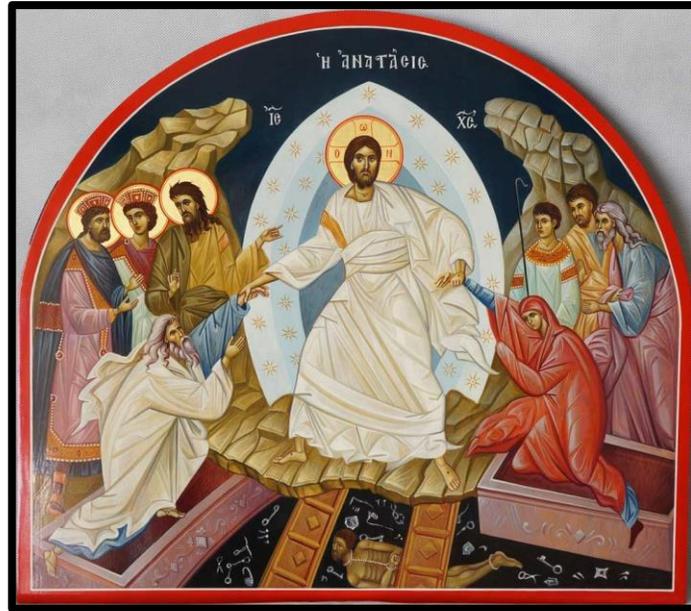


**CHRIST IS
RISEN!**



**INDEED HE
IS RISEN!**

**ARCHPASTORAL LETTER FOR
GREAT AND HOLY PASCHA 2020**

Prot. No. 01-005/2020
Great and Holy Pascha
Sunday, April 19, 2020

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

*We celebrate the death of death and the overthrow of hell,
the beginning of another life which is eternal; and in exultation,
we sing the praises of its source. He alone is blessed and most glorious,
the God of our Fathers.” — (Paschal Canon, Ode 7)*

Christ is Risen! He has burst open the gates of Hades, and freed the dead from their captivity! He has renewed the earth through the members of His Church, who are 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”* (Psalm 117:24 LXX).

And so, my brothers and sisters, each of us ought truly to rejoice on this Holiest of Days! The Conqueror has redeemed us! He handed Himself over to sinful men so that He could transform sinners 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 (in Baptism), 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. As we ponder these things, some feelings may cause us to weep for those we love; some hidden hurts may discourage our minds from trust and hope. Such is the sad human condition – for 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 us from those we love. 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).

My beloved, I realize that this Pascha is like no other in the memory of any of us. Nevertheless, let me remind you that while our churches are closed to our parish families and the public ... and our divine services are celebrated by skeleton crews and live-streamed ... this should not deter our celebration of our faith in Christ! The Risen Lord Who left the sealed Tomb can pass through the closed entrances of all our churches and be in the altar with our priest and those assisting him. The Resurrected Savior Who entered the locked doors of the Upper Room where the Apostles were in hiding can come into each of our homes and be with us at our Prayer Corners, whether we live and pray alone – accompanied by the Saints and Angels – or whether we pray with our families ... *“where two or three are gathered in My Name”*. The Son of God Who conquered sin and death and the devil can now overcome every obstacle and bring salvation, life and joy to all of us!

The only exception is this: The Risen Lord will not enter our heart without us opening it to Him. It is not that He cannot, it is because He will not, because Love is never forced! As the Scripture tells us, Christ comes, knocking at our hearts: *“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me”* (Revelation 3:20).

On this radiant Pascha, let us open our hearts to the Resurrected Savior at our Prayer Corner. Let us praise His glorious victory over sin and death and the devil with the shouts of joy: *“Christ is Risen! – Indeed He is Risen!”* over and over again, in as many languages as we can muster ... and with the singing of the triumphant hymn: *“Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs, bestowing life!”* over and over again, in as many languages as possible.

Let us thank Him for the blessings that He has given us this Pascha and throughout the past year! Let us implore His care and healing for those who are sick or in need, alone or in sorrow, suffering or in mourning. Let us remember to pray to Him on behalf of those who have been taken from us to the portals of eternity. Let us confess our sins and shortcomings to Him every night and seek His saving forgiveness.

Let us promise to do better from this day, this moment forward: in our daily prayer life, our attendance at divine services and our reception of the Sacraments (once the pandemic restrictions are lifted), our daily reading of the Scriptures, our participation in the feast days, our fasting, our generous stewardship of time, talent and treasure to our parish, and our assisting fellow parishioners, our neighbors and even strangers in want. Knowing that every fear and doubt in our faith are conquered by the Good News of the Resurrection, let us also offer ourselves as a witness to the great love of our Savior – speaking boldly of all that He has done for us, and sharing the richness of the life in Christ with those who need Him, but do not yet know Him.

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 cursive script that reads "Archbishop Michael".

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