

**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,
Dearly Beloved Laity in Christ of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church**

Christ is Risen!

*When those bound by chains in the realm of Hades
Saw Your boundless mercy,
They hastened to the light with joy, O Christ,
Praising the eternal Pascha.
Ode 5, Paschal Canon*

Beloved in Christ!

This year we are celebrating Christ's Pascha in particular circumstances. Many of us spent the season of Great Lent at home, isolated from others, physically distant from our churches and parish communities. Yet even in such challenging conditions, no one has the power to prevent the joyful movement of people everywhere towards the Light, in order that, with faith in Christ's resurrection, with hope in God's victory and with the love of the community of God's children, we might greet one another with a jubilant and resounding "Christ is risen!"

Over three thousand years ago the Lord heard and received the cry and lament of the sons and daughters of Israel, languishing in captivity in Egypt. On the night of Passover, by the blood of the Paschal lamb, the Lord protected his people from the angel of death and led them from the house of slavery. Subsequently, the escape from Egypt under the leadership of Moses brought another danger at the shore of the sea – deep waters ahead, the pharaoh with horses and chariots behind. And the sea parted before them! Thus, for the people of God, the Passover came to be associated with salvation from death. Every Israelite, having lived through the liberation from Egypt, experienced his God as a Deliverer: I escaped death! All those who were saved came to see themselves as one people: we were together in

slavery, together we survived death, we share one and the same God—a Saviour and Liberator. We are the People of God!

In the risen Christ the passage from death to life transcends all boundaries of human history. The Pascha-Passover of the Old Testament was limited to the salvation of a limited circle of people from a danger that was limited in time. Our Pascha, the Pascha of our Lord, the Eternal Pascha, as we sing in our Paschal Matins, is not only salvation from the temporary danger of a physical illness and mere bodily death. Today Christ grants salvation from the very cause of death—to all people, of all times and nations. We aren't speaking here merely of salvation from an emerging sickness or protection from the sword, even an angelic one, as it was in the case of the Israelites in Egypt. Having gone from suffering and death to the resurrection, Christ, in the words of the Apostle Paul, destroyed deadly sin and crucified it on the cross along with its hellish power to enslave.

The Eternal Pascha is a victory and a mockery over the very sting of death, as the Apostle proclaims today: "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Cor. 15:54-57). In his resurrection, Christ removed our enslaving chains of fear before death, and transformed that fear, by granting us paschal entrance into a new life. With the resurrection, we have opened before us a door that leads us from that which passes away to that which lasts forever. The Pascha of our Lord opens for us the door to joyful eternity. We were together in the chains of death—today, as the united People of God of the New Testament, we share in the common experience of joy in the resurrection.

When those bound by chains in the realm of Hades saw Your boundless mercy...

In the face of the global pandemic, we suddenly recognized that as humans we are weak and mortal. The coronavirus brought a deadly danger to the rich and poor, to all people, with no regard for place of residence around the globe, for race or religious persuasion. Possibly, for the first time, we came to understand that we are all equally vulnerable and in need, but we have also come to see ourselves as one human family: that, which affected people in one corner of the planet—carried over to and impacted people on the other side of the world—it personally affected each one of us.

The entire world has found itself as if bound together by the chains of Hades. The fear of becoming ill and dying, the pain of losing family members, friends and acquaintances, the darkness of loneliness and despair in circumstances of enforced isolation, the ruin of new methods of communication and the collapse of world economic systems have become our common universal chains. As shackles restrict a slave, so have the strict rules of quarantine—the only possible way to fight this deadly disease—suddenly restricted all humanity: airports have ceased to operate, trains have stopped running, borders between nations, having almost receded from our consciousness, once again have been reasserted as impenetrable iron gates.

