

RESURRECTION PASTORAL LETTER 2014

+ NATHANIEL

**By the Mercy of God and the Will of the People,
Archbishop of Detroit and the Romanian Episcopate
of the Orthodox Church in America**

To our beloved clergy, monastics and pious faithful of our God-protected Episcopate,
Grace, Mercy and Peace from God, and from us our fatherly love and hierarchal blessing.

CHRIST IS RISEN!

“The day of resurrection! Let us be illumined, O people! Pascha of the Lord, O Pascha. For Christ God has brought us from death to life, we who sing the song of victory! Christ is risen from the dead!”
Canon of the Resurrection: Ode I

Dearly Beloved in Christ,

The Day of Resurrection is the day of universal joy for all; as universally all men are born, so also universally shall all men die. What was alive, dies. What was dead, lives! Resurrection means, “the un-doing of death!” The universality of birth and death and new-birth or resurrection includes all humanity. Thus, the illumination that Death is no longer to be feared, gives each person liberty to live free of the passions which pressure us to live as though there were no personal responsibility for our lives. For the believer, nay rather all humanity, lives in the presence of the Creator and is responsible for the actions taken in life. *“For certainly the reason of a resurrection is only in order to judgment; and therefore it is necessary that the bodies which have been instrumental to the actions should be the same bodies which are summoned from the grave to judgment, ‘that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to what he has done, whether it be good or whether it be evil’.”* (Tertullian, The Apology, 48).

St. Gregory Nazianzus urges us: *“Let us sacrifice ourselves to God, or rather offer sacrifice every day and in every movement. Let us accept all things for [Christ] the Word”* (On Pascha 23); and further, he says: *“We needed a God made flesh and made dead, that we might live. We were made dead with him [in baptism] that we might be purified. We have risen with him since we were made dead with him. We were glorified with him since we rose with him”* (On Pascha 28).

While for the very young, death is only a word, for those who become aware that all men die, the reality of death has a profound personal meaning: “All men die; others have died; I will die.” In time, each of us knows that to each is given a limited time of living on earth. Thus, it is the understanding that death is the universal reality that shapes our thoughts, deeds and thus our existence. We act as we do, because we know that we will die; and once we acknowledge this, we believe either that we will be resurrected at the Second Coming of Christ, or we believe that our personal existence is erased at death. Personal death is a reality for all. Believers, however, live trusting that there is to be a universal resurrection for all humanity. *“...So ought we also to await the time of our resurrection prescribed by God and foretold by the prophets, and so, rising, be taken up, as many as the Lord shall account worthy of this privilege”* (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 5:31:2).

In the Old Testament (Exodus 12), we read that the Angel of Death passed over the houses of the Hebrews in Egypt, because their homes were identified with the prescribed sprinkling of lamb’s blood. This was the temporary Passover, the escape from the Angel of Death which visited the houses of the Egyptians reaping the lives of the first-born. This event is remembered yearly in Jewish homes around the globe. This, however, is a celebration of a temporary and historical reprieve; it did not deliver mankind from death.

In the New Testament, we hear that Christ's blood shed on the cross is a sprinkling of blood on all mankind from the beginning to the end of human history. This is the permanent Pascha, the eternal victory of life over death brought about through the sacrifice, not of an unblemished lamb from the field, but of the Lamb of God from the heights of heaven - Jesus himself, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, "the one who receives and who is received, who gives and is given" (Divine Liturgy). Jesus is both eternal God, "born of the Father before all ages," and in time he who has taken on our human nature, "who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became man. And he was crucified for us" (The Creed).

Saint Athanasius the Great states: "God became man so that man may become as God." Further, he says, "*It was not his own death that the Savior came to complete, but that of human beings. The Lord was especially concerned for the resurrection of the body that he was able to accomplish; for the trophy of victory over death was this resurrected being, shown to all*" (On the Incarnation 22). Christ the Lord died for us, was buried, and rose, and this is why we "sing a song of victory," a song celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ and a song celebrating the resurrection of all humanity, of our own resurrection at the last day. This is the true joy of today!

"Indeed, God calls even the body to resurrection and promises it everlasting life. When he promises to save the man, he thereby makes his promise to the flesh. What is man but a rational living being composed of soul and body? Is the soul by itself a man? No, it is but the soul of a man. Can the body be called a man? No, it can but be called the body of a man. If, then, neither of these is by itself a man, but that which is composed of the two together is called a man, and if God has called man to life and resurrection, he has called not a part, but the whole, which is the soul and the body" (The Resurrection 8, Justin Martyr).

Although we sing that it is the Day of Resurrection, by this we do not mean that this is a twenty-four hour day like any other day, but an era in which from the time of Christ's coming out of the tomb in the garden of Gethsemane, until his Second Coming, we live in the reality that "death no longer holds men captive." The fruit of the cross and resurrection covers the entire human race from its beginning until the Lord returns; it is, in effect, retroactive. The song of victory that we sing, the song which is always humming in our own hearts, is that "*Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down Death by death, and bestowing life on those in the graves.*" There can be no song more glorious, more joyful than this, which means that with the resurrection, Christ swoops all humanity into eternal life.

How will this be, and in what manner shall we live? Saint Cyril of Jerusalem in the 4th century informs us: "*This body shall be raised, not remaining weak as it is now, but this same body shall be raised. By putting on incorruption, it shall be altered, as iron blending with fire becomes fire—or rather, in a manner the Lord who raises us knows. However it will be, this body shall be raised, but it shall not remain such as it is. Rather, it shall abide as an eternal body. It shall no longer require for its life such nourishment as now, nor shall it require a ladder for its ascent; for it shall be made a spiritual body, a marvelous thing, such as we have not the ability to describe*" (Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 18:18).

Dearly Beloved, as we walk, step by step, through the gift of life on this earth, let us respond to the Good News, the Holy Gospel, and to the promptings of the holy Fathers of the Church. Let us walk with Christ who is with us here and now and who is waiting to welcome us in the life to come, he who has brought us from death to life to sing to him a Song of Victory! Christ is risen!

CHRIST IS RISEN! TRULY, HE IS RISEN!

Accept our fatherly love and archpastoral blessings on those near and those far away.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+Nathaniel". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large, decorative initial 'N'.

+NATHANIEL, Archbishop