



**ARCHPASTORAL MESSAGE OF HIS BEATITUDE
METROPOLITAN TIKHON
PASCHA 2019**

To the Venerable Hierarchs, Reverend Clergy, Monastics, Distinguished Stewards, and the entire family of the Orthodox Church in America:

CHRIST IS RISEN! INDEED HE IS RISEN!

*Let no one fear death
For the Savior's death has set us free.*

With these words, and the other powerful and inspiring words of his paschal homily, Saint John Chrysostom reminds us of that which Christ has accomplished on this bright and glorious feast of Holy Pascha: the conquering of death, the revelation of the universal Kingdom, and the reign of eternal life. Death has lost its sting and hades has been abolished, mocked, and slain. Christ is risen and life reigns.

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For the Savior's death has set us free.*

Life reigns and yet, on this bright and saving day, Saint John does not say that it is the Savior's resurrection that has set us free but rather His death that has done so. We manifest this reality by unceasingly singing that Christ has trampled down death *by His death*. It is precisely by his voluntary death upon the Cross that Christ now lifts all things unto Himself, as the resurrection icon indicates by depicting the Lord raising Adam and Eve—the whole human race—out of hades with His hands outstretched in the form of a cross.

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For the Savior's death has set us free.*

Yet, as we know too well, our existence remains full of corruption, illness, and passion, and ends in physical death. So, in what way have we been set free by the Savior's death? We are set free because, though we suffer, though we endure illness, though we die, we need not fear death. Death is no longer a dark abyss of nothingness, but rather becomes the very place where we behold the risen Lord in all His glory, a glory that today pierces even to the depths of hades. We are free because the grave is no longer our final dwelling place but has become an entrance into *another life which is eternal*, an entrance into the life which Christ Himself has given to us, 'to those in the tombs.'

In this new life, we not only come before the presence of the Lord but we gain Him for ourselves. As the Apostle Paul cries out: *For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain* (Philippians 1:21). If we have Christ, we live in Him and our physical death is merely the final veil to true and authentic communion with Him. How could one fear this? What we experience on the bright and radiant day

of Pascha is not simply an external light and a passing jubilation but a transformation of our fear, our pain, and our sorrow into a taste of the freedom of everlasting life.

To be free, we need to gain Christ, not in a philosophical or abstract manner, but through our concrete participation in His death and His resurrection: *Yesterday, O Christ, I was buried with Thee, and today I rise again with Thee, in Thy rising.* By our baptism, all the painful realities of our existence—illness, despair, corruption, and death—are buried in Christ and we rise with Him who has voluntarily borne our human weakness, voluntarily endured our suffering, and voluntarily died. But by so doing, He has, with Himself, lifted up to life eternal all those who become His Body through communion with Him.

Christ is risen and not one dead remains in the grave.

The resurrection is universal—it is bestowed on all of humanity and all of creation—and therefore you and I are now free to enter into that experience in a very real way. But we need to receive that experience in the very same manner in which the Apostles received and transmitted it: *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing this that our joy may be complete.* (1 John 1:1-4)

Today, all of us—both those who have fasted and those who have disregarded the fast, both the rich and the poor, both the sober and heedless, both the sick and the healthy, both the stable and the confused—are offered this life. It is now our turn to make this joy complete by casting off the fear of death, by voluntarily dying to ourselves and living for others, by burying our passionate desires in the tomb of love, by holding back from rebuking others and by spreading our cloak over those who are falling, by rejoicing with those that rejoice and weeping with those that weep, by suffering with the sick and mourning with sinners, and by strengthening those who repent. In so doing, we will indeed enjoy this fair and radiant triumphal feast, receive our recompense, and enter into the joy of the Lord.

Christ is Risen!

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Tikhon', with a stylized flourish at the end.

+TIKHON
Archbishop of Washington
Metropolitan of All America and Canada