

PATRIARCHAL ENCYCLICAL
FOR HOLY PASCHA

PROT. NO. 251

+ B A R T H O L O M E W

By God's Mercy

Archbishop of Constantinople-New Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch

To the Plenitude of the Church:

May the Grace, Peace and Mercy of Christ Risen in Glory be with you All

Most honorable brother Hierarchs,

Dearly beloved children,

By God's mercy and strength, we have journeyed through prayer and fasting across the ocean of Holy and Great Lent, finally reaching the splendid feast of Pascha, and we praise the Lord of glory, who descended to the depths of Hades and "achieved the entrance for all to Paradise" through His raising from the dead.

The Resurrection is not the remembrance of an event from the past, but the "good change" of our existence, "another birth, an alternate life, a different kind of living, the transformation of our very being."¹ And in the

¹ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Resurrection of our Lord*, PG 46.604.

Risen Christ, the entire creation is renewed together with humanity. When we chant in the 3rd Ode of the Paschal Canon, that “Now everything is filled with light—heaven, earth, and all things beneath the earth; therefore, let all creation celebrate the resurrection of Christ, in which everything has been established,” we proclaim that the universe is founded on and filled with unfading light. The phrases “before Christ” and “after Christ” ring true not only for the history of the human race, but also for the sake of all creation.

The Lord’s raising from the dead constitutes the nucleus of the Gospel, the stable point of reference for all the books of the New Testament, as well as for the liturgical life and devotion of the Orthodox Christians. Indeed, the words “Christ is Risen!” summarize the theology of the Church. The experience of the abolition of the dominion of death is a source of ineffable joy, “free from the bonds of this world.” “All things are filled with joy upon receiving the taste of resurrection.” The resurrection is an explosion “of great joy” and permeates the entire life, ethos and pastoral ministry of the church as the foretaste of the fullness of life, knowledge and life of the eternal kingdom of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Orthodox faith and pessimism are contradictory phenomena.

Pascha is for us a feast of freedom and victory over alienating forces; it is the churchification of our existence, an invitation to collaborate for the transfiguration of the world. The history of the Church is rendered “a great Pascha” as the journey toward “the liberation in glory of the children of God” (Rom. 8.21). The experience of resurrection reveals the center and

eschatological dimension of freedom in Christ. Biblical references to the Savior's resurrection demonstrate the power of our freedom as believers; it is in this freedom alone that the "great miracle" is manifested, which remains inaccessible to every oppression. "The mystery of salvation belongs to those who desire it freely, not to those who are tyrannized against their will."² Accepting the divine gift as a "transition" of the believer toward Christ is the voluntary existential response to the loving and saving "transition" of the Risen Lord toward humankind. For "without me, you cannot do anything" (Jn 15.5).

The mystery of the Lord's resurrection to this day continues to shatter the positivistic certainties of those who deny God as "the denial of human will," as well as the advocates of "the fallacy of self-fulfillment without God" and the admirers of the contemporary "man-god." The future does not belong to those imprisoned in a self-sufficient, stifling and narrow earthly existence. There is no authentic freedom without resurrection, without the perspective of eternity.

For the Holy Great Church of Christ, one source of such resurrectional joy is also found this year in the common celebration of Easter by the entire Christian world, along with the commemoration of the 1700th anniversary of the First Council of Nicaea, which condemned the heresy of Arius, who "diminished within the Trinity the one Son and Word of God," and which

² Maximus Confessor, *On the Lord's Prayer*, PG 90.880.

established the way of calculating the date for the feast of our Savior's resurrection.

The Council of Nicaea inaugurates a new age in the conciliar history of the Church, the transition from the local to the ecumenical synodal level. As we know, the First Ecumenical Council introduced the non-biblical term "homoousios (of one essence)" to the Symbol of Faith, albeit with a clear soteriological reference, which remains the essential characteristic of church doctrines. In this sense, the celebrations of this great anniversary are not a return to the past, inasmuch as the "spirit of Nicaea" exists unspoiled in the life of the Church, whose unity is associated with the correct understanding and development of its conciliar identity. Discussion on the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea reminds us of the common Christian archetypes and the meaning behind the struggle against the perversion of our spotless faith, encouraging us to turn toward the depth and essence of Church tradition. The joint celebration this year of the "most holy day of Pascha" highlights the timeliness of the subject, the solution of which not only expresses the respect of Christianity for the decrees of the Council of Nicaea, but also the awareness that "there should be no differentiation in such sacred matters."

With these sentiments, filled with the light and joy of the Resurrection, while proclaiming "Christ is Risen!" with jubilation, let us honor the chosen and holy day of Pascha with a heartfelt confession of our faith in the Redeemer, who trampled down death by death and granted life to all people and all creation, through our faithfulness to the sacred traditions of the Great

Church as well as through sincere love for our neighbor, for the glorification by us all of the heavenly name of the Lord.

At the Phanar, Holy Pascha 2025
+ Bartholomew of Constantinople
Fervent supplicant for you all
to the Risen Lord

To be read after the Holy Gospel during the Divine Liturgy on the Feast of Holy Pascha.