

RESURRECTION PASTORAL LETTER 2017

+ 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!

“We must therefore choose someone who has been with us the whole time that the Lord Jesus was traveling round 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).

Dearly Beloved:

In this passage from the Acts of the Apostles, we read that Saint Peter addressed a gathering of about one hundred and twenty of the brethren to address the need to elect someone to take the place of Judas, the fallen apostle. This was to be done by drawing lots from among those who had accompanied Jesus Christ *“...the whole time that the Lord Jesus was traveling round with us.”* The purpose was to *“...take over the ministry and apostolate”* to be a *“...witness to his (Jesus’) resurrection....The lot fell to Matthias who was then listed with the apostles”* (Acts 1:21-26).

What is this *“ministry and apostolate?”* Saint Peter addressed the crowd in Jerusalem on Pentecost Day: *“Brothers...what the prophet David foresaw and spoke about, was the resurrection of the Christ; he is the one who was not abandoned to Hades, and whose body did not experience corruption. God raised this man Jesus to life, and all of us are witnesses to that”* (Acts 2:30-32). Thus, the ministry and apostolate of Peter and the eleven, and then of Matthias and for all the gathering of the one hundred and twenty, and the five hundred witnesses (1 Cor. 15:6), was to bear witness to the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ of God; for in his resurrection is the promise of our own future eternal life.

Dearly Beloved,

As Peter and Paul, as the one hundred and twenty, and the five hundred, we, too, are called to bear witness to this unique resurrection of him who was *“begotten of the Father before all ages, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made; of one essence with the Father, through whom all things were made; ... and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became man”* (Creed).

Saul on his way to Damascus was confronted by the risen Christ who asked him: *“Why are you persecuting me?”* (Acts 9:4). This same man later says: *“Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?”* (1 Cor. 9:1). How did he say he saw Christ, if Christ was dead? It was in his seeing Christ that he became a witness and an apostle with his ministry and apostolate. Whom Saul-Paul saw, he confessed as his Lord, Jesus of Nazareth! This is *“the one David the Prophet foresaw and spoke about”* (Acts 2:31) and whom Saul had anticipated. This is he whom we today celebrate as having laid aside the cross of death, destroying

Death by his own death on the cross, and trampling down death for every person. This is the one about whom today we also are witnesses. It is because we do bear witness to him today, even as did the first apostles and the faithful through all the ages, that we can call ourselves together with them, “Christian” or “Christ-followers!”

Saint Gregory Palamas instructs us thus: “...any of us who wishes will share in the Lord’s resurrection, and will be an heir of God and joint-heir with Christ. That is why we joyfully celebrate the resurrection of our human nature, its exaltation and sitting down on high, and also the starting point of the resurrection and ascension of each of the faithful, publicly proclaiming that when the Lord had risen, he stood in the midst of his disciples” (Luke 24:36-53; Homily 21:6).

Dearly beloved,

Christ stands among us today, here in this church, as among his disciples. He is present as much here as he was among the apostles and with all believers through the centuries; Christ is in our midst. At the time of the recitation of the Creed, the clergy exchange a kiss of peace with these words: “Christ is among us!”, and the response is “He is and ever shall be!” Saint Luke speaks of the reaction of the apostles when Christ stood among them. “*Their joy was so great that they still could not believe it, and they stood there dumbfounded*” (Luke 24:36-41). Perhaps that is how we are today, joyful for the celebration but still wondering what the resurrection of Jesus has to do with us.

We must remember that just as Christ arose from the dead, so we also arise with him into our own resurrection at the day of the universal resurrection; and thus, our celebration is not of a simple historical event this day, but of an on-going and unending renewal of our wounded human nature.

We must seize the day and proclaim with our own lives as did the apostles and early Christians. St. Gregory of Nyssa warns us: “...many serve God with their tongue, but turn from him in their lives” (Homily 19 on Matt. 20:1-16). The apostles and all martyrs proclaim the resurrection of our Lord with their lives, with their tongue; they were witnesses to what they saw. We are further encouraged about our calling to be witnesses to the resurrection by Saint Peter in his first letter: “*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 spoiled or soiled and never fade away, because it is being kept for you in the heavens*” (1 Peter 1:3-4). In that we, too, have the hope of eternal life in Christ Jesus, we continue to bear witness not only today, but every day, to his overcoming the power of corruption and bestowing on us everlasting life.

Thus, our ministry and apostolate is to live in Christ, and we stand together with the apostles and the one-hundred and twenty and with all the saints through the ages who have been pleasing to God, singing a song of praise today, that Christ is risen from the dead! Christ is among us! He is and ever shall be!

Christ is risen! Truly, he is risen!

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

+ NATHANIEL, Archbishop