

## PASTORAL LETTER ON THE FEAST OF OUR LORD'S RESURRECTION, 2015

† NICOLAE

*by the mercies of God*

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*To our beloved clergy and Orthodox faithful,  
peace and holy joy from Christ, the Risen Lord,  
and from us hierarchical blessings.*

*Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death  
and upon those in the tombs bestowing life!*

**Very Reverend Fathers,  
Beloved Faithful,**

**Christ is risen!**

We give glory to God because He has enabled us once again to proclaim the Lord's Resurrection, the victory of life over death, the raising up of all from the grave through the power of the Resurrection of Christ. After the period of Great Lent, a time of spiritual struggle to join ourselves to the Lord and allow Him to work in our lives, we again proclaim the good tidings of Christ's Resurrection and our own. It is fitting that we challenge ourselves to an understanding of this news for ourselves and for our world.

Many thousands of years ago, God made man as the crown of His creation. In the Liturgy that bears his name, St. Basil the Great expresses very beautifully this act of God's love: "having made man by taking dust from the earth, and having honored him with Your own image, O God, You placed him in a garden of delight, promising him eternal life and the enjoyment of everlasting blessings in the observance of Your commandments." Man was created from physical matter and adorned with the image of the Creator. From the beginning the purpose of creation was the perfecting of man, "immortal life," life without decay, life in which the Spirit that makes all things alive could bring physical matter to the "inheritance of eternal good things," to the eternity of God. But man fell from that state, "from paradise into this world," and was returned "to the earth from which he was taken" (Liturgy of St. Basil the Great). Man lost paradise and with it the possibility of eternity, and heard the punishment: "In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return" (Gen. 3:19).

The history of mankind since that time has been marked by this distancing from God and adherence to the earth. The nature of man and the nature of the world suffer the same abasement: "Not satisfied with the mission of priesthood offered by the nature of God, but through the intention of becoming god cutting off the inclination of the creation toward the Creator, man found a multitude of pleasures in creation. But nature rebelled, creation became man's enemy, and refused to give us food and to reveal its mysteries to us," says the theologian Panagiotis Nellas. The one who could have become immortal like God and have brought the entire creation to the perfection of God became subject to death, all through God's pedagogy. For death is allowed by God "so that evil would not be immortal," as the Holy Fathers say.

This history of mortal man and decaying creation is changed through the Lord's Resurrection. The angel proclaims to the myrrh-bearing women that the crucified Jesus is no longer in the place where He had lain, that His body has not returned to the earth as had happened until then with all mankind. The angel proclaims that the earth no longer has power over human nature. The body taken from the earth is

now suffused with the power of God that transforms physical matter, until then opaque and mortal, into a source of light, for it reveals the glory of God. The life that ended at the grave now receives a new meaning, of eternity, for death no longer means the end, but a passing over. Christ's being raised from the tomb shows that death has been conquered.

The songs from the night of Holy Pascha proclaim this victory over death and transfiguration of physical matter: "Now all is filled with light: Heaven and earth and the lower regions. Let all creation celebrate the rising of Christ, in which it is established" (Paschal Canon, Ode 3). And St. Nikolai Velimirovich proclaims, "Christ is risen, chosen people! The earth cannot harm Him, nor can the tomb restrain Him. Let your souls arise, you who are filled with the grace of Christ! Let the image of God within you shine, cleansed of earth and saved from mortal decay" (The Faith of Chosen People). The Resurrection of Christ meant victory over death as separation of man from God, but also transfiguration, the changing of the physical matter that through its corruption bore the signs of the death of man. Through the Resurrection the physical matter of the Body of Christ is fully transfigured, deified, made eternal. Thus is opened up the horizon of the understanding of the mystery of the transfiguration of our bodies and of the physical matter of the created world which will take place in the Kingdom of God. "Christianity believes... in an eternity of physical matter, of matter unceasingly transfigured by the infinite power and richness of spiritual life and of the divine energies. Christianity admits a kind of mystical materialism, it knows holy matter. For Holy is the Body of the Lord, through the receiving of which our bodies are sanctified," says Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae (Dogmatic Theology).

#### **Very Reverend Fathers, Beloved Faithful,**

Of this transfiguration of matter all of us partake who believe in the Resurrection of Christ and are partakers in the Mysteries of the Church. At every Divine Liturgy we receive His Body and Blood, which He took on Himself as fully human, subsequently transfigured through the Resurrection. We commune with the Risen Christ, we receive as food and drink the physical matter of His Body suffused with the power of the Spirit at the Resurrection. And this communion is a foretaste of the perfect communion in the heavenly Kingdom, as we confess in the prayer after communion: "O great and most holy Pascha, O Christ; O Wisdom, Word, and Power of God, grant us to partake of You more perfectly in the unwaning day of Your kingdom." The partaking "more perfectly in the Kingdom" refers also to the perfecting of creation, of matter, in the Kingdom through the power of the Spirit of Christ. In the Resurrection the transfiguration of creation, which aspires to "deliverance from the bondage of corruption," (Rom. 8:21) is already anticipated. In the Lord's Resurrection the ultimate meanings of creation, with regard to spirit and matter, space and time, are included.

Receiving these revelations of the meaning of the Lord's Resurrection, we who believe in our transfiguration and the world's at the General Resurrection should clothe ourselves in the "armor of light" (Rom. 13:12) and become witnesses of the Lord's Resurrection and our own resurrection. The hope of the resurrection and the transformation of the world can be our beacon in these times subject to matter, to the pleasures of the world which are opposed to God, which declare the so-called freedom of man without God. We who believe in the Resurrection must show that we live already in the light and eternity of the Kingdom, that this light embraces our souls and shows us to be "the light of the world."

With these thoughts I embrace you in Christ, the Risen Lord, and wish you a happy Feast with health, peace, and joy in your families and parishes!

Your brother in prayer to God,  
† NICOLAE

Chicago, the Feast of the Lord's Resurrection, 2015