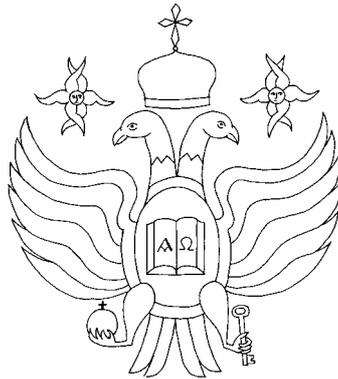


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† METROPOLITAN IOSIF



PASTORAL LETTER

FOR HOLY PASCHA

2004

FOR ALL THE CLERGY, MONKS,
AND ORTHODOX PEOPLE
OF THE METROPOLIS

*"Today , a sacred Pascha is revealed to us,
A new and holy Pascha,
A Pascha which is Christ the Redeemer...
A Pascha which has opened for us the gates of Paradise,
A Pascha which sanctifies all the faithful."
(The Paschal Verses)*

Reverend Father,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

CHRIST IS RISEN!

In our life as Christians, there is no moment or feast of the year that we long for more than the night of Great and Holy Pascha, the night of the Resurrection. And with good reason, for on this night Christ has put an end to the tyranny of death, and to our fear of death, a disease that we all carry in us. On this night, we discover and come to know God in a wholly other way. We discover that He never wished evil for us, or death. We know that there is no longer any need to be afraid of Him, we realise that He loves us, we now know that He did not spare His Son in order to call us from death to life. Christ bears the suffering of our death on the Cross and carries us over with Him "from death to life and from earth to heaven", He Himself becomes our Pascha.

At the heart of the night, united in prayer, a shiver goes through our heart. Waiting for the voice that calls us to take the holy Light, to receive Christ, and let Him penetrate our very being. Deep down perhaps there are dark regions created by actions, intentions of ours, conflicts, desires, fear! However, Christ comes and says to us: *"Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and Hades"* (Rev 1, 17-18). We are stunned: what more could we wish for than to get out of death and hell? But what are these keys? What stuff are they? *"I am the Resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die!..."* (Jn 11, 25-6), Christ says to Martha and Mary, the sisters of Lazarus, now four days dead and whom He is about to call forth from the tomb. And they believed! This is what Christ asks of us: **faith**. On the night of the Resurrection we feel that Christ adds

much grace to our fragile faith, and we feel carried to the Resurrection. And the other key? **Forgiveness**. On the Cross, the prayer of Christ to the heavenly Father rings out for those who nailed Him to the cross or for those who screamed for His crucifixion, or those going to crucify Him, who call for Him to be placed on the cross, for all these, and those of all time, He cried, and cries on the Cross: *“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing”* (Lk 23, 34). On the Cross, and after rising from the tomb, Christ too gives us the power to forgive, and He demands that we forgive. How many times does he say to us, that if we do not forgive, we will not be forgiven either? Or invites us to forgive those who hurt us and persecute us, and to pray for them? Or to forgive those who subject us to injustice? It is with confidence that He places the key in our hand. Further, He gives us the power to **love**: another key that opens the gates of death and hell. Remember the commandment to love one’s neighbour that Christ often gives to his apostles: *“That you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another”* (Jn 13, 34-5). And recall what He said to the listening crowds: *“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven... Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect”* (Mt 5, 44-8). We can find many of these sayings and commandments of life which Christ gave us as nourishment for our soul. However, today let us leave aside what is said or written, and simply look at Christ on the Cross. In front of us, on the Cross, was and is forever **Forgiveness** itself, incarnate and crucified, and given to us and to the world in Christ’s prayer. Before us, on the Cross, is **Love** itself, crucified: soon neither death nor hell will hold Him any longer. Such are the keys of life which Christ possesses and that He gives to us. Forgiveness has sprung from the tomb for us; Christ’s sacrificial love cannot be entombed by death. We must **believe** in the love and forgiveness of Christ! And let us beg for them so as to taste the life of infinite joy when we communicate at each celebration of the divine Liturgy. The sign of love and forgiveness that the Father gives us through Christ is given us here on earth through holy Communion, which St Basil the Great in the prayers of the holy Liturgy terms a “provision for eternal life”.

And if today Christ sows the seed of the resurrection in us by His Resurrection, we must not forget this, nor neglect it. Have confidence in Christ; let us entrust ourselves to Him, no longer afraid for ourselves. Let

Romanian Orthodox Metropolis of Western and Southern Europe

us love, and with His help, let us equally entrust ourselves to others. Let us show ourselves capable of forgiving them and loving them. Too, let us show ourselves capable of self-sacrifice, finding in Him the conviction that *"what burns with love perishes not, but rises on the third day."* *"When we cannot lift our heart towards Him in prayer, we should look for Christ in more lowly situations."**there where Christ waits expectantly in our brother, a fellow human being, for a glass of water, a piece of bread, a loving look to soothe the soul, a kind thought, a hand held out in friendship; all these are signs of our resurrection. Sometimes Christ waits for us *"lower than ourselves, in the poorest, the most despised"**, in order to meet us. That we might dare to see Christ our Pascha, and to live with Him and for Him!

I cannot fail to remember our brothers who died in Spain, at Madrid: guilty only of a desire to live. I believe they are a living witness to us that the world in which we dwell has more need than ever of our prayer for mankind: a truly life-giving prayer - Christ's - who has the keys of death and hell (a death and hell that many view our world as today) and, above all, the keys of forgiveness and love without which our world cannot live.

I would like to wish you all, along with the priests who serve our holy altars and you, and their families, a very holy Pascha with much joy and light. This year the Christians of the whole world celebrate Pascha on the same date. Do not hesitate to greet the other Christians around you where you live. And do not lose what we have been taught and what we witness to, as did our ancestors, concerning these days of holy Pascha. Greet one another with that most beautiful and encouraging phrase: **Christ is risen!** And the reply: **He is risen indeed!** Please do not forget these greetings because of the world in which you live; and teach them to your children. In such phrases is encapsulated all the mystery of our faith in Christ, the Son of God and Son of Man, who became our Brother and Saviour through love.

C H R I S T I S R I S E N !

† Metropolitan Iosif

Paris, holy Pascha 2004

* Expressions drawn from : Un moine de l'Eglise d'Orient, *Au cœur de la fournaise*, éd. Le Cerf, Paris, 1998 ; Marko Ivan Rupnik, *Cuvinte despre om*, éd. Deisis, Sibiu, 1997 ; Olivier Clément, *Anachroniques*, ed. Desclée de Brouwer, Paris, 1990.