



PASTORAL LETTER 2005

THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD AND GOD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST

“The Lord God says this to these dry bones: I am now going to make the breath enter you, and you will live. I shall put new sinews on you, I shall make flesh grow on you, I shall cover you with skin and give you breath, and you will live; and you will learn that I am the Lord God.”

(Ezekiel 37:5-6)

Dearly beloved,

Christ is Risen! Truly, He is Risen!

We are in the presence today of the mystery of the resurrection of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ. Through the loving kindness of God, this celebration has again been bestowed on us, and we are called by the Holy Spirit to gather around God’s altar to hear the electrifying proclamation of the angels hovering at the tomb: *“Why look among the dead for someone who is alive? He is not here; he has risen. Remember what he told you while he was still in Galilee: ‘that the Son of Man had to be handed over into the power of sinful men and be crucified, and rise again on the third day.’ And they remembered His words.”* (Luke 24:6-8)

Each year that we remain on earth, we are blessed to “remember His words” and especially on this Day of Days, the Great and Holy Pascha. These words were announced by the angels to *“...the women who had come from Galilee with Jesus...”* (Luke 23:55) In the Church, each Sunday, each Day of the Lord, we relive the astounding event: “Christ is risen from the dead!” In the hymnography of the Church each Sunday Matin Service, we remember these women in the “Hymns of Resurrection.” They are called “Women Disciples” for indeed they were the women who were followers, disciples of the Lord. They are also called: “Myrrh-bearers” because they brought ointments to the tomb to anoint the body of the Lord. The Twelve Apostles, the very ones whose images we encounter on the icon of the Mystical Supper which is above the Holy Doors, were not the only ones who accompanied the Lord during his ministry. These women were part of that entourage and they were the ones who, *“After the Sabbath, and toward dawn on the first day of the week...went to visit the sepulcher.”* (Matthew 28:1-2) These are the truly courageous disciples for they braved the dark and dangerous silent streets of Jerusalem to slip outside the inner protection of the city walls to wind their way to the cemetery to anoint the body of their Teacher and Lord.

In the Holy Gospel according to Luke, we hear the angel say to them: *“There is no need for alarm. You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified: He has risen, He is not here. See, here is the place where they laid Him. But you must go and tell His disciples and Peter...”* (Mark 16:6-7) The women were commanded to begin their own ministry by informing the others of the resurrection of the crucified Lord: “the others” meaning the very Apostles who had fled from the sight of the crucifixion; Peter, the chief Apostle, who had denied his Lord three times at the trial; the very disciples who for fear for their own lives locked themselves away in an upper room; the disciples who did not brave the dark and dangerous streets of Jerusalem to approach the tomb at the early dawn.

In all probability, their faith in Christ’s statement that He would rise from death was overcome by their fear for their lives, and the three disciple forgot what they had seen and heard about the promise Christ had foretold on Mount Tabor. *“As they came down from the mountain, Jesus gave them this order, ‘Tell no one about the vision until the Son of Man has risen from the dead’.”* (Matthew 17:10) The Women Disciples, although fulfilling a duty, a final act of love and compassion for their Master, were most likely also not prepared to hear the proclamation of the resurrection. But the limitations of the human heart and mind can be overcome when one puts one’s trust in the Lord who made heaven and earth. Says David the Psalmist, *“...turn Your face away and man dies, You give breathe, fresh life begins, You keep renewing the world. Glory for ever to the Lord!”* (Ps. 104)

From the Gospel accounts, we know that the women disciples had traveled with the Lord during His ministry among the people; they heard Him foretell His death on the cross; they heard Him encourage them not to be afraid nor lose faith; that he would overcome death and arise; that he would meet them, not in the Capital City of Jerusalem

which had rejected him, but in Galilee, among those who had accepted his message of salvation which they were now to announce to the others. Indeed, the place where he had been laid was empty and he would honor his promise to be with them again and remain with his disciples for forty days!

Dearly beloved,

What a fright these women must have had, having witnessed the crucifixion and burial, lamenting all night through the death of the Lord, anxiously awaiting another day through the long Sabbath until they would be able to move freely about the city to exit to the cemetery outside its walls, to search among the graves of hundreds of dead to find the tomb which Joseph of Arimathea had given over to hold the body of the Lord. During their long walk on their sad search, they were like Ezekiel who had been carried by the Spirit of the Lord into that valley full of the dry bones of those long dead. He was privy to witness the resurrection power of God over the valley of dry bones. The Myrrh-bearing women, however, would soon see the resurrected body of the Lord. Whereas Ezekiel saw the prototype of the universal resurrection of the bones of many, the women disciples were to see the resurrected Christ, himself the very author of all human resurrection. They would see him, as he had promised, in Galilee. *“He had shown himself to them after his Passion by many demonstrations: for forty days he had continued to appear to them and tell them about the kingdom of God.”* (Acts 1:3)

Ezekiel was told that the bones were of the whole House of Israel: *“Our bones are dried up, our hope has gone; we are as good as dead”* and then God told Ezekiel to prophesy to them: *“Say to them, ‘The Lord God says this: I am now going to open your graves; I mean to raise you from your graves, my people, and lead you back to the soil of Israel....I shall put my spirit in you, and you will live...’”* (Ezek. 37:11-14) This gift of resurrection, of emptying all graves, of raising the dead, of leading back to *“...a place of rest, a place of green grass, a place from where all pain, sickness and sorrow have been driven away...”* was planned not just for one limited segment of humanity but for all mankind. We, dearly beloved, are heirs of the promise.

The fact of the resurrection spread and was repeated. It is remembered, sung and embraced as much today as when it took place. Following the forty days of teaching, and then the Ascension into the heavens, followed by the empowerment of gifts of the grace of the All Holy Spirit at Pentecost and in anticipation of the Second and Glorious Coming of Jesus Christ, we are called to celebrate his resurrection and to look at every cemetery and resting place as a “holding ground” of dry bones waiting to hear the sound of the trumpet of the archangel. The word, “cemetery” means a “sleeping place.”

The spark of wonder which burst forth in the hearts of those women disciples soon enkindled into a brilliant flame of public witness which has blazed through the centuries penetrating the darkness of despair, sin, and death with the eternal cry: “The light of Christ illumines all humankind!” Arising from the darkness of that tomb, the message continues to radiate, to encourage, to strengthen people of good will. In celebrating this event of universal importance, we are reminded of the words spoken to Ezekiel: “You will learn that I am the Lord God and I give you life!”

Dearly beloved,

Christ is risen! And the dry bones will be renewed! Christ is risen! And the promise of ages has begun with the resurrection of our Lord and God and Savior, Jesus Christ, to whom be all honor and glory, now and unto the ages of the ages. Amen.

Christ is Risen! Truly, He is Risen!

+ NATHANIEL
By the grace of God,
Archbishop of Detroit and The Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America