



The Serbian Orthodox Church to her spiritual children at Pascha, 2013

IRINEJ

By the grace of God

Orthodox Archbishop of Pec, Metropolitan of Belgrade-Karlovci and Serbian Patriarch, with the 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! INDEED HE IS RISEN!

*“For you will not leave my soul in Sheol,
nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.”*
(Psalm 16:10)

True, indeed, is this word of God’s prophet by which he announces the radiant feast of Christ Resurrection, this feast of great Christian joy and spiritual celebration. If there is a day among all days for celebration, that is today — the day we celebrate the Resurrection of Christ our God. Thanks to this holy day, all the days of mankind — from the beginning to the end of the world — receive their true meaning, and all that has happened in those days and is happening receives its proper meaning. If there is an event to which Christianity can be narrowed down, then that event truly is the Resurrection of Christ. If there is a feast to which all feasts can be narrowed down, then again, that is the Resurrection of Christ. That is why the Church calls the feast day of Christ’s Resurrection the *Feast of Feasts*; and in the Church we sing: *This is the day the Lord has made! Let us rejoice and be glad in it! (Psalm 118:24).*

The Resurrection of Christ is the foundation of Christianity, the foundation of the Church, because by it Christ has confirmed His entire teaching. Up until the Resurrection He taught about eternal life; with His Resurrection He has confirmed His teaching and has shown that He truly IS eternal Life. Up until the Resurrection, He taught about the unceasing love of God towards people. By the Resurrection He has proven that love, since for man’s sake He has conquered the greatest enemy of mankind – death. If He had not risen from the dead, Christ would have been neither God nor Lord, neither Savior nor Redeemer, but an ordinary man. It is only in the light of His Resurrection that His life and all His works become clear and explainable. Saint Justin of Celije said concerning this: *“Take away the Resurrection from*

Christ, and you will have taken away His Divinity, because you will have taken from Him that which makes Him God-Man (Theanthropos), and Savior, and the Resurrected One.” Only in Christ’s Resurrection did people recognize in Him the God-Man. The Christian faith would be impossible and meaningless without Christ’s Resurrection, because death, the main enemy of mankind, would have remained unconquered. This truth enables the Apostle to the nations to say: “For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep.” (1 Corinthians 15:16-20). Christ’s Resurrection gives meaning to heaven and earth, and to man and to the history of mankind. By worshipping the Living God, we worship our immortal and eternal human dignity. When Christ resurrected, the holy yeast of immortality entered into the human soul, into the human being and the human mind, and it enlightens each person so that human life receives eternal sense and eternal meaning.

The truth of the Resurrection echoes especially powerfully in our time full of tribulations and suffering — a time which, as seldom before, poses questions about the meaning and goal of life. We are witnesses to the fact that each day there are more and more lonely and forgotten people; that there are many homes without warm human words, so many children robbed of their parents’ attention and love. Hospitals are filled with sufferers, those who suffer in body and soul. Phenomena such as violence, terror, robbery of others’ property, a never before seen restlessness which has overtaken the souls of people throughout the world, a tendency towards crime, and the threatening of the peace and happiness of others, are the results of spiritually deserted and morally weakened souls, in most cases among young people who stray before they even find a path in their life. Today, as in days past, selfishness and dishonesty destroy every real life in community, all communal good and property. Distrust and theft, violence and robbery, violate the person and his or her security and dignity.

For mankind, there is no greater mystery and unknown than the existence of evil in the world. At times it appears that it has become concentrated and condensed so much that we can clearly see it or even touch it. Evil appears spectacularly; it loves to expose itself and to fill all printed and electronic media with its message: ‘I am unconquerable — life makes no sense because I reign in it.’ This message points towards the events of Great and Holy Friday: evil not only reigns on the earth, but it appears to be stronger even than God, for Him too it can cast into the tomb — this is the message of the Evil one, not comprehending that Christ by His death conquers death.

From the moment he comes into being, a person for his entire life longs for peace,

happiness and success in life. He likes to be recognized and well known, to do works that will outlive him, to leave behind a name for himself. And even the simplest of people, not only the gifted, the geniuses and those of worldly stature, enjoy it when someone praises something of theirs or admires their actions. Oftentimes in life, though, we do not succeed, we are not happy, nor do we know how to use God's gift for good. There are many more of those who leave behind themselves more days filled with pain and unrest, than of those with many days of happiness and peace.