In the midst of this darkness of fear and captivity for contemporary humankind, we have a unique opportunity to grasp anew what it means to be a Christian. As Christians, we are those, who in the Mystery of Baptism, have already died to this world and have risen

together with our Saviour! We are the heirs of the apostles, who saw the Risen One with their own eyes and with their own hands touched his glorified Body, the Body that went from death on the cross to eternal life. In these circumstances, which temporarily deprived us of the possibility of fully participating in the liturgical life of our churches and communities, we rediscovered the importance of spiritual life in our Christian families, traditionally called domestic churches. Unintentionally, many of us have found ourselves thinking of the time when we celebrated Easter in the underground, how we, not having the possibility of coming together in church, were joined with the Eucharistic Christ at Divine Liturgy being broadcasted on the Vatican, and we held our Easter baskets before our radio receivers to be blessed. No one and nothing can deprive Christians of the joy of Christ's Resurrection! Families, in which Christians consciously and maturely confront today's challenges, in a special way, demonstrate their character as domestic churches, becoming for its members homes of profoundly intense prayer, blessing, sacrifice and spiritual growth, places of encounter with the living Christ. At the same time, we are discovering new methods of spiritual unity, over which no restrictive measures have any power, for that which unites us is the one spiritual body of the Church, that is, one hope that belongs to our call – "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (see Eph. 4:4-5). It is, indeed, in this spirit of hope that today we celebrate Pascha and pray for its fulfilment in the restoration and renewal of ecclesial and spiritual life.

In response to the darkness of separation and the fear one has of the other, as a possible carrier of the virus of death, on this night we encounter the living risen Christ, who passes through all closed quarantine doors, in order to encounter us, his disciples: "On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you!'" (John 20:19). Fear before all that might be touched by a person's hand in a time of epidemic, gives way to the hand of the living God – the risen Christ, which carrying the wounds of the nails reaches out to us and reveals to us God's limitless mercy! All of our sins and illnesses, pandemics and fears are conquered by God's love. The physical chains of the present time have no power before the spiritual freedom of faith and spirit, before eternal life, given to us in Christ Jesus. In good time He will break down the doors of quarantine, take away the fear that lies ready to pounce on us behind these doors, and He will call on us to proclaim to the world, as once did the apostles, "Christ is risen!"

They hastened to the light with joy, O Christ, praising the eternal Pascha.

In celebrating Pascha, we believe and already see that the present pandemic will surely end, and humanity will emerge the better for it, with a sense of solidarity and unity among us, with a deeper understanding of the meaning and calling of human life. On this feast, Christ gives us the Light of hope, open to all people without exception. No quarantine, no social distancing, can block our path to him. On the contrary, all of us together, those alive today, and those who have departed into eternity, as one People of God, celebrate the joy of victory over death. In our affliction and pain, we receive hope and comfort. We have been given eternal liberation from our spiritual chains. Therefore, let us praise the eternal Pascha!

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ! On this bright, joyful day I hasten to each of your homes, in order to share with you the joy of deliverance given us in the Resurrection. To all of you, in Ukraine and throughout the world, I send you my sincere prayers and heartfelt greeting. I bless you all: the well and the sick, the strong and the weak, the young and the old, parents and children.

I hasten also to all hospitals and care centres, in order to share with you the joyful and life-giving news and to encourage you to carry your suffering in faith, with a spirit of self-sacrifice. I especially greet and bless our doctors and medical staff – all who heroically care for the sick and those needing assistance in these extraordinary circumstances. I unite myself spiritually to all the soldiers at the front lines and their families, to the wounded, to all refugees and to those who remain in the occupied territories, to all captives and prisoners for the sake of their conscience. All of you who are alone or far from your loved ones, I embrace you with fatherly love.

May the risen Christ transform this moment of weeping and pain, universally experienced by all humankind, into the paschal joy of victory over illness and death, just as this morning he transformed the weeping of the Myrrh-bearing women into joy! May he grant us in every moment the gift of victory over sin, and a rebirth of love and hope through an increase in our lives of the divine gift of eternal life, which we all received in Baptism! I sincerely wish each of you 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 Saint Cyril, Archbishop of Jerusalem,
March 31 (18), 2020 A.D.