



UKRAINIAN GREEK CATHOLIC CHURCH
SVIATOSLAV SHEVCHUK
MAJOR ARCHBISHOP OF KYIV-HALYCH

EASTER PASTORAL LETTER
OF HIS BEATITUDE SVIATOSLAV

Most Reverend Archbishops and Bishops,
Very Reverend and Reverend Fathers,
Venerable Brothers and Sisters in Monastic and Religious Life,
Dearlly Beloved Laity in Christ of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church

Christ is Risen!

*Bearing torches let us meet the bridegroom, Christ,
As He comes forth from His tomb,
And let us greet, with joyful song, the saving Pascha of God.*

Ode 5, Paschal Canon

Beloved in Christ!

Today the heart is jubilant, the soul rejoices, feet rush to church, arms stretch out to the Lord, resounding song comes from our mouths, for this day is truly the feast of feasts and solemnity of solemnities: "Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and to those in the tombs bestowing life!" As smoke which is blown away by the wind, and as wax which disappears in fire (see. Ps 67:2-3), so today all our anguish, worries, doubts, and fears dissipate and lose their power over us: "This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it" (Ps 117:24).

Let us meet... Christ, as He comes forth from His tomb...

We go to encounter the One, who emerges from the grave, having undergone horrific torture, suffering, and death. In rising, Christ passes from death to live. He emerges from the confines of a limited and narrow tomb, with the entrance closed by a stone and signed with a seal. Christ passes by the guard, placed there at Pilate's command. The glorified body of the Saviour cannot be held, neither by time, nor by the space of earthly human existence, as we pray in the Anaphora of the Liturgy of St. Basil the Great: "He

loosed the pangs of death, rising on the third day and making a way for all flesh to the resurrection of the dead - for it was not possible for the Prince of life to be mastered by corruption."

Christ opened a new Pascha of God, for not Moses, but the God-Man leads humankind - not from Egyptian captivity, but from death to life, and from earth to the heavens. The paschal matins service depicts this paschal movement, this exodus of the New Covenant as that of a Bridegroom emerging from the wedding chamber., This image is familiar to us! Already, during Passion Week, the Church prepared us for the coming of Christ the Bridegroom: "O faithful, let us be on fire with love for the Bridegroom, and with lamps burning, let us go out to meet Him. May the light of our virtues shine brightly, and may our faith be radiant. With the wise virgins, let us prepare to enter the banquet hall of the Lord; for the divine Spouse offers us the crown of immortality." (Great Tuesday, Matins, Lenten Sessional Hymns). And lo, the grave is transformed into a chamber, with Christ's Resurrection funeral services are transformed into the joy of encountering the Bridegroom, who dispels sorrow, fulfills the time of expectation, and invites us to the paschal feast of the Heavenly Kingdom. With Christ's Resurrection, we become partakers of eternal life-not observers, but real participants in the life of God's children.

Bearing torches let us meet the Bridegroom!

This past year we have lived as if in a tomb "behind the locked doors" of quarantine restrictions that periodically intensified. Our churches and monasteries in some parts of the world were truly inaccessible to worshipping faithful, out of concern for the safety and health of both clergy and religious, as well as the laity. However, today Paschal Matins help us accept these restrictions as a form of expectation-of the exodus and of the risen Bridegroom-Christ, whose arrival is awaited vigilantly in the night by the wedding guests (see Mt 25:1-13). And here we sense that this time is approaching. The Bridegroom draws near, announcing to us that the exodus has begun. The light of hope shines through, that with God's help we will be able to emerge from this global "incarceration," to return from the virtual world to the expanse of our churches and communities, in order to pray together "with one heart and one voice" in God's assembly. But for this to happen, is it especially important that the torch of the Resurrection-the light of faith, hope, and love-not be extinguished.

