

PASCHAL EPISTLE of the Episcopate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada to the Reverend Priesthood, the Deaconate in Christ, and to all the faithful children of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada.

CHRIST IS RISEN!

“Cast your eyes around you, O Zion, and see. Behold, like beacons shedding light divine your children have come to you from West and North, from the Sea and from the East, blessing Christ in you to all the ages.” (Tropar 2, Canticle 8 of the Paschal Matins.)

Reverend Fathers! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ!

Once again, all over the world, we are gathering together to greet each other on the bright celebration of the Resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. For many years now, we have been walking along the special way of the Cross, and perhaps at this moment, we cannot simply talk about joy in a human way because Pascal joy does not come from people, but from God! Today, the entire universe praises Christ's victory, His overcoming of evil and death. "You captured hell and resurrected man, O Christ, with your Resurrection."

The Old Testament Passover recalls the significant event when the Lord freed His chosen people from Egyptian slavery and the angel of death passed by every house whose doors were marked with the blood of the Passover lamb. Truly, The first meaning of the Hebrew word "Pascha," for

which the holiday was named, portrays the image of God's punishment, which "bypasses" and "passes by" those doors. So when we sing that the Lord Jesus Christ is our Pascha, we glorify Him through Whom we have the possibility to escape the consequences of our sins, but only if we firmly decide to come out of the house of slavery to sin and passions, only if we repent and follow in the footsteps of His Gospel. He saved us with His blood!

“Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in the last times for you who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.” (1 Peter 1:18 - 21).

Not everyone understands these words of salvation. To talk about Jesus Christ the Lamb crucified on the Cross, is as problematic in today's world as it was in the time of the early Christians. Although the Gospel of Christ has already been preached for almost two thousand years, yet it still often happens that in the world, even the part that considers itself Christian, that only the language of wealth, power, weapons, and authority continues.

However, at the same time, in every generation those who see God's ways, those who know how to be God's quiet lambs in the history of their people, those who imitate God's humility, those who choose meekness and the spirit of sacrifice, those who realize that crosses and suffering do not only

pass away, but that without these there is no Resurrection, continue to be present with us.

In today's current circumstances, there are thousands of sons and daughters in our native homeland Ukraine, who sacrifice their lives for freedom and independence. The Resurrected Christ, our innocent Lamb, unveils to them the Paschal value of their pure offering, which leads them out of the house of slavery, and reveals the meaning of suffering endured by all Ukraine at the dawn of the new millenium.

Despite all the trials and uncertainties, the Paschal Season is a time of indescribable joy and hope for us. On the glorious Feast of the Resurrection of Christ, our Church, honours the sacrament of the union of opposites: burial and resurrection, death and life, crucifixion and glory, sorrow and joy. The great Paschal mystery is found here, that the Son of God Himself becomes one of us, and dies like us, so that we can be resurrected with Him!

Christ walks His Way of the Cross for us and for our salvation, giving us His bright Resurrection and new life in God. Therefore, the Cross and the Resurrection are inseparable. They apply not only to Christ but to all people and to each of us individually. The event that took place in the life of Jesus Christ, His Death and Resurrection, encompassed into itself the entire history of mankind, all suffering, both past, present and future, and transfigures us into a new life and a new joy.

The Risen Christ enters into the heart of each of us. He endures all our suffering and humiliation, and we are at the same time condemned and

crucified with Him---together with Him we rise from the grave and are resurrected. *“Yesterday I was buried with you, O Christ, today I rise with Your resurrection.” (Tropar 2, Canticle 3 of the Paschal Matins)*

Today, the Lord comforts us, transforms our sadness into joy, just like with the myrrh-bearing women. They were going to the Lord’s tomb crying but returned filled with a true joy. They were going in the darkness of hopelessness, but received the light of the Risen One and announced to the Apostles and the whole world that Christ has truly Risen. Let this miracle, ” the Miracle of all miracles” transform us, and through us, our society and country.

With His Resurrection, Christ gives us the strength for the struggle against sin and to resurrect our souls. Faith in the resurrection of the dead inspires us to offer self-sacrificing service to God and the Church, to our Ukrainian people and our native motherland, in the name of love for Christ the Saviour and all humankind.

At this moment in history when the world is experiencing trials; we, as faithful children of Christ, must show generosity, love, and mutual support for our neighbours. May our heart be open to those who need help, and may our prayers be a mighty tool for establishing peace and justice in the world.

Pascha reminds us that a flower rises through the thornbush and light breaks through the darkness. Likewise, may our faith lead us to great heights, where we will be a light of hope and a living emblem of peace.

During these festive Paschal days, we sincerely greet all of you, our God-loving clergy and faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada, in

Ukraine, and in the diaspora, with the Feast of the Lord Jesus Christ's Resurrection. We especially greet our glorious defenders of Ukraine, men and women, who do not begrudge their lives for the sake of love for their neighbour and for their motherland. Let us not forget all those who sincerely love and help Ukraine, who are doing everything possible for a just peace, for the earliest possible end to the war and victory over our enemies, both known and unknown.

Paschal days---this is also the time to pay tribute to all those who are no longer among the living, who left us their love and life experience, and who have passed into eternity. Let us remember them with prayers and visit their graves with the proclamation that "Christ is Risen"!

Our wish for you is that the light of Christ's Resurrection embraces each of us. May the blessed Fire of the Lord's Tomb illuminate the path of every family and all their relatives, and may the Risen Christ fortify our mental and physical strength and grant us gracious help for good deeds. Let no one and nothing darken our spiritual joy. May the Grace of our Resurrected Lord Jesus Christ be with all of you.

TRULY CHRIST IS RISEN!

With Archpastoral Blessings,

+Ilarion, Archbishop of Winnipeg, Metropolitan of Canada

+Andriy, Bishop of Toronto

Pascha 2024

