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**Archpastoral Letter of His Grace, Bishop Michael,  
For the Feast of the Glorious Resurrection 2011**

Holy PASCHA  
Sunday, April 24, 2011

**Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!**

Dearly Beloved in our Resurrected Lord:

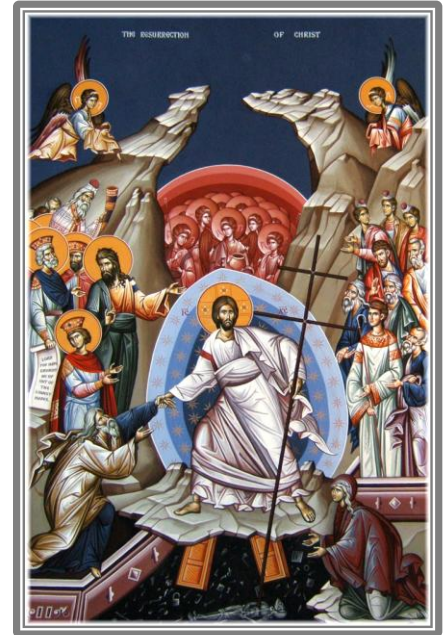
The day of Pascha is at the very center of the life of our Orthodox Church, since its very inception twenty centuries ago. The Resurrection of Jesus dominated the preaching and thinking of the early Christians. The message of the resurrection is the heart of our Creed because it is the very heart of our Christian Faith. Saint Paul states this in no uncertain terms when he writes:

*“If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we who are in Christ have only hope in this life, we are of all men most to be pitied.*

*“But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, so by a Man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:17-22).*

If Christ has not been raised, says St. Paul, our faith is futile. If Christ has not been raised, we are still in our sins. If Christ has not been raised, our loved ones who have fallen asleep have perished. If Christ has not been raised, we have no hope: we are of all men most to be pitied. If Christ has not been raised, love ceases with death, and God’s love cannot reach beyond the grave. If Christ has not been raised, there is no justice; the books will never be balanced. Truth, goodness, and virtue will remain forever crucified.

*“But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep,”* says St. Paul. When a tomato plant produces the very first tiny green tomato, it is the promise of more to come. So the Resurrection of Jesus, says the Apostle, was the “first fruit.” He is the promise that those who live with Him will also rise. As the Fathers of the Church tell us, “Could the Head (Christ) rise and leave the members dead?”



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Because Christ *has been raised* from the dead, our faith is not futile; our sins are forgiven; our loved ones who have fallen asleep in Christ have not perished; we do have hope; God's love, backed by His boundless power, reaches beyond the grave; yes, there is justice. Even in the face of injustice in the world, we can believe in the justice of God because we know that on "the third day He arose again according to the Scriptures."

Is it any wonder that the resurrection dominated the preaching of the early Apostles? The Book of Acts has been called the Gospel of the Resurrection. There is not a single sermon in it which does not proclaim the Resurrection of Jesus as the heart and soul of the Christian message (Acts 24:15; 17-18).

This Resurrection of Jesus is a fact of history; it is not a myth or a legend. This is why the early Church emphasized the fact that there were *witnesses* to the Resurrection. Judas was to be replaced by Matthias, another apostle who "*must become with us a **witness** to the resurrection*" (Acts 2:32). St. Paul speaks of the more than five hundred brethren who saw the Risen Christ, "*most of whom are still alive,*" he says. He seems to be saying that if anyone wants any evidence for the fact that Jesus rose from the dead, he may go and cross-examine those living witnesses.

The Risen Lord appeared to the ten apostles in the absence of Thomas (John 20:19-23). He appeared to the eleven in the presence of Thomas and invited the doubter to actually come and touch Him so as to convince himself of the reality of His Body and His wounds. St. Matthew says that the women returning from the empty tomb met the Risen Christ "*and took hold of His feet and worshipped Him*" (Matthew 28: 4). They actually took hold of His feet; they not only *saw* Him, but they also *touched!* They were true witnesses of the Resurrected Christ.

The appearances of the Risen Savior were such as to demand worship. For example, the myrrh-bearing women who were returning from the empty tomb *worshipped* Him after taking hold of His feet. The final cry of St. Thomas was the greatest of all statements of faith: "*My Lord and my God!*" (John 20:28). And when the disciples met Jesus in Galilee, "*they worshipped Him*" (Matthew 28:17). Indeed, the Resurrection of Christ was surrounded by an atmosphere of glory.

The Resurrection also produced a profound change in the disciples. Following the crucifixion, the disciples were a company of hopeless, frightened, disappointed men terrified that they too would be crucified and wanting nothing more than to get back to their old jobs and forget everything. Seven weeks later we see an astonishing change in these men. They are filled with a blazing hope and confidence, with a courage that enables them to defy all opposition in their efforts to preach the Living Christ.

We need only remember how Peter denied His Master three times to save his own skin. Two months later this same Peter stands before the Sanhedrin and preaches Christ fearlessly, defying them to do their worst. Why the change? The cause of Peter's change was the conviction that Jesus had risen from the dead. He had actually seen Him and conversed with Him. He was a witness. For this he was willing to lay down his very life.

My prayer for you this Pascha is that you truly know and believe and appreciate the full meaning of the Resurrection of Christ. May it confirm your faith in the Risen Lord and our own resurrection from the dead in

