

## PASTORAL LETTER ON THE FEAST OF OUR LORD'S RESURRECTION, 2016

† NICOLAE

*by the mercies of God*

*Archbishop of the Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese in the Americas*

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

***Let all of you then enter into the joy of our Lord... The Table is richly laden.***

***All of you, fare sumptuously on it; enjoy the banquet of faith!***

(St. John Chrysostom, Homily on the Lord's Resurrection)

**Very Reverend Fathers,  
Beloved Faithful,**

**Christ is risen!**

The Day of Resurrection offers us, once again, the joy of proclaiming to one another that our life does not end on this earth, for we who believe in His Resurrection will rise and rejoice with Christ. We have finished seven weeks of spiritual struggle to “cleanse our senses” and to enter into the spiritual banquet of the Feast of the Resurrection; now it is fitting that we should reflect on the meaning of the Lord's Resurrection.

What is the banquet of which St. John Chrysostom speaks in his homily? What is the connection between the Lord's Resurrection and “the banquet of faith?” The meaning of the banquet, a celebration and special event in a family or in the world, is revealed to us in Holy Scripture. For the Patriarch Abraham hosted the three youths at the Oak of Mamre, and through them the Holy Trinity was revealed to him and he learned he would become the father of the chosen people (Gen. 8). Christ participated at the wedding banquet in Cana of Galilee, and performed there His first miracle and blessed the Sacrament of Marriage (John 2:1-11). Invited to a meal in the home of Martha and Mary, the sisters of Lazarus, Christ spoke of “the good part” of serving God (Luke 10:38-42). There he also received the offering of ointment from the sinful woman, foretelling His own burial (John 12:1-8). He entered the house of Zacchaeus the Tax Collector, not for food and drink, but to proclaim salvation (Luke 19:1-10). If the Pharisees accused Him of eating with tax collectors and sinners, Christ did so in order to show them that the healing of the soul is fulfilled through the joy of man's communion with God.

Before His Passion, Christ desired “to eat this Passover” together with His disciples. The Jewish Passover was actually a banquet in memory of the liberation of the Jews from Egyptian bondage, a supper at which family members feasted on the Paschal lamb prepared in a special ritual. At the Mystical Supper, the final banquet of the disciples with their Teacher, Christ spoke of the fulfillment of the Supper: “*I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God*” (Luke 22:15-16). At this Mystical Supper, Christ Himself is the sacrificial Lamb: “*While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to His disciples, saying, ‘Take and eat; this is my body.’ Then He took a cup, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins’*” (Matt. 26:26-28). In the hands of Christ, the bread and the wine, as real food, now became a spiritual reality, His Body and Blood which would be offered on the Cross for the forgiveness of the

sins of mankind and reconciliation with God. We know that this is the moment of the institution of the Holy Eucharist through the Savior's commandment, "*Do this in remembrance of Me*" (Luke 22:19). We now discover the full meaning of the banquet prefigured in the above mentioned moments. The communion around the table is used by God to reveal Himself in His love, goodness, and riches. At the Mystical Supper these are fulfilled through the offering of the Lord's Body and Blood as food and drink. The One Who revealed Himself to Abraham at the Oak of Mamre now is offered as nourishment, not material and passing, but spiritual, unto eternity. When we talk about a banquet we think of a richly laden table. The Savior's Sacrifice on the Cross and His Resurrection offer us a profound image of this richness, for God offers Himself to man as food and drink for eternity. For what we eat and drink in Holy Communion is the Body and Blood of the Savior, the One offered on the Cross and then risen, transfigured, full of the power of divinity. This Body is our nourishment for eternity.

Coming back to St. John Chrysostom's Homily, we can find yet another meaning of the banquet to which we are invited: "*The Table is richly laden. All of you, fare sumptuously on it. The calf is a fatted one; let no one go away hungry. All of you, enjoy the banquet of faith. All of you, enjoy the riches of His goodness. Let no one grieve of poverty; for the universal Kingdom has been revealed.*" The banquet of which St. John speaks is the Kingdom of Heaven, the eternal Kingdom, and its revelation on earth through the Lord's Resurrection. In His parables, Christ speaks of this Kingdom using words like "the wedding of the King's son" or "the great supper." "*The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son....*" He invited his guests, saying, "*...I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet*" (Mat. 22:2-4). And the book of Revelation speaks of "the wedding supper of the Lamb" (Rev. 19:9), revealing to us the profound meaning of the Kingdom of heaven. For if through the Incarnation and Resurrection the Kingdom has come, and the Church is in the world, this Kingdom will be fulfilled at the end of the ages when we are called to rejoice with Christ in His eternal Kingdom. But the parables also speak of many who had been invited and yet refused the invitation for various reasons. And of one found without appropriate garments, who was thrown out of the banquet hall. If the wedding is a true banquet, revealing the riches of the king, then the way we receive the invitation and prepare ourselves for it reveals us to be either desirous and prepared or, rather, unworthy of the joy of the Heavenly Father. This is revealed at each Divine Liturgy, which is the great supper or wedding of the King's Son.

St. John Chrysostom then assures us that partaking of the banquet brings us forgiveness of sins and victory over death. Nourishing ourselves on the Risen One, we too proclaim the victory of life. And this proclamation is a cause of hope and joy. It is fitting that with this hope and joy we travel through our world, troubled as it is by wars and fearful of terrorist plots. The Body and Blood of the Risen Christ has become our food, and through us can become the food of this world. Thus nourished, we can bring hope to the world. At this glorious feast I encourage you to bring to the world this hope that springs from the Lord's Resurrection, from the victory of life over death. I urge you to show your face illumined by hope and your conversation filled with faith, as those who have tasted "the banquet of faith."

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, 2016**