Paschal Message by 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

Beloved in the Lord my brothers the archpastors, all-honourable fathers,

pious monks and nuns, dear brothers and sisters!

It is with joy that I greet you with the ancient and yet eternally new and life-affirming victorious exclamation:

CHRIST IS RISEN!

This wondrous resonance of truly life-creating words contains the foundation of our faith, the gift of hope and the fount of love.

Just yesterday, together with the Lord's disciples, we grieved at the death of our beloved Saviour, while today with the whole world, both visible and invisible, we sing triumphantly: 'For Christ has risen, the everlasting eternal joy!' (Canon of Holy Pascha). Just yesterday it would seem that the last hope for salvation had been lost, while today we have acquired firm expectation of eternal life 'in the never-fading Kingdom of God.' Just yesterday the ghost of corruption prevailed over creation, casting doubt over the meaning of our earthly life, while today we proclaim to each and all the great victory of Life over death.

The divinely-inspired apostle Paul spoke of the significance of the miracle that took place on that distant, and yet forever near to every Christian night; he tells us directly that this event has the greatest importance for our faith, for 'if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain' (1 Cor 15:14). The Lord's Passover is the very heart and invincible power of Christianity: as St. Philaret

of Moscow says, it 'creates hope, ignites love, inspires prayer, calls down grace, illumines wisdom, destroys all calamities and even death itself, gives vitality to life, makes bliss not a dream but a reality, glory not a phantom but the eternal lightning of the eternal light illuminating all things and defeating nobody' (Homily on the Day of Holy Pascha, 1826).

Belief in Christ's Resurrection is inextricably harnessed to the Church's belief that the incarnate Son of God, in redeeming the human race and tearing asunder the fetters of sin and death, has granted to us genuine spiritual freedom and the joy of being united with our Maker. We are all in full measure communicants of this precious gift of the Saviour, we who have gathered on this radiant night in Orthodox churches to 'enjoy the banquet of faith,' as St. John Chrysostom puts it.

Pascha is the culmination of the Saviour's path of thorns crowned with suffering and the sacrifice of Golgotha. It is not fortuitous that in both the writings of the Fathers and liturgical texts Christ is repeatedly called the 'First Warrior in the battle for our salvation.' 'For I have given you an example,' (Jn 13:15), the Lord says to his disciples and calls upon us all to follow the example of his life.

Yet how are we to imitate the Saviour? What sort of spiritual heroism can we apply to the realities of modern-day life? Today, when we utter the word 'heroism,' an image often arises in peoples' minds of a legendary warrior, a historical figure or famous hero from the past. Yet the meaning of spiritual heroism lies not in the acquisition of resounding fame or the gain of universal recognition. Through spiritual deeds, immutably linked to our inner endeavours and the limiting of oneself, we can know by experience what true and perfect love is, for the willingness to sacrifice oneself, which lies at the foundation of all spiritual deeds, is the highest manifestation of this feeling.

The Lord has called us to the feat of active love embedded in losing oneself in service to our neighbour, and even more so to those who especially need our support: the suffering, the sick, the lonely and the downcast. If this law of life, which is so clearly manifested and expressed in the earthly life of the Saviour, becomes the inheritance of the majority, then people will be truly happy. Indeed, in serving others, we gain incomparably more than we give: the Lord then enters our hearts and by communicating with divine grace all of human life is changed. As there can be no holiness without labour, as there can be no Resurrection without Golgotha, so too without spiritual feats the genuine spiritual and moral transformation of the human person is impossible.

When spiritual heroism becomes the substance not only of the individual but of an entire people, when in striving for the celestial world the hearts of millions of people are united, ready to defend their homeland and vindicate lofty ideals and values, then truly amazing, wondrous things happen that at times cannot be explained from the perspective of formal logic. The nation acquires enormous spiritual strength which no disasters or enemies are capable of overcoming. The truth of these words is evidently attested by the

Victory in the Great Patriotic War, achieved by the self-sacrificing heroism of our people. We shall mark the seventieth anniversary of this glorious date in the current year.

In afflictions and temptations we are called upon to preserve peace and courage, for we have been given the great and glorious promise of victory over evil. Can we be discouraged and despair? No! For we comprise the Church of Christ which, according to the Lord's true word, cannot be overcome by the 'gates of hell' (Mt 16:18), and Divine Revelation bears witness to us by foretelling that 'God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away' (Rev 21:4).

I prayerfully wish you all, Your Graces my brothers the archpastors, all-honourable fathers, dear brothers and sisters, strength of spirit and steadfastness in faith, peace and unfailing joy in the Lord, the Conqueror of death. Imbued by the light of Christ's Resurrection and in communing with the mystery of the Paschal miracle, let us share our exultant joy with those who are close to us and those far from us in testifying to all of the Saviour who has risen from the tomb.

May we all the days of our life be forever warmed, comforted and inspired to good deeds by the ardent words of the good news of Pascha which impart to us the true gift of the joy of life:

CHRIST IS RISEN!

HE IS RISEN INDEED!

/+KIRILL/

PATRIARCH OF MOSCOW AND ALL RUSSIA

Moscow

Pascha 2015

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- **Latvian**
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- **Moldavian**
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