

# RESURRECTION PASTORAL LETTER 2003

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.

*"Touch me and see for yourselves; a ghost has not flesh and bones as you see I have."*

Luke 24:39

Dearly beloved:

## Christ is Risen!

We greet you with an ever-increasing love for you because of your diligence in keeping the faith "once and for all delivered to the saints." It is by keeping, no, in living this faith in the risen Lord, that you have passed from this transitory life into one which has no end. *"May you have more and more grace and peace as you come to know our Lord more and more"* (2 Peter 1:2).

*"Peace be with you!"* (Luke 24:37) is the greeting of the resurrected Master to his disciples gathered in Jerusalem. Why this greeting? The Lord knew that, although the disciples believed in the resurrection of the dead and the life in the age to come, nevertheless, they were fearful at being confronted with someone risen now from the dead. This was the same Master whom they had followed on his agonizing road to crucifixion, and the same Lord who had expired on the cross, was taken down from it and buried in a new tomb. They were fearful also of the chief priests and Pharisees who had said to Pilate: *"Sir, we recall that ... [Jesus] said, while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise again'"* (Matthew 27:63) and what they might do to the followers of Jesus.

Now, in their midst stood the resurrected Jesus. What amazement and then, joy! What fear and then, boldness, as they saw and touched the same Lord whom they had laid in a new tomb three days prior. It is this greeting of Christ, *"Peace be with you!"* which echoes, no, resounds through the ages, sweetly falling on the ears of the children of Adam and Eve, stirring humanity to live in his peace and to confess him as did the Apostle Thomas, *"My Lord and my God!"* (John 20:28).

This is the foundation of the Christian faith: Christ crucified, Christ risen, Christ coming again. It is called the Kerygma. It is the confession of those who lived with Christ, those who came after his ascension and those of us up to this very day who confess it and upon which we base our life. It is the belief that not only did Jesus Christ, the Only-begotten Son of God the Father rise from the dead, but that he will also raise up all mankind at the hour known only to the Father.

Was this a new belief? Let us look at the prophecy of Ezekiel in which we read, *"The Lord God says this: I am now going to open your graves; I mean to raise you from your graves, my people..."* (Ezekiel 37:12-13). He wrote centuries before the coming of Christ; the belief in a future existence was a part of Jewish belief at the time of the incarnation of Jesus of Nazareth. It is the fulfillment of man's desire to live forever.

Did the apostles and disciples touch him and see him? We read in Acts of the Apostles, that while he, Jesus, was with them for the forty days, he told them that they are witnesses to the resurrection (Acts 1:3). Was this personal witnessing to the resurrection of Christ important? Yes, it was the cornerstone and prime condition for election among the followers of Christ. For when the remaining eleven gathered together to elect someone to take the place of the betrayer, they established conditions. *"We must therefore choose someone who has been with us the whole time that the Lord Jesus was traveling around with us, someone who was with us right from the time when John was baptizing until the day when he was taken up from us and he can act with us as a witness to his resurrection"* (Acts 1:21-22).

This is the cornerstone of our faith, which is that not only does God love mankind (for he showed this from creation and in paradise and even before the coming in the flesh of Jesus on earth; not only in his mercy, which he ever bestowed upon his children and for which he has ever been praised and lauded even before the coming of the Savior), but that He has promised to bestow the gift of unending existence on us who are mortal; and, that this corruptible flesh will be changed into incorruptible. As proof of this, he sent his Only-begotten Son, who willingly came into this world being born of a Virgin, taking on our flesh, our fallen human nature, to break down the wall of enmity.

It was this humanity that he raised to a new dignity, and it is to this dignity that we are called. *"By his divine power, he has given us all that we need for life and for true devotion, bringing us to know God himself, who has called us by his own glory and goodness ... In this way you will be granted admittance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ"* (2 Peter 1:3, 11).

We are instructed by the words of the Great Paul who says in his First Letter to the Corinthians, *"When this perishable nature has put on imperishability, and when the mortal nature has put on immortality, then*

*the words of Scripture will come true: 'Death is swallowed up in victory. Death, where is your victory? Death, where is your sting?'*" (1 Corinthians 15:54). Elsewhere, we read in Romans, "*Christ, as we know, having been raised from the dead will never die again. Death has no power over him any more!*" (Romans 6:9). Saint Peter sings out in joy: "*Blessed be God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in his great mercy has given us a new birth as his sons, by raising Jesus Christ from the dead, so that we have a sure hope and the promise of an inheritance that can never be spoilt or soiled and never fade away, because it is being kept for you in the heavens*" (1 Peter 1: 4). Everything promised must await for fulfillment, and fulfillment comes about if that which is promised is believed and hoped upon.

