

PASTORAL LETTER FOR THE LORD'S RESURRECTION 2017

† NICOLAE

by the mercies of God

***Archbishop of the Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese of the United States of America and
Metropolitan of the Romanian Orthodox Metropolia of the Americas***

*To the beloved clergy and Orthodox Christians of our Holy Metropolia,
peace and holy joy from Christ the Risen Lord,
and from us Hierarchical Blessings.*

***Go quickly and tell His disciples: "He has risen from the dead
and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see Him" (Matthew 28:7).***

Very Reverend Fathers,
Beloved Faithful,
Christ is risen!

We give glory to God that He has enabled us once again to proclaim the Resurrection of Christ, the miracle that changed the destiny of mankind and of the world, a miracle proclaimed by the myrrh-bearing women, by the Holy Apostles, and by the multitude of those who encountered the Risen Christ, all the way to Saul on the road to Damascus. It is fitting that we should pause and think about the meanings of this proclamation at the end of our pilgrimage through Great Lent.

In keeping with tradition, we have fasted and prayed that we may become worthy of the light and joy of the Resurrection, but also may discover the meaning of this event. Our quest in fasting and prayer reached a climax during the days of Holy Passion Week. We sang, "*I see your Bridal Chamber adorned, O Savior, and I have no wedding garment that I may enter in; enlighten the vestment of my soul and save me,*" glimpsing the riches of those days of the Resurrection and longing to clothe ourselves in the light of knowledge. The Savior's Bridal Chamber into which our soul longs to enter is the tomb in which He was laid after being taken down from the Cross, the tomb that glowed with the light of the Resurrection and became the source of proclamation and participation in the eternal light of the Kingdom of Heaven.

The faithful women disciples of the Lord, the myrrh-bearers, found themselves early on Sunday morning at the tomb to fulfill the Jewish custom of anointing the body of the dead. The angel of the Lord himself rolled away the stone and showed them the tomb so that the myrrh-bearers could see the miracle (Matthew 28:1-4). And the angel also proclaimed to them the Lord's Resurrection: "*I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; He has risen, just as He said. Come and see the place where He lay. Then go quickly and tell His disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see Him'*" (Matthew 28:5-7).

The women received the angel's words, that "*the Crucified One is not here; He has risen,*" and took them to the Apostles. The angel's proclamation was later confirmed by the encounter of the myrrh-bearing women and the Apostles with the Risen Christ, becoming the testimony: "*The Lord is risen indeed and has appeared to Simon*" (Luke 24:34).

Who are these that were counted worthy of this *Encounter* that changed the destiny of mankind? First of all, the myrrh-bearing women mentioned by St. Matthew, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, whom we can identify as the mother of James and Joses. Mary Magdalene is the same person as the sinful woman who, "*taking it upon herself to become a myrrh-bearer,*" came to Jesus in the house of Simon the Leper in Bethany (Mat. 26:6-13), poured costly myrrh on His head, washed His feet with her tears of repentance, and dried them with her hair. The Lord received this offering as a prefiguring of His death and burial, praising her gesture. This woman is the one who, along with "the other Mary," became the first to receive the angel's proclamation and encounter the

Risen Christ: *“So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them. ‘Greetings,’ He said. They came to Him, clasped His feet and worshiped Him”* (Matthew 28:8-9). Their faithfulness to their Teacher, their courage in going early in the morning to the tomb while the Apostles were hiding for fear of the Jews, frightened that they might share the fate of the prophet from Nazareth, were rewarded by the first encounter with the Risen Christ. As the Holy Gospels tell us, after this the Lord appeared repeatedly to the disciples, until the vision beheld by Saul the persecutor on the road to Damascus. Intent on unmasking what he believed to be the disciples’ “lie” and on finding the Lord who had been stolen from the tomb (Gala Galaction), Saul encounters the One he was seeking, just like the myrrh-bearers and the Apostles, the *Risen Christ*, Who calls him to the proclamation of the miracle of the Resurrection. And Paul too discovers the mystery of the empty tomb glowing with the light of the Resurrection of Christ.

Very Reverend Fathers, Beloved Faithful,

This search for the Risen Christ, this discovery of the tomb that is “empty,” yet full of the glory of Christ, is the profound meaning of every Christian’s journey through this life. We all find ourselves in the person of the sinful woman, of the fearful and uncomprehending Apostles, or of Saul the truth-seeker. Each of these found the answer to their questions and their searching in their encounter with the Christ who rose from the dead. We cannot believe that we will find the answer to our turmoil in any other way than in this encounter. St. John Chrysostom assures us of these things: *“Perchance some one of you would wish to be like them, to hold the feet of Jesus; you can even now, and not His feet and His hands only, but even lay hold on that sacred head, receiving the awful mysteries with a pure conscience. But not here only, but also in that day you shall see Him, coming with that unspeakable glory”* (Homily nr. 89 on St. Matthew’s Gospel). What gives meaning to our lives is our encounter with the Risen Lord, in icons, in the word of the Gospel, in the Holy Eucharist. This encounter can mean an existential change for us, just as in the case of the myrrh-bearers and the Apostles, at the end of a profound search, following an attentive examination of our conscience for the identification of our sins and weaknesses, and crying out to Christ for healing and understanding. St. John Chrysostom assures us of the fulfillment of this search in the eternal Kingdom of the Risen One.

In the coming days our mission on American soil will be renewed through the fulfillment of the plan to create a Metropolia for the Romanian Orthodox in the Americas, and a Diocese in Canada. We invite you all to prayer that God may strengthen us in our mission; we encourage you to work together that we may fulfill our responsibilities to raise and educate our children and our youth, and guide our faithful on the path of salvation. Let us pray that God will keep us in the true faith, worthy witnesses of the true Tradition of the Orthodox Church. In all these things we place our hope in the Risen Christ, the joy and light of our souls.

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

Your brother in prayer to God,
† **Metropolitan NICOLAE**

Chicago, The Feast of the Lord’s Resurrection, 2017