! Him let us magnify for He has been glorified! That is why we are joyful today, that is why together with the angels in heaven and with all people of this world do we gloriously sing: Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing life.

Among the many names used by the Church hymnographers in praising the Resurrected Christ we notice the name Spring. Rightly indeed, they call Him so for the Lord Jesus Christ is the Spring of our new life. That is not a coincidental poetic construction. Here it is not the spring as an annual season that we talk about; rather, it is a deep understanding of the meaning and significance of spring as our beginning of new life of nature and everything in it.

Until the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, that is, until His descent into Hades, we were chained in the winter of sin and death in the depths of Hades. Death had reigned over us. Having descended into the grave, He has destroyed Hades, He has shattered the chains of sin and death and has freed us. In explaining the anthropological mystery of Christ the Savior's descent into the tomb, His stay there and His Resurrection, the Holy Apostle Paul exclaims: Death, where is thy sting? O Hell, where is thy victory? Contained in the mystery of the Resurrection – that is, in the mystery of the Resurrected Lord Christ – is our victory over sin, death and the devil. That is why it was necessary that Christ become Emanuel (God is with us); that is, it was necessary that He take upon Himself our entire human nature and indivisibly and without mingling unite it with the divine nature in His one and distinctive God-Man Hypostasis, so that as the God-Man (Theanthropos) He might win over Adam's sin of disobedience to God the Father and destroy the consequences of the original sin. The God-Man Christ, not only God or only Man, defeated Satan, sin and death! This mystery of victory the Lord foretold even during His temptation after His baptism in the river Jordan, saying: "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.'" (Saint Matthew 4:10)

Reminding you of these truths of the Gospel, we call you today, on this day of the Resurrection, to be in truth and in essence, communicants of a new and eternal Life, of the new and eternal Spring, Christ the Lord. "Let no one weep for his iniquities, for pardon has shown forth from the grave," exclaims St. John



Chrysostom. May no one fear death any longer for from it the Savior has freed us; He Who with His death on the Cross has extinguished death and made free all those over whom it has reigned. Today we celebrate the Resurrected Christ. We celebrate the death of death, we celebrate the destruction of Hades, we celebrate the beginning of new life, we celebrate Him Who is the Cause of all of that, the only blessed and most glorified One unto the ages of ages.

Our entire faith, hope and love is established upon the truth of the Resurrection of Christ the Savior, who with the Resurrection from the dead laid not only the cornerstone of His Church but also the faith of all of us who are baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. We believe and confess Him “who rose again on the third day according to the Scripture”. Without the Resurrected Christ the Lord not only would our faith be empty but it would burst as the bubble made of soap. The Holy Apostle Paul who experienced the True and Resurrected Lord Jesus Christ in a special way concludes: “And if Christ is not risen, your [our] faith is in vain”. (I Corinthians 15:17) That is the empirical faith of the Apostle to the nations and the Church of Christ. May God grant it that we also, having experienced the Resurrected Christ, boldly and without fear sing: Christ is risen!

Unlike the Apostle Paul, the other Holy Apostles, who experienced the horror of Great and Holy Friday, as well as the Holy Myrrhbearing Women, experienced Christ’s Resurrection in a different manner. The news that Christ had risen and appeared to Cephas – that is, to the Apostle Peter – and “some of the women”, brought fear and trembling and some even began to doubt. Instead of joy and faith they were seized by fear and doubt. In doubting the news that the Teacher had risen the Apostle Thomas went the furthest when, with not much thought, he said: “Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.” (Saint John 20:25) It is nothing strange and unusual if we bear in mind the spiritual battles and sufferings that the Apostles underwent. The fearful judgment of Great and Holy Friday, the judgment of the God-Man Christ, had left behind even more dreadful consequences for the Holy Apostles and those who followed Him and those who hoped that He would free them of the Roman oppression. Their hope and faith dispersed while watching His terrible judgment, while watching how man, merciless and harsh, judges and to the cross crucifies their Teacher and Savior of the world, the Lover of mankind. The fear from within and the fear from without, the fear from the Sanhedrin, from Pontius Pilate, from the Jews, fear from all around! The fear had seized the disciples and apostles and they dispersed on all sides as sheep without a shepherd. Knowing well in their hearts, their fear and their thoughts, the Lord comes in their midst informing them that He is risen and tells them: “Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (Saint John 16:33) and “do not doubt, but rather have faith!

Today He comes to us who are afraid and frightened, dear brothers and sisters, to us frightened of the global world order and disorder, of great and small inquisitors, and of new Pilates, who once again judge and determine truth and justice and once more threaten God’s inheritance on earth with Golgotha. To us today He communicates this message: Do not be afraid! I have overcome the world! Recognizing in Him the Victor of every sin and every death and injustice with our faith, let us have courage and let us not fear those who, not knowing what they are doing, still ask: what is Truth? But we, having experienced the Resurrected Lord as Truth above all truths, having gathered around Him today on the spiritual Zion, let us glorify and praise Him for “all God-enlightened lights from the West and from the North of the sea, and from the East His children, glorifying Him through centuries”. “Today is the day of the Resurrection, let us be illumined by the celebration! says the Church hymnographer adding: “Let us embrace each other and let us say brothers to even those who hate us and let us forgive all by the Resurrection!” May the hymn and



glorification of Christ who glorified us flow from our voices and our hearts. With the all-victorious and all-joyous greetings Christ is risen! we greet you all one more time, dear children of St. Sava in our homeland and those throughout the world in the diaspora. The Resurrection is a Feast Day of pan-Orthodox unity and all-Christian fellowship. In the name of Christ Resurrected we call you all to the oneness and unity in His Church. He who is not in communion with the Church, which He has bought with His blood, is not with Him – with Christ the Lord. Without Christ there is no Church, and the Church is never without Christ. That is why without the Church there is no salvation. Outside the Church there is only the lonely “autonomous” man without a home, with his disobedience to God and His Church, with his egoism and opposition to the Holy Spirit like Adam expelled from Paradise. Such people the Lord Himself calls the doors of hell which will not prevail against the Church.

We especially greet our suffering brothers and sisters in Kosovo and Metohija who, despite being discriminated and in the chains of captivity, celebrate with us today the victory of Good over evil, Life over death, Christ Resurrected over the demonic powers of darkness.

With the same love in the Resurrected Christ the Lord and with warm prayers we greet today all our brothers and sisters in Dalmatia and Lika, Kordun, Banija, Slavonija and Baranja.

With *Christ is risen!* we also greet all of our brothers and sisters in Republika Srpska, Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Slovenia and the former Republic of Yugoslavia – Macedonia, most especially the latter ones who at the forefront with their unjustly imprisoned Archbishop suffer for the unity of the Church and for the purity of the Orthodox Faith.

We pray especially today to the Conqueror of sin, death and human injustice for our brothers and sisters in Christ the Lord in the Middle East, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Ukraine, with wishes and prayers that the light of Christ's Resurrection dispel the darkness of sin which hovers over Ukraine, that it may enlighten the minds and souls of the sowers of hatred towards Holy Orthodoxy and the Russian Orthodox people.

May the Resurrected Christ our Lord shatter the chains of injustice, unlawfulness and hypocrisy with which the sons of illegality have bound the Archbishop of Ohrid and Metropolitan of Skoplje Kyril Jovan who through us greets the entire Orthodox and justice-loving world.

Praying to the Resurrected Christ our Lord that the love of God always and incessantly fill your entire being, we once again greet you wholeheartedly with the salutation more important than any other salutation:

Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!

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