Paschal Message of Patriarch Kirill of Moscow And All Russia

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to the Archpastors, Pastors, Deacons, Monks and Nuns

and All the Faithful Children of the Russian Orthodox Church

Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us,

that we should be called the sons of God

(1 Jn 3:1)

Your Graces the archpastors, all-honourable priests,

God-loving monks and nuns, dear brothers and sisters:

CHRIST IS RISEN!

With these joyous and life-affirming words I greet you, my beloved, from the depths of my heart and congratulate you all on the great and saving feast of Pascha.

The Church calls this day 'the feast of feasts and the festival of festivals' through the lips of one of her great ecumenical teachers, St. Gregory the Theologian. Herein is contained a profound spiritual meaning, for 'Pascha is as far exalted above all – not only those which are merely human and crawl on the ground but also those which are of Christ himself and are celebrated in for him – as the sun is exalted above the stars' (*Oration 45: On Holy Pascha*). The glorious resurrection of the Lord Jesus, which has become the most important event in the history of the salvation of the human race, contains the very meaning and profound essence of our faith, the heart and mighty power of the Christian message to the world. In these days what we preach may be encapsulated in these three words: Christ is risen! 'In saying this, what more can I say? All has been said!' proclaims St. Philaret, Metropolitan of Moscow (*Homily for Holy Pascha*, 18 April 1826).

The history of humanity after the fall of Adam is the history of the unceasing struggle of good with evil. Having shown disobedience to the Creator, people embarked upon their own life and sin came into the world, and with it suffering and disease, corruption and death. Yet, most importantly, sin separated people from God who did not create evil and who does not know any falsehood. No righteous man has

ever been able to overcome this tragic division, this great spiritual abyss, as it is impossible to do so purely through human endeavour. And so it was that, as St. Gregory the Theologian says, 'there arose within us a need for a God made flesh and made dead, that we might live' (*Oration 45: On Holy Pascha*).

In other words, Christ's resurrection has become the breach into eternity thanks to which human limitation has been overcome and the thirst to be united with God has been satisfied. Pascha is the triumph of the Maker's boundless love for people, 'for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life' (Jn 3:16).

And yet what does it mean to celebrate Pascha in a world weighed down by pain and suffering, exhausted from war and conflict, replete with hatred and enmity? What does it mean to sing 'trampling down death by death and to those in the tombs he has given life,' when death remains the evident culmination of the earthly life of each one of us? Undoubtedly, Pascha does not abolish the real presence of death in the cosmos, but now human pain and the tragedy of our earthly life are surmounted by the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, who has granted to us, his disciples and followers, unconquerable hope in attainment of eternal life. Death is henceforth for us Christians no longer a parting but the joyful encounter and longed for reunification with God.

Christ, 'the first fruits of them that slept' (1 Cor 15:20), has shown us the only possible way of overcoming sin and death. This is the way of love. And it is to this love that we are called to bear witness before the whole world. And we are called in the first instance by the example of our own lives, for 'by this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another' (Jn 13:35).

Love, which according to the apostle Paul, 'is the bond of perfectness' (Col 3:14), is the loftiest and greatest of Christian virtues. When we enter eternity and are enabled to see the Lord, our faith will be transformed into knowledge, and our hope in salvation with be turned into reality by God's mercy. And yet, 'charity never faileth' (1 Cor 13:8) and does not know change.

As St. Ignatius Bryanchaninov so wonderfully writes, 'the perfection of Christianity lies in the perfect love of one's neighbour' (*Ascetic Essays: On Love of One's Neighbour*). What does 'perfect love' mean? It is a love that extends to a love for strangers, for ill-wishers and even for enemies. It is a sacrificial love which transcends all human reasoning as it cannot be contained by the framework of everyday worldly logic. We can attain it only through great spiritual endeavours which evoke the grace of God that grants to us the chance to respond to hatred with love and to evil with virtue.

It is precisely this love which Christ has shown to us when for our salvation he endured terrible humiliation, suffering on the cross and the agonizing death. By his all-conquering love, which fills all

things, hades was destroyed to its foundation and finally the gates of paradise were opened to all humanity. In all of life's circumstances we are called upon to remember that the powers of evil are indeed illusory and not so great, for they stand no comparison with the powers of love and virtue, the sole fount of which is God. Let us recall, too, that the best response to and the most effective means of resisting sin and falsehood is our sincere prayer that is lifted up from the depths of our heart, and first of all prayer which is communal, offered up in church in worship, and even more so communion of the Body and Blood of the Saviour in the mystery of the Eucharist.

In experiencing today great Paschal joy and contemplating with reverence and awe Christ the Giver of Life who has risen from the tomb, let us share this saving message with our neighbours and those far from us, so that they too may see the ineffable radiance of Divine Love and together with us 'bless and glorify the all-honorable and majestic name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit'.

May the saving light of Christ's resurrection, which surpasses all human comprehension, immutably illumine our way through life, enlightening and comforting us in making us participants and heirs of the kingdom of heaven.

Rejoice, my beloved, for

CHRIST GOD HAS TRULY RISEN!

/+KIRILL/

PATRIARCH OF MOSCOW AND ALL RUSSIA

Pascha

2016

In other languages:

- **Yakut**
- **Byelorussian**
- **Ukrainian**
- **Estonian**
- **Latvian**

- **Lithuanian**
- **Moldavian**
- **Azerbaijanian**
- **Tajik**
- **Turkman**
- **Kazakh**
- **Kirghiz**
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