

**PASTORAL LETTER
AT THE FEAST OF THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD 2019**

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by the mercies of God

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To our beloved Clergy and Orthodox Christians,

peace and joy from Christ the Lord,

and from us hierarchical Blessings.

He said to them:

“It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you;

and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria,

and to the ends of the earth.”

(Acts 1, 7 – 8)

Most Reverend Fathers,

Beloved Faithful,

Christ is risen!

“Today all things are filled with light: earth and heaven and the world beneath. Then let all creation celebrate the resurrection of Christ. In Him is the firm foundation of all things.”¹ we sing in the third ode of the Matins of Resurrection. We find ourselves in the night of joy where we contemplate the unapproachable light of the Resurrection of Christ. It is time for us Christians to celebrate the essence of our faith - the beginning of the salvation of all in Christ.

The text of the Acts of the Apostles reading on this occasion shows us the meaning of our mission as Christians. We are called in the times and the space of our history to be witnesses, to be apostles, to become the bearers of the message of the first witnesses of the Resurrection of Christ - the Apostles and the Myrrh-bearer women. We are called to be apostles in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the edges of our times. The priority of our mission is to receive the transfiguring power of the Holy Spirit more than to know the *'years or times that the Father has placed in His dominion.'* This power makes the true and faithful Christian a confessor to the whole world of the joy of Christ's resurrection and the salvation of all.

We can therefore ask: we understand that we are confessors of our time, but what is the message that we are bound to convey? We find an answer in the Gospel of John:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. (John 1, 1-4)

The resurrection of man's faith through Christ means the rediscovery and the reaffirmation of the fundamental truth - God is the source of everything. The central message of our mission as personal churches that live in the great church of the Christian community is

¹ Easter Matins ode 3

that the world and man have beginning and foundation in God. He is the One who has done everything by word. He is the life and light of every man.

The resurrection brings with it a renewed consciousness in the Holy Spirit who considers and thinks everything from the perspective of God. Father Stăniloae says that *"through His resurrection, Christ generally establishes our faith in a continuation of life after death."*² There is a resurrection of our faith and confession in the existence of God as the foundation of everything, and there is a resurrection of our understanding that makes us realize that we are created for eternity out of love of the One Whose generosity cannot be measured.

Is it enough the simple faith in the path of salvation? Evangelist John tells us:

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. ... And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. (John 1: 14,16)

On the morning of the Resurrection, we profess as Christians that man's just renewed but abstract faith is important but not sufficient for his salvation. It was needed the living presence of the Son of God through incarnation, the authentic leaven through grace and truth, in order that everything could be restored and fully accomplished. Through this presence, the deep connection of the world and man to God could first be recovered.

In what way Christ as a true leaven restores everything? St. Athanasius the Great discovers the fullness of Christ's accomplishment for the salvation of man in His earthly mission:

*... no one should stand up to the truth - that the Savior has risen His body and is the true Son of God, being the Word and Wisdom and Power that came out of God as from the Father and Who in the latter times took the body for the salvation of all and taught the world about the Father, overthrew death, gave them all incorruptibility by the promise of the resurrection, lifting up his own body as a first-fruits, and showing him a trophy against the death and its corruptibility through the sign of the Cross.*³

In the working of salvation of man, the Creator manifests full responsibility for His creation. Christ, the foundation of our restoration, educates us and does all that is necessary for our healing and salvation - the incarnation, the knowledge of God, the annihilation of death, and the gift of incorruptibility through the Resurrection. He is the One who dwells in us, who offers Himself to us in a participatory way through His risen body as the pillar and foundation of our resurrection. From within our humanity fully assumed by His resurrected Body radiates the light of the grace of the healing of our human understanding and deeds. We understand that we can not have the salvation without the intervention of God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit; we understand that we have the responsibility to remain open by faith to the work of the grace of God in us; we understand our responsibility in our actions towards God and towards people around us. We become true apostles witnessing by understanding, word, and deed.