That death is destroyed by Jesus Christ and this accomplished through his death on the cross, has been and remains the foundation of the Christian faith. The first generation of believers lived with the apostles, hearing that apostolic witness from their own mouths. After their deaths, their disciples bore witness to what the apostles confessed. Thus it is clear that the belief in the reality of the resurrection of Jesus was not something invented after the death of the apostles, but was rather a continuation of the apostolic witness which remains the statement of faith to this day.

Saint Clement of Rome at the end of the first century (c. 96 A.D.) states that Christ had shown himself alive to them (the apostles and disciples) after his passion by many demonstrations; for forty days he had continued to appear to them and tell them about the kingdom of God. Saint Ignatius of Antioch, who lived around the same time, stated that he knew that Christ, after his resurrection, was still possessed of flesh; and, he believes that Christ is so even now. That is, that just as the apostles touched and saw the risen Jesus, so too, he is in a new body which is in glory; and thus, this body is not a ghost.

No less powerful is the confession of this belief by Saint Policarp who around the year 135, at the age of 86, died for this belief and stated his expectancy of his own new life. "If we please him (God) in this present world, we will also inherit the future world. For he promised to us that he will raise us again from the dead" (Epistle 1:34). As he approached his martyrdom, he offered this prayer to God: "I give you thanks in that I can have a part in the restoration of eternal life, both of body and soul" (Martyrdom 1:42).

This consideration is the same of Saint Clement in his Second Letter: "Let none of you say that this very flesh will not be judged, nor rise again. For just as you were called in the flesh, you will also be called to be judged in the flesh" (7:519). Another witness is Saint Irenaeus in the third century who says that, "They will have their own bodies, their own souls, and their own spirits, in which they pleased God" (E/W 1:411). What will this body be like? Saint Hippolytus in the same century says: "However, the body is not raised the same as it is now. Rather, it becomes pure and no longer corruptible. And to every body, its own proper soul will also be given" (W. 5.222).

Saint John the Golden-mouth reminds us that, yes, we are still in the weak human body; and yes, we fall but, "Let no one mourn that he has fallen again and again, for forgiveness has risen from the grave. Let no one fear death; for the death of our Savior has set us free. He has destroyed it by enduring it" (Paschal sermon).

Dearly beloved in Christ, gentle flock of the Good Shepherd, having heard the words of the Old Prophet and the promise from the lips of our Lord, having heard what the apostles confessed and for which the martyrs willingly and joyfully shed their blood, let us not be skeptical as are the foolish of our age who, although having often heard these beautiful words, have cast them aside, having tired of the waiting for the restoration. They have fallen along the wayside, burdened by self importance, rejecting the apostolic witness and thus falling aback on their own arrogance, even reject the witness of him who is the first-born from the dead, the Lord Himself whose glorious resurrection we are today celebrating. Look around you and lift the faint-hearted and give them courage. Let your own light shine so that seeing it, others will give glory to God in heaven.

Humanity has been passing through the Valley of the Shadow of death from the fall. And we, in our own short pilgrimage through, know our prize and we see the crown and we must continue the race, each individually but together in the Body of the Church, the Bride of the Risen Lord. Put first things first, and we shall have the "peace which is beyond human understanding." History shows that wars will not cease nor cannons be silent until he returns, for man has had his chance and falls short of his good desire. But knowing that the Lord is the author of human history and that there is a "holy history," let us put our trust in him who brings peace into our hearts; and then we, through our lives, shall extend this into our world.

Let us join together with Saint Romanos in his hymn. "In return for these things, O Redeemer, what do we have to offer except a doxology? Therefore, spare, O Christ, as God, those who believe in your cross, tomb and resurrection. Grant us forgiveness of sins, and whenever the awakening common to all comes, consider us worthy to see your face and to hear your voice with confidence" (Kontakion Resurrection IV, Strophe 20).

**Truly, He is Risen!**

**+NATHANIEL, Archbishop of Detroit**

**+IRINEU, Bishop of Dearborn Heights**