



**The Serbian Orthodox Church
to her spiritual children at Pascha, 2019**

+IRINEJ

By the Grace of God

Orthodox Archbishop of Pec, Metropolitan of Belgrade Karlovci and Serbian Patriarch, with all the Hierarchs of the Serbian Orthodox Church to all the clergy, monastics, and all the sons and daughters of our Holy Church: grace, mercy and peace from God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, with the joyous Paschal greeting:

Christ is Risen!

O death, where is your sting?

O Hades, where is your victory?

Christ is risen, and not one dead remains in a tomb!

Christ is risen, and life reigns!

(Paschal Homily of Saint John Chrysostom)

Dear Spiritual Children,

With hearts full of joy and the light, we today celebrate *Feast of feasts*, the Feast of victory of faith and life over death, the feast of Christ's resurrection, as well as the resurrection of human nature, the resurrection of every person.

Dissolution and death, planted in human nature through sin, confirm with their glaring and undeniable certainty the end of the historical path and life of every human being. The biological cycle that begins from the mother's womb ends in the womb of the earth, but passingness and death show themselves as the only unavoidable reality. But we, from the first man to this day, with our every word, thought and action show that we do not accept death, that the death is anomaly, that we are hungry and thirsty for eternal life, that is, that we are created and elected for the fullness of life and eternity.

Hence all human efforts are directed towards an attempt in finding a cure against death and decay. All the religions of the world, all sublime efforts of the human spirit – philosophy, science and art - in the end, have only one goal: to conquer death! To this end, throughout the centuries, mankind has created unprecedented wonders of technical and material culture in general. It has developed scientific knowledge to unprecedented proportions, it has demonstrated an immeasurable momentum of social creativity, philosophical thought has led to extraordinary elegance and clarity and it has created great art, but the goal remained unreachable! The reason is simple – the transient and created cannot by itself become permanent and eternal.

That is why the Only-Begotten Son of God, the Incarnated Love of God, came into the world and endured sufferings on the Cross, and in so doing, once and for all -- Oh what a miracle!--made His life our life! He took our death upon Himself as His own, so that, by the blessing and the love of the Heavenly Father, He would rise from the grave, and so by His death irreversibly overcome the general law of dying and death.

Christ's Resurrection, as the Good News of the Gospel and an irrefutable fact, is the firm foundation and the heart of the Christian faith. It has become a new birth of humanity for eternal life and a door leading into the world of a new, transfigured reality, the reality of the glory of the Heavenly Kingdom. The words of the Holy Apostle Paul attest to this fully when he said: *"But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep."* (I Corinthians 15:20)

The mystery of Christ's Resurrection reveals to us that God in no way is an abstract notion or some hypothetical and unapproachable "higher power", which enslaves and limits us with a system of moral norms. On contrary, He is a perfect Person Who came into the world not only to improve the conditions of this life or to offer to us some, or even an ideal economic or political system or to teach us a method by which to achieve a certain psycho-physical balance. He came to conquer death as "the last enemy" (cf. I Cor. 15:26) and to bring life eternal to the entire human race. *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."* (St. John 3:16)

It is no coincidence that none of the evangelists has tried to describe the Resurrection Event itself, that is, to present what has happened during the key moment of rising from the sleep of death. All, without exception, talk about the consequences of that Event and cite testimonies from people about the empty tomb. The actual Mystery of the Resurrection remains hidden. What the eyewitnesses, disciples and apostles of Christ have witnessed and what the saints of God throughout the centuries have confirmed, are the appearances of the Resurrected Lord and their experience of conversing and entering into communion with Him. This means that not only can no one comprehend and see, but also, no one can describe these saving events, which are above our intellectual capabilities. We are made worthy of the reality of these Mysteries only through faith and spiritual experience, because the reality of communion with the Resurrected One is not a question of laboratory research and rational proof, but rather is that of the Eucharistic participation in the common Life Cup. We have the blessed opportunity to experience the fruits of the Resurrection, but not to judge the nature of this Mystery in isolation, but only together with the Mystery of Incarnation and with all the Mysteries of the Divine Economy of salvation as a whole.

The Resurrected Lord Himself has revealed that Mystery above all mysteries to us when He with the two of His disciples was on the road to the village of Emmaus: *"Then He said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?"* (St. Luke 24:25-26) He fully revealed Himself in His resurrected and transfigured form only when He during the dinner took the bread, blessed it, and then distributed it to them. It was then that the eyes of their minds were opened and they *recognized* Him as the Resurrected Lord. The

joyous reality of the Resurrection cannot be understood with the human mind, but only through the eyes of faith. And even then it not just anywhere, but in the Divine Liturgy, that we can recognize the Resurrected and glorified Savior Christ. The event of Resurrection is experienced in the Liturgical communion with others, that is, in the Church of Christ. Therefore, the Resurrection concerns not only individuals, but the entire community, the People of God as a whole. By the gift of God it is an all-encompassing, ecclesial event of the entire universe.

By His Cross and Resurrection Christ has finally destroyed enmity and has unified mankind in one Body and one Nation. That is why One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church is the Church of the reconciliation of all and of everything. That is why we, the reconciled, filled with the new true life, have become "*fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.*" (Ephesians 2:19)

Unfortunately, even in the midst of this heavenly-earthly Paschal joy, we are facing many temptations and tribulations with terrorism, wars, and the loss of life throughout the world. The cries and agony of victims which come to us with the greatest of speed through modern means of communication wound our hearts. Various and limitless disappointments, sadness and dissatisfaction are overtaking our souls. All around us, injustice and hate rule and truth is being made relative. People who live a virtuous life are slandered and persecuted. That is not only on a personal and local plane, but also on a global scale. We are witnesses that throughout the world today basic Christian values are being pushed into the background, and mankind is not only being offered, but also in some places being forced, not only to accept those systems that are foreign to Christianity, but also those totally opposed to it.