Is this because evil is stronger than us, or because we do not know how to live? What are we missing in order that we too might become happy? The answer for Christians is well known: in the first place, it is that we learn how to truly love, and in the second, to learn to forgive more. Never can a person reach such true heights as when he loves and gives of himself out of love. Likewise, he ascends to heights when he forgives and when in forgiving he does not turn to insults. Never does a person look so much like God as when he prays to God for forgiveness and asks his brother for forgiveness. Love and forgiveness offer us unlimited joy. A person is greatest when he understands that every bad word he utters to someone else returns to him and hurts him. We cannot bring evil to someone else without first hurting ourselves. Everything we endure and then reconcile with forgiveness gives us the strength to be victorious, whatever evil it might be. *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God* – said our Savior (Matthew 5:9); and peacemakers are all people of big heart who love and who forgive.

Life is beautiful only when it is imbued with love, and it is meaningful only when we bring ourselves into the life of others with love, when we are one with the hungry and thirsty, with the poor and persecuted, and when we are in prison with those who have been convicted. Love is not just a word. Love is God's power only when it is permeated and filled with sacrifice, with giving of oneself for others, for the good of others. A life with meaning is a call to love, a call to service to God and to every human being. As long as we understand life to be self-serving, there will be conflicts, restlessness and wars in the world. When a man recognizes that he is called to give himself for the general good of all people and to multiply his talent by giving it out for the good of his neighbor, every time he does a good deed, he has a foretaste of the Heavenly Kingdom in history.

In the great and all-encompassing Mystery of Divine Love, permeated with the Resurrection of Christ, the Mystery of Christ's Church is revealed and created, to which all people and all creatures of God are called. The Precious Cross, which Saint Constantine the Equal-to-the-Apostles saw in the skies and under which sign he won in battle 1700 years ago, with its vertical and horizontal lines annihilates all barriers among people and creatures and gathers all mankind in one community, a unique living organism which is called to eternity and

the unending Kingdom of God.

In this community, gathered around the Resurrected Christ, *there is neither Greek nor Jew..., slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.* (Colossians 3:11) That is why we Orthodox Christians confess *One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church*, one People of God gathered around Christ from all corners of the earth, from all nations and from all ages.

From this it follows that it is an unforgiveable sin to attempt to lay a foundation for the Church, whether in this world or the next, whether universally or locally, on anything or anybody other than the Resurrected Christ and His Precious Cross. The Church is founded on Christ as the Cornerstone, on the Prophets, Apostles and the Holy Fathers, and she is filled with the Holy Mysteries and holy virtues. Her structure and historical order is based on this, her inner Mystery, calling all the peoples of the earth to be baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and to observe all that the Lord has commanded to His disciples (cf. Matthew 28:19-20). We especially emphasize that the Church is founded only on the Resurrected Savior because, unfortunately, even in our time some people — in their ignorance or evil-mindedness — try to found the Church on themselves, and in doing so they are rending apart the living organism of God's Church, leading some individuals into the destruction of "the Land of No Return". Let us guard ourselves, dear brothers and sisters and spiritual children, from all old and new idols! Let us live with the eternal truth of the Catholic Church of God, which alone gives freedom from sin, the devil and death!

Let us firmly plant our life in the Church upon love and forgiveness! Let us keep in mind that God will be the final Judge of all, and that He will measure solely according to the yardstick of good, of love for God and love for man. It is necessary to follow these values in our lives — and that means without exception, without justification and without any excuse based on the easy or hard circumstances of our life — inasmuch as we wish to be numbered among God's children. The last word will not be man's, but God's. Never forget this teaching of our holy ancestors, dear children of Saint Sava, who are scattered willingly or unwillingly throughout all the world's meridians from Australia and America to Europe and Asia.

Calling all of you to love for God and love for man, our dear spiritual children, we call upon you to always remain with Him Who has conquered all suffering and temptations, Who in the end has conquered death as our greatest enemy; that remaining with Him, we may remain in soul and heart with our suffering people in Kosovo and Metohija, and in all earthly regions where Orthodox Christians are suffering because of their name and their faith in the Christ Who said: "*Fear not, I have overcome the world*". (John 16:33)

By His Death and Resurrection the Lord has conquered our death and gave to people an unconquerable and imperishable power, which cannot be surpassed by any power of this world.

