

Archpastoral Letter for Great and Holy Pascha 2016

Prot. No. 01-002/2016
Great and Holy Pascha
Sunday, May 1, 2016

Dearly Beloved Members of our Diocesan Family:
Christ is Risen! – Indeed He is Risen!

“This is the day which the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it!”

(Psalm 117:24 LXX)

Christ is Risen! He has burst open the gates of Hades, and freed the dead from captivity! He has renewed the earth through the members of His Church, now born anew in Baptism, and He has made creation blossom afresh with men and women brought back to life! He has unlocked the doors of Heaven, which now stand wide open to receive those who rise up from the earth!

Because of Christ’s Resurrection, the thief ascends to Paradise, the bodies of the Saints enter the Holy City, and the dead are restored to the company of the living! There is an upward movement in all of creation – each element being raised to something higher! We see Hades releasing its victims to the upper regions, the earth sending its buried dead to Heaven, and Heaven presenting its new arrivals to the Lord! In one and the same movement, Our Savior’s Passion raises men from the depths, lifts them up from the earth, and sets them in the heights!

Christ is Risen! His rising brings life to the dead, forgiveness to sinners, and glory to the Saints! It is no wonder David the Psalmist summons all creation to join in celebrating the Paschal Feast: *“This is the day which the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.”*

And so, my brothers and sisters, each of us ought truly to rejoice on this Holiest of Days! Let no one, conscious of his sinfulness, withdraw from this glorious celebration. Nor let anyone be kept from the Holy Liturgy because of the burden of his guilt. Sinners we may indeed be, but we must not despair of pardon on this day which is so highly privileged. If a thief could receive the grace of Paradise, how could a repentant Christian be refused forgiveness?

Christ is Risen! The Conqueror has redeemed us! He handed Himself over to wicked men so that He could transform the wicked into Saints truly dear to Him! By focusing our attention upon the glory of Our Redeemer, there is sufficient hope for our resurrection. Through faith we know that we are already risen from the dead. Saint Paul tells us, *“Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him”* (Romans 6:8).

Even as regards our departed loved ones, the Apostle does not want us to grieve about those who have fallen asleep. Let the hope of the Resurrection encourage us, because we shall see again those whom we have lost here below. Of course, we must continue to firmly believe in the Risen Christ; we must continue to obey His commandments. But we know that His power is so great that it is easier for Him to raise the dead to life than it is for us to arouse those who are sleeping.

As we ponder these things, some feelings may cause us to weep for those we love; some hidden feelings may discourage our minds from trust and hope. Such is the sad human condition – without Christ, all of life is emptiness! But with Him, we share in His victory: The triumph of His light over darkness! The triumph of His goodness over evil! The triumph of His love over hate! The triumph of His healing over suffering! The triumph of His salvation over sin! The triumph of His life over death!

True, for a time death separates those who are joined to each other in marriage. Yes, it harshly and cruelly divides those whom friendship unites. But, Christ is Risen! Death's power is broken! Its heinous yoke has been destroyed by the One who threatened it with the cry of the Prophet Hosea: *"O Death, I shall be your death"* (Hosea 13:14). And with the words of the Apostle Paul, we too deride it: *"O Death, where is your victory? O Death, where is your sting?"* (I Corinthians 15:55).

Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen! On this joyous day, my beloved, let us truly celebrate! But let us also remember: We do not really belong to ourselves. We belong to the One Who has redeemed us! Our will should always depend upon His! For this reason we say in the Lord's Prayer: *"Thy will be done!"* Yes, we belong to the Risen Savior ... the One Who has triumphed on Holy Pascha! We belong to the Resurrected Christ ... the One Who promises us: *"I am the Resurrection and the Life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, yet shall he live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die"* (John 11:25-26). We belong to the Lord of Glory ... the God Who loves us more than we love ourselves!

Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen! May the Resurrected Lord bless you and your loved ones on this great Feast of Feasts and always – with all the good things that come from His hands!

With my humble prayers, my Archpastoral blessing and my sincere love,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Michael". The plus sign is a simple cross, and the name "Michael" is written in a cursive, flowing script.

+ MICHAEL

Archbishop of New York and the
Diocese of New York and New Jersey