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ARCHPASTORAL LETTER FOR The Feast of the Glorious Resurrection: Holy PASCHA Sunday, April 20, 2014

Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!

Dearly Beloved in our Resurrected Lord:

"Having beheld the Resurrection of Christ, let us worship the holy Lord Jesus ..."

Certainly one of the most beautiful prayers of our Church is the Paschal hymn, "Having Beheld the Resurrection." One might rightly wonder, however, how we can offer this prayer ... how we can say that we have beheld the Resurrection, as though we have seen it, when in fact Christ rose from the dead two thousand years ago and, even then, without any human being actually having been an eye-witness?

The fact is that the Holy Spirit urges us to offer this prayer not only on Pascha but at every Liturgy. And, the words of the hymn urge us to speak the truth that the Resurrection of Christ takes place in everyone who believes, and not only once a year but at every moment when our Lord arises in us ... resplendent in beauty and shining with the brightness of incorruption and divinity.

We know this from the Scripture. Following His Resurrection on the first Pascha, Jesus appeared to several of His followers ... at the point of their deepest need.

He appeared to Mary Magdalene in her great grief, when she thought that her beloved Master was dead. His appearance, His calling her by name, brought her unbounded joy.

He appeared to Simon Peter in his great sense of sorrow and shame for having denied Christ three times. The Lord appeared to assure him that he had indeed been forgiven and accepted once more.

He appeared to Luke and Cleopas, the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, who were despairing and doubting now that their great Deliverer had been crucified. His appearance caused them to feel the warmth of God's presence in their hearts.

He appeared to His disciples in the Upper Room, where they were hiding behind locked doors for fear of the authorities. His appearance changed those broken men. It made them strong and confident and bold as lions. They sang, they rejoiced; they healed, they taught; they suffered triumphantly -- not just for a few days of passing enthusiasm, but for the rest of their lives. This miraculous change occurred in them because Christ had actually appeared to them.

Eight days later He appeared to the Apostle Thomas to help him cope with his doubts. He showed him the nail prints in His hands and the spear mark in His side, and enabled the doubting Thomas to make the greatest profession of faith in all the Scripture, calling Christ "my Lord and my God!" ... and Thomas went the farthest of any of the apostles in his missionary labors, travelling all the way to India to preach the Good News of the Risen Savior.

My beloved, the Bible tells us: "*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever*" (Hebrews 13: 8). If He appeared to them, He appears now. If He revealed Himself then, He reveals Himself now. He comes to us in our sense of grief to comfort us. He comes to us now, in our sense of failure and sorrow for sin, to forgive us and raise us to our feet. He comes to us now in our times of doubt and disillusionment to instill new hope. He comes to us now in our sense of fear to uphold us.

Christ is not dead. He is not just a great teacher or a beautiful example for us to follow. He is the Son of God, the Risen Lord of Glory. He comes to us this Pascha, and He appears today to you and to me as He appeared to His apostles, to James and to Peter, to the more than 500 brethren, and to Paul who writes, *"Last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared also to me"* (I Corinthians 15:8). It was that appearance on the road to Damascus that changed the fanatical persecutor of Christians to be Christ's greatest friend; it gave the New Testament its chief author; and it provided Christianity its greatest teacher next to Jesus.

If our Lord appeared to His disciples then, He will certainly appear to us today: in our confusion, to show us the way; in our despair, to be our hope; in our sin, to be our forgiveness; in our death, to be our life. Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen! ... But how do we know for sure?

Like Thomas and the other apostles, we know not merely because someone has told us about the empty tomb or even the message of the angels: "He is risen! He is not here." We know because we have experienced the Resurrected Christ. Like Thomas we have touched the Risen Lord, and He has touched us. Have we not been speaking to Him in our prayers each day? Have we not been listening as He speaks to us in the Holy Bible and in that inner voice called conscience? Have we not been touching Him in the sacraments, especially Holy Communion?

Has He not strengthened us in our weakness and comforted us in our sorrow? Has He not raised us up each time we have fallen? For some, Christianity is an argument; for too many, it is a performance. But my prayer for us is that, like for the Saints, our faith is an experience ... an experience of the Risen Lord.

Having beheld the Resurrection of Christ, let us worship the Holy Lord Jesus, the only sinless One. We venerate Thy cross, O Christ, and we praise and glorify Thy holy resurrection; For Thou art our God and we know no other than Thee, and we call on Thy name. O come all you faithful, let us venerate Christ's holy Resurrection! For, behold, through the cross joy has come into all the world. Let us ever bless the Lord, praising His resurrection, For by enduring the cross for us, He has destroyed death by death.

May this Pascha be for you a renewed experience of the Risen Christ -- the unbridled joy of "*the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints*" (Jude 1:3). And, with it may you be blessed with all the good things that come from the hands of our Lord, God and Savior.

Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!

With my prayers, my blessings and my love,

 $+ \ M \ I \ C \ H \ A \ E \ L$ Bishop of New York and the Diocese of New York and New Jersey

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