



Patriarchal Encyclical for Holy Pascha 2014

Christ is Risen!

Come, brethren and children in the Lord, receive the light from the unwaning Light of the Phanar, the Holy Center of the Orthodox, and let us all together and jointly glorify “Christ, Who is risen from the dead.”

The emotional state of the Lord’s disciples was grim after His Crucifixion, because by the Lord’s death on the Cross the hopes of His disciples were dispersed that He and they would one day prevail as political power. They had perceived the triumphant entrance of Jesus Christ into Jerusalem, following the resurrection of Lazarus and the miraculous feeding of five thousand men, with additional women and children, by five loaves of bread and two fish, as a prelude of their conquering of secular authority. The mother of two of them moreover requested that her two sons sit by each side of the Lord, when He came to power. All these, however, dissipated as **childish imaginations** on account of the awful execution of Jesus Christ.

But, one Saturday morning, the Myrrh Bearers found the tomb empty and heard from an Angel that Jesus **was risen from the dead**. Shortly after, they saw Him in a different state not allowing the Myrrh Bearers to touch Him. This unexpected **development** of the situation caused the people close to Jesus to **wonder** about what was to happen next. They did not receive the answer right away. They were told to wait with patience and endurance until they received **strength from above**. Obeying the command, they waited until Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came down and revealed to them, in fullness, their new **mission**. This mission did not call for the liberation of one nation from its slavery bondages by another nation; instead it called for the **liberation** of all humanity from its enslavement by the master of evil and evil itself. This was another great mission and different from the one they had dreamt about.

The inconceivable commandment calling for the preaching of the message of man’s deliverance from the slavery of death took them by surprise; nevertheless they undertook it with zeal and preached the message everywhere and saved and continue to save many from death. There is the first among the dead, the risen Jesus, Who offers to all the gift of **resurrection** and **eternal life**, a life that is not subjected any longer to corruptibility, because man in the resurrected state is like an angel of God in heaven who no longer has a fleshly body but a spiritual one.

We experience already the foretaste of this blessed resurrected state when we carry our fleshly garment in a way by which we do not taste the substance of death, that is the distancing from God’s love, but feel that we transition from the natural death of our fleshly body to the higher life of our spiritual body through the loving knowledge of the **Person of the Lord**, a knowledge which equals towards **eternal life**.

Therefore, we are not simply in anticipation of the resurrection of the dead as an event that will take place in the distant future, but we partake in it now, and are jubilant and cry out along with Saint John Chrysostom: *Death, where is your sting? Hades, where is your victory?* We were resurrected alongside Jesus Christ and experience the end of times as present reality and present reality as the end of times. The resurrection permeates our being and fills us with joy. Exactly like the joy the disciples felt when they were saying that the Lord was risen.



We continue the work of the Apostles. We convey to the world the message of the resurrection. We preach knowingly that death must not have a place in our life for it offers no benefit to humanity. The ones who seek to improve social life by killing fellow humans do not offer good service to the living. They rather serve the proliferation of death and prepare their own devouring by death.

In our times, the drums of death and darkness beat frantically. Some fellow men believe that the eradication of other fellow men is a praiseworthy and beneficial act, but they are seriously mistaken. Unfortunately, the annihilation and suppression of the weakest by the strongest dominates in the secular pyramid of today's reality. Often we are shocked by the cruelty and lack of compassion exhibited by the powerful that hold the reins of the world, believing that they are actually the ones ruling it.

However, Christ, by His death on the Cross, reversed this secular pyramid and placed on top of it His Cross. He sits atop, because He suffered most than any man. There was no man in the world who suffered as much as God-Man Christ did: *And being founding appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the Cross. Therefore God, the Father, also has given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth* (Philippians 2:8-11).

Oftentimes in the history of humanity we see as prevailing forces the darkness of death, injustice over justice, hatred and envy over love, and we see that man chooses the infernal hatred over the light of the Resurrection. Despite the apparent technological progress of human societies, despite the declarations of human rights and religious freedom, racial and religious hatred swells universally and causes dangerous tensions, which exacerbate the dominion of the kingdom of death, Hades, and evil. Unfortunately, people can not tolerate diversity in their fellow human beings. They can not tolerate the different racial origin of other men, the different perceptions and beliefs of them, be it political, religious or social.

History, though, has proven that real progress can not exist without God. Not one society can be truly progressive and happy if there is no freedom. True freedom though is acquired only with our staying close to God. The history of the 20th C. tragically confirms this truth. Humanity experienced a horror that originated from Central Europe and produced millions of victims during WWII and racial persecutions. At the same time, it also experienced the horror that was sown by these so called progressive forces, which committed crimes of equal magnitude and cruelty in Eastern Europe in the name of freedom. Therefore, totalitarianism as an offspring of a humanity without Christ, does not recognize political parties and its natural conclusion becomes destruction and death. All of the above confirm that every attempt to reach freedom without God shall be doomed to tragedy.

To this dominance of the forces of darkness, the Church responds with the grace and power of the Risen Christ. He, Who took upon Himself the afflictions and infirmities of each man, offers to the world through His Resurrection also the certainty that *death is vexed*.

Resurrection and life are **the gifts and the light** of Jesus Christ, which “**shines upon all.**” Let us all honor this **gift**. Let us all thank the **Giver** Who by His flesh shone in the world like in a mirror, and has presented the light of the resurrection to the world. Let us then receive the light from the unwaning Light of Life. Let us receive and welcome the **gift** of the resurrection and cry out from the bottom of our hearts:

Christ is risen from the dead, trampling over death by death, and to those in the grave bestowing Life!



Rejoice nations and be happy!

Holy Pascha 2014

† **Bartholomew of Constantinople**

Your fervent suppliant before God