In going out to meet the risen Christ this paschal night we carry our torches of faith! Even in circumstances of strict quarantine we've learned to practice our faith, to differentiate between its substance and its forms of expression. We may have had to change our practices and customs, but we did not weaken our relationship of faith with our Lord God, a faith that filled our life with light through prayer and daily reflection on the Word of God, through participation in the Divine Liturgy in a different way, through a heartfelt desire to receive the Body and Blood of our Saviour. The torch of faith in us did not go out.

We carry today the torches of our hope! Drawing strength from our faith, we have fostered expectations that we will overcome and survive these complex times. Christian hope gave us strength to continue living, to adapt to a culture of preserving a healthy life in these new circumstances. We shone our torches of faith and hope in the resurrection even as we mourned our dead. When the world became disoriented and lost its bearings, the torch of Christian hope helped us find an exit-exodus, move towards an encounter with the Bridegroom, who today joyfully and victoriously emerges from the tomb!

We are encountering the risen Christ, carrying our torches of love in action-of God and neighbour. As the wise virgins of the Gospel parable (see Mt 25:1-13), this pandemic night of waiting for the coming of the Bridegroom filled our lamps with works of mercy and service to our neighbour. We understood that we will find our way out of these complex circumstances of life only if we create authentic and vibrant Christian communities, built on mutual assistance and sacrificial service to one another. The torch of love for neighbour in us did not die out, and on this paschal night it allows us to go out to meet the risen Christ!

And let us greet, with joyful song, the saving Pascha of God.

We joyfully praise Christ, who emerges from the tomb, as a spring bird, who, with the thaw, begins to sing louder and more cheerfully, and does not cease, even when it senses that the branch on which it is perched is swaying-for it knows that it has wings of faith, hope, and love! Let us gaze upon the body of Christ, covered in wounds from brutal scourging, without breath or life. A body crucified and buried, it would seem, irrevocably and forever. And yet, the Spirit of God revives this broken human body, which in the brightness of Divine glory comes out to meet us and lay a path for us to eternity. This is the salvation of which we sing today: "O Son of God, who are the giver of life to the whole world, for this the whole world glorifies You."

Therefore, if we are under the impression that humanity has become like a body tortured unto death by the pandemic-and our people suffer this evil in the midst of the horrors of war, which continue now for the eighth year-let us gaze towards the Bridegroom, who emerges from the tomb fully alive and surrounded by light, and let us not doubt even for a moment, that a light-filled resurrection also awaits us, that we too are true partakers of the Resurrection which we celebrate today by the power and action of the Holy Spirit!

Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ! On this bright, joyful day I greet all of you with the Pascha of our Lord. Especially in this Year of St. Joseph the Betrothed I greet all our husbands-fathers. My wish for you is that you be a light of faith, hope, and love for your families, models and icons of God's love, fidelity, courage, creativity, industriousness, patience, openness-for your beloved spouses and children. Christ is the only icon of God the Father, but children, as they grow up, develop an image of Him on the basis of their family experience and the example of their dad.

I greet those who in this pandemic feel lonely and abandoned. Remember: when you pray, the risen Lord is always with you, and by the power of Christian prayer you are united with the entire community of His Church. You are not alone!

I greet all the sick and frail, as well as medical professionals and your family and friends, who care for you. On this feast of victory over death I ask you: cherish the gift of life, and embrace bodily suffering as sacrifice in prayer, for this is "a spiritual fragrance" pleasing to the Lord.

To our soldiers and to those who remain in occupied territories and in Crimea, I send you my sincere paschal greeting and assure you of my prayers, that the risen Lord strengthen you and keep you alive and healthy.

I embrace with a fatherly love all the clergy, religious, and faithful in Ukraine and throughout the world, and sincerely wish you all a blessed Easter feast, a tasty sharing of our traditional blessed egg, and a Paschal joy that is full of light.

The grace of our Risen Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Christ is risen! - Truly, He is risen!

+ *Sviatoslav*

Given in Kyiv

at the Patriarchal Cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ,
on the day of our Venerable Father and Confessor Theophanes of Sigriana,

Our Holy Father Gregory the Dialogist, Pope of Rome
and Blessed Priest-Martyr Omelian Kovch

March 25 (12), 2021 A.D