

RESURRECTION PASTORAL LETTER 2018

To the 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!

“Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus directed them. And when they saw him, they worshipped him, but some of them doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age’.” (Matthew 28:16-20)

Dearly Beloved:

These words from the Holy Gospel according to Saint Matthew are the final words of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ to His disciples. Although addressed in the first instance to His disciples of that day, they are directed as well to us, as they have been to all previous generations. They are words of direction, of command *in participation through* co-operation with Him in bearing witness to God in Trinity and to God’s gift of life to His children, and the promise of eternal life.

In His great love, God created man in His own image and likeness. He invited him to work with Him, to be the caretaker of the earthly paradise which He offered him. This was the divine invitation to man *to participate fully in Him*, as co-operator, as co-worker with God in His creation. The end result of cooperation with God is called *theosis*, “...becoming by grace what God is by nature” (St. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, I). You and I are called to live our lives and share our divine call to become one with Him, to live in His presence in reciprocal love as Christ has commanded us (John 13:34ff).

Adam and Eve freely chose to reject God’s invitation to be co-workers. Instead of bearing witness to God’s love, by their choice of self-love, they became witnesses for Death. This self-centered action on their part, a rejection of parental care and love, resulted in undergoing physical death. Man lost, or better stated, cast aside the divine invitation to be one with Him, to co-operate, to work with God, and thus live forever. Saint Justin Martyr tells us: “[Men] were made like God, free from suffering and death, provided that they kept His commandments” (c. 100-165).

The reality of that great loss caused a deep longing for reconciliation and restoration of that broken bond of filial love. God did not abandon his children, but made us a promise, as the Apostle Paul explains: “*Death came through one man [Adam] and in the same way the resurrection of the dead has come through one man [Jesus Christ]*” (1 Cor. 15:21). In other words, God’s love would be manifest in and through our Lord, Jesus Christ, who would overcome Death and restore humankind with the Father. Blessed Augustine of Hippo (354-430) informs us: “*But he himself that justifies also deifies, for justifying he makes sons of God*” (Sermon 192.1.1).

Jesus Christ, Love Incarnate, is the one referred by Saint Paul to Saint Timothy as Savior of the whole human race. He, the eternal Son of God, in the fullness of time, came into this world to live among us, witnessing to the Father's love. He, himself, is the fulfillment of unity in love of the Creator and the created. God, out of love for his creation *took on flesh from the Virgin Mary and became man* (Creed) thus fulfilling the restoration of that bond of co-operation between God and man which had been long lost in Paradise. Jesus is "...*light of light, true God of true God...*" (Creed), and He restores us to be "...*heirs of God and coheirs with Christ, sharing his sufferings so as to share his glory*" (Romans 8:17).

True love demands sacrifice of self for the other. We confess this in the Creed, when we state that *Christ, for our salvation took on flesh and became man and was crucified, died and was buried*. By stating, "...*for our salvation,*" we mean restoration to and with God through Christ. If, however, the only purpose of Christ's coming on earth was his death and burial, then there would be no reason for this pastoral letter. This letter, however, is in celebration of and witness to Life, not Death.

The love of God is not only sacrificial but redemptive and restorative. The Creed continues: "...*And on the third day, he rose again...*"; and therefore, we can sing: "*Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down Death by death, and on those in the graves, bestowing life!*" (Troparion of Pascha). The resurrection of Jesus is the witness of God Himself to His eternal love for us; He bestows on us unending life, permanent existence, eternal being. Our life, which had been held captive by Death because of the ancient sin of Adam and Eve, is forever freed. Who can bestow life? Only He who is the Source of Life. Who can and does bestow new life on the dead? Only He who is the source of life for all, who, by His sacrificial death on the cross, has destroyed Death's power. It is He, Jesus Christ, true God and true Man, who can bestow it on even those who have been laid to rest.

Christ, as He once did in Paradise and now through the ages, commands us to go forth to be His witnesses. We do witness His resurrection from the dead, His ascension and His return. We are witnesses to His gift of eternal life, by our unification with and participation in Him, which is *theosis*.

Let us, as have the disciples and those through the centuries, bear witness to God's loving restoration of mankind. Let us be on fire with love for the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, One God, immaterial, eternal and loving as Christ has invited us to do! Dearly beloved, as His disciples, we choose to worship Christ, to confess His resurrection from the dead, witnessing His trampling of Death itself, so that we, too, may bear witness to Him before all nations, remembering his final words: "... *and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age*" (Matthew 28:20).

Christ is risen!

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

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "+ Nathaniel". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

+ NATHANIEL

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