That power is not manifested as evil — with self-promotion and worldly noise. On the contrary, it is manifested in peace, endurance, and in the seeming weaknesses of the children of the Light. He Who has triumphed over the world grants power to those who are His, that they too may triumph through peace and endurance over the fear within themselves, as well as over their lack of faith; to triumph over all violence inflicted upon the children of God; to endure violence, again with peace and endurance, confident that God's power is everlasting, while human power is only temporary; that all the powers of this world have come and disappeared while God has remained, and that His Church has remained standing and unshakable. It was like that, it is like that, and it will be like that. This truth is being attested to from his prison cell by the Archbishop of Ochrid and Metropolitan of Skoplje Jovan, to whom we send our words of love, comfort, courage and hope, that the Resurrected Christ may open the eyes even of his persecutors.

Believing in the Resurrection of Christ, we believe in the unending renewal of human dignity. Believing in the Resurrection of Christ and in the general resurrection, we believe in the possibility of the resurrection of human morals, of a sense of shame, and of goodness! Only faith in the Resurrection can renew faith and faithfulness in unselfish love. Only faith in immortality can burn up with its flames selfishness as a false principle of life, revealing that the solution and our salvation from our darkness and from all of our hopelessness lies in self-sacrificial love towards God and our neighbor!

Dear brothers and sisters, our spiritual children, let us rejoice in our Resurrected Lord! By rejoicing in Him we are rejoicing in ourselves because in Him we become eternal and immortal. In worshipping Him, the Resurrected One, we worship eternal Life! By partaking of His Body and Blood in Communion, we become one with Him and we gain life eternal. In the Resurrected Christ we discover all of our ancestors. All that which is good in the history of the world and in the history of our people rests in Him, and it becomes eternal and indestructible. In the Resurrected Christ we are in communion with our Saints, and they with us! In the Resurrected Christ justice always triumphs! With Him and in Him it will triumph even in our days! If the Resurrected Christ is with us and we with Him, then – who will be against us? With these thoughts and wishes, we greet you with the most joyous salutation:

Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!

Given at the Serbian Patriarchate in Belgrade at Pascha 2013.
Your prayerful intercessors before the Risen Lord:

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

Metropolitan of Zagreb and Ljubljana JOVAN
Metropolitan of Montenegro and the Coastlands AMPHILOHIJE
Metropolitan of Dabro-Bosna NIKOLAJ

Bishop of Sabac LAVRENTIJE
Bishop of Zvornik-Tuzla VASILIJE
Bishop of Srem VASILIJE
Bishop of Banja Luka JEFREM
Bishop of Budim LUKIJAN
Bishop of Canada GEORGIJE
Bishop of Banat NIKANOR
Bishop of New Gracanica – Midwestern America LONGIN
Bishop of Eastern America MITROPHAN
Bishop of Backa IRINEJ
Bishop of Great Britain and Scandinavia DOSITEJ
Bishop of Bihac and Petrovac CHRYSOSTOM
Bishop of Osijek and Baranja LUKIJAN
Bishop of Central Europe CONSTANTINE
Bishop of Western Europe LUKA
Bishop of Timok JUSTIN
Bishop of Vranje PAHOMIJE
Bishop of Sumadija JOVAN
Bishop of Slavonia SAVA
Bishop of Branicevo IGNATIJE
Bishop of Milesevo FILARET
Bishop of Dalmatia FOTIJE
Bishop of Budimlje and Niksic JOANIKIJE
Bishop of Zahumlje and Hercegovina GRIGORIJE
Bishop of Valjevo MILUTIN
Bishop of Raska-Prizren TEODOSIJE
Bishop of Nis JOVAN
Bishop of Western America MAXIM
Bishop of Gornji Karlovac GERASIM
Bishop of Australia and New Zealand IRINEJ
Bishop of Krusevac DAVID
Retired Bishop of Zahumlje and Hercegovina ATANASIJE
Vicar Bishop of Hvosno ATANASIJE
Vicar Bishop of Jegar PORFIRIJE
Vicar Bishop of Moravica ANTONIJE
Vicar Bishop of Lipljan JOVAN
Vicar Bishop of Remezijan ANDREJ

THE ARCHDIOCESE OF OCHRID

Archbishop of Ochrid and Metropolitan of Skoplje JOVAN
Bishop of Polos and Kumanovo JOAKIM
Bishop of Bregal and locum tenens of the Diocese of Bitolj MARKO
Vicar Bishop of Stobija DAVID

[Path of Orthodoxy translation]