In such a devious world, we, the Orthodox Christians, are called to witness by our example to our loved ones and neighbors, near and far, the victory of life over death and of sense over nonsense. The Church must not live only for itself as a closed religious community, concerned only with questions of personal piety. She is obliged to be the bearer of peace and reconciliation, love and solidarity to the entire human race through the joy and experience of the Resurrection.

Let us ask ourselves: what kind of faith do we have? Do we really believe that Christ rose from the dead? Does this Event have crucial saving consequences for us and for our lives? In the answer to this simple question lie the answers to all our troubles, fears and insecurities; the answers to all our temptations, existential dilemmas, psychological conflicts, moral, societal, national and all other challenges, of both a personal and global character. "*If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.*" (Romans 10:9)

In this year when we celebrate the great jubilee of our Church, the eight centuries of its autocephaly, we pray for the fullness of our blessed nation, living in the fatherland and abroad, that it may rejoice in the Resurrection of Christ, and in love and in harmony may preserve the unity of our Holy Church; that no personal or any earthly interests may ever supplant the interests of the Church of Christ, nor of the general welfare of mankind.

With special earnestness, we pray today to the Resurrected Christ God that, through the intercession of Saint Sava, the Holy Tsar Lazar and all the saints of our nation, peace and freedom may return to our crucified Kosovo and Metohija, our spiritual cradle and our Jerusalem, where the greatest Serbian holy shrines are, the pearls of Orthodox spirituality, Serbian culture and of the entire Christian and world spiritual heritage.

God, by spreading His arms upon the Cross, has embraced and drawn to Himself all people and all of creation and has come to dwell within us as Eternal Love, *full of grace and truth*. Therefore let us, by likening ourselves unto Him, embrace each other with God's crucified and resurrected Love! Not only those who love us, but also our enemies! Let us forgive them, because the Lord also forgave us our sins on the Cross, saying, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." (St. Luke 23:34) "If there were no words: *forgive me*, and *may it be forgiven*, human life would be totally unbearable", said the Serbian Chrysostom, Saint Bishop Nikolai. So, let us forgive each other! Let us reconcile with each other! Let us embrace each other, that we may walk the sacred path of Divine Love! Let us witness the Love and live by Him!

Expressing with one mouth and one heart these truths, all of us Orthodox Christians throughout the world today exclaim: "This is the day of resurrection. Let us be illumined by the feast. Let us embrace each other. Let us call "Brothers" of even those that hate us, and forgive all by the resurrection, and so let us cry: Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing life."

Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!

Given at the Serbian Patriarchate in Belgrade on Pascha 2019.

Your intercessors before the Resurrected Christ:

**Archbishop of Pec,
Metropolitan of Belgrade-Karlovci and
Serbian Patriarch IRINEJ**

Metropolitan of Montenegro and the Coastlands **AMPHILOHIJE**
Metropolitan of Zagreb and Ljubljana **PORFIRIJE**
Metropolitan of Dabro-Bosna **CHRYSOSTOM**

Bishop of Sabac **LAVRENTIJE**
Bishop of Srem **VASILIJE**
Bishop of Banja Luka **JEFREM**
Bishop of Budim **LUKIJAN**
Bishop of Banat **NIKANOR**
Bishop of New Gracanica-Midwestern America **LONGIN**
Bishop of Canada **MITROPHAN**
Bishop of Backa **IRINEJ**
Bishop of Great Britain and Scandinavia **DOSITEJ**
Bishop of Western Europe **LUKA**

Bishop of Zicha **JUSTIN**
Bishop of Vranje **PAHOMIJE**
Bishop of Sumadija **JOVAN**
Bishop of Branicevo **IGNATIJE**
Bishop of Zvornik-Tuzla **FOTIJE**
Bishop of Mileseva **ATANASIJE**
Bishop of Budimlje and Niksic **JOANIKIJE**
Bishop of Düsseldorf and Germany **GRIGORIJE**
Bishop of Valjevo **MILUTIN**
Bishop of Ras and Prizren **TEODOSIJE**
Bishop of Western America **MAXIM**
Bishop of Gornji Karlovac **GERASIM**
Bishop of Eastern America **IRINEJ**
Bishop of Krusevac **DAVID**
Bishop of Slavonia **JOVAN**
Bishop of Austria and Switzerland **ANDREJ**
Bishop of Bihac-Petrovac **SERGIJE**
Bishop of Timok **ILARION**
Bishop of Nis **ARSENIJE**
Bishop of Australia and New Zealand Metropolitanate **SILUAN**
Bishop of Buenos Aires and South Central America **KIRIL**
Bishop of Dalmatia **NIKODIM**
Bishop of Osek-Polje and Baranja **HERUVIM**
Bishop of Zahumlje and Hercegovina **DIMITRIJE**

Vicar Bishop of Moravica **ANTONIJE**
Vicar Bishop of Remezijan **STEFAN**
Vicar Bishop of Mohac **ISIHJE**
Vicar Bishop of Diokleia **METODIJE**

THE ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF OCHRID:

Archbishop of Ochrid and Metropolitan of Skoplje **JOVAN**
Bishop of Polog and Kumanovo **JOAKIM**
Bishop of Bregalnica **MARKO**
Vicar Bishop of Stobi **DAVID**

[Path of Orthodoxy translation]