The cult of the Church in its entirety is a guide and reinforcement in God. We believe, witness and fulfill all of Christ by participating in the Divine Liturgy and the Holy Mysteries, in the life of prayer and asceticism of the Church. *"The church is the kingdom*

² Dumitru Stăniloae. *Culture and Spirituality. Complete Works vol 3.* Ed. Basilica: Bucharest 2012, p 73

³ St. Atanasius the Great. *Against the Hellenes. Treaty on the Incarnation of the Lord. Three homilies against Arians.* (translation. Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae) Ed. EIBMO: Bucharest 2010, p 190

of Christ the Lord - says Archimandrite Vasilachi. *He founded it, and through His power, it continues through ages and eternity. In it, He is always present, and the apostles forever share the heavenly treasures to mankind.*"⁴ The Church, though present here on earth in us and among us, is at the same time the guarantee and the source of eternal life.

Beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord,

We are in the *Homage Year of the Romanian village (of the priests, teachers and diligent mayors)* and in the *Commemorative Year of Patriarchs Nicodim Munteanu and Iustin Moisescu and of church books' translators* in the Romanian Patriarchate. There are two themes that urge us to meditate on our Christian and Romanian values and on the activity of tireless churchmen working in the apostolate of authentic Christian tradition. Father Staniloae synthesizes in a brilliant way the spiritual matrix of the Romanian village to be model and inspiration in this year dedicated to it:

*The village is a united community composed of free people. ... the active and transfigurative transparency of God, which brings together everybody without confusing them, is lived in the most accentuated way in the Divine Liturgy of Sundays and Feasts, in which all pray for all. ... The transparency of the active transcendence of God in the living experience of the Romanian village gives it, in addition to the spirit of a deep communion, that of a thinking that unites in it the understanding with the consciousness of the inexhaustible mysteries of the world and the people united with God.*⁵

The ethos of the Romanian village is a result of the Christian spirit that combines freedom and personal specificity with communion, the understanding of Christian life with the amazing astonishment and contemplation of the mysteries that go beyond the understanding. They meet in the Divine Liturgy, which is the most authentic expression of man's union with God. This millenary Eucharistic model remains for us a living book of God's work through the human person in society. It can guide and inspire us.

Thinking about the second theme of the year, the examples of those unknown - *priests, teachers or diligent mayors* - beside the patriarchs *Nicodim and Iustin* - and church book translators such as the *Mitropolitans Dosoftei, Veniamin Costachi and Irineu Mihălcescu*, the priests such as *Dumitru Stăniloae Dumitru Bodogae, Dumitru Fecioru, Ioan G. Coman, Petre Vintilescu, Ene Branishte, Eufrosin Poteca, Olimp Caciulă, Matei Pâslaru, Spiridon Cândea, Mihai the priest, St. Paisie Velicovschi*, Archimandrites such as *Iuliu Scriban, Nicodim Grecianu and Vasile Vasilachi, Monk Gherontios* and others, become necessary and indispensable references in the meticulous work of spreading the Christian message through word, letter and the labor of translating and adapting the saving word to our everyday reality.

Let us become in the places where we are living luminous examples of free and open people who understand the surrounding realities and let us get prepared to proclaim and incarnate the Christian message today for the salvation of all.

⁴ Vasile Vasilachi. *The triple Love for God, Church and Nation*. Theological Edition *The Word of Life*: New York, p 249

⁵ Dumitru Stăniloae. *Reflections on the Spirituality of the Romanian People. Complete Works vol. 9*. Ed. Basilica: Bucharest 2018, p 165 - 166

On the occasion of the feast of the Lord's Resurrection, let us give thanks in an Eucharistic spirit to God for all His benefits. I also wish you to have a good health, a spirit of thanksgiving, peace and blessing in Jesus Christ our Lord!

Yours in prayer to the Risen Lord,
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