

PASTORAL LETTER ON THE FEAST OF THE LORD'S RESURRECTION 2007

† N I C O L A E

by the Grace of God

Archbishop of the Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese in the Americas

*To our Beloved Clergy and Right-Believing Christians,
Peace and Holy Joy from our Lord Jesus Christ,
And from us Hierarchal Blessings.*

**Most Reverend Fathers,
Beloved Faithful,
Christ is Risen!**

We give glory to God because He has granted us the privilege to repeat once again these words proclaiming to each one of us the Resurrection of Christ, a miracle that changed the destiny of man and of the world, a miracle to be shared because it is the news of the victory of life over death, of the end of the reign of darkness and the beginning of the Kingdom of the Light of the Resurrected Christ.

The Gospel of St. Matthew describes the moment when the miracle was discovered by the Myrrh-Bearing Women, who had come to carry out the Jewish burial ritual: *Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the sepulcher. And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone, and sat upon it. His appearance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men* (Matt. 28:1-4). The angel of the Lord himself revealed the empty tomb so that the Myrrh-Bearing Women could see the miracle. They came to anoint the body of a dead man, but were met by an angel who shone like lightning. The vision was frightening for those who guarded the tomb, but not for the Myrrh-Bearers who heard, for the first time, the good news of the Lord's Resurrection: *"I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He has risen, as He said. Come, see the place where He lay. Then go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead, and behold, He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see Him"* (Matt. 28:5-7).

Many thousands of years previously, God had created man and given him the commandment: *"Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it."* But man wanted to flourish without God, and as a result of his disobedience he received the sentence: *"In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return"* (Gen. 3:19). The history of man ever since has been marked by this distance from God and attachment to the earth. But this story is changed through the Lord's Resurrection. The angel proclaims that the Crucified Jesus is no longer in the place where He had lain; His body had not gone back to the earth, as had happened with every human being up to that time. But He

had risen from the dead and His disciples would see him in Galilee. The angel proclaims that the earth will no longer have power over human beings. The body that was taken from the earth is now transformed by the power of God that transforms matter, up until now opaque and mortal, into a source of light, for it reveals the glory of God. Life which had ended in the grave now receives a new meaning, for death no longer means the end, but a passage. Christ's rising from the tomb shows that death has been conquered.

All the hymns from this holy night talk about this *trampling down of death*. In his catechetical homily, St. John Chrysostom says: *Let no one fear death; for the death of our Savior has set us free. He has destroyed it by enduring it.* And he takes up the words of the Prophet Isaiah: *"You, O Hades, have been embittered by encountering Him below". ...It took a body, and, lo, it discovered God. It took earth and, behold! it encountered Heaven. It took what it saw, and was overcome by what it could not see. O death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory? Christ is risen, and you are annihilated.... Christ is risen, and life is liberated.* This must be our faith. For if Christ is risen, from now on life rules, and not death. Hades, which had swallowed up all of creation separated from God, was destroyed because it received God Himself. Death lost its power, for it was shattered by the Giver of Life.

But the way the miracle was told by the angel reveals yet another meaning of the abolishing of death as non-understanding, non-comprehension, non-receiving of God. The Myrrh-Bearing Women had come to the tomb mourning their Teacher. In their minds everything had ended; the One they had followed and obeyed had ended His earthly, temporal sojourn. Appearing to them like lightning, the angel announced to them that the Crucified Jesus had risen. When all seemed lost, God revealed His power that conquers death and brings life. We must understand that our very faith in God has been changed; our very relationship, as believers, with God the Creator and Ruler is now different. For since the Resurrection of Christ, we believe in eternity, we believe that people can be changed through the work of God, we believe in the enlightening of our mind, we believe in life which conquers death. And we find that our own life has been changed.

On this Feast of the victory of life, we too lift up a humble prayer to the Resurrected Christ, that He raise us also from the tomb of our sins, weaknesses, and malice. That He proclaim to us as well through His angel that death has been conquered; that He send us also to announce His Resurrection, and thus show ourselves to be people who fulfill our mission on this earth. We also ask the Risen Lord to grant us His light to guide us along the road of salvation. And just as He changed His Apostles and disciples into witnesses of the truth of the Resurrection, may He show us, through our faithful deeds, to be believers and witnesses of the fact that we too will all be resurrected in Christ (1 Cor. 15:26).

May the Risen Christ our Lord pour out upon us His rich blessings which bring health, peace, and understanding in our families and parishes.

I embrace you all in Christ and wish you Joyous Holidays!

Christ is risen!

Your brother in prayer to God,

† N I C O L A E

Chicago, The Feast of the Lord's Resurrection, 2007