

April 21, 2007:

New York: Epistle of the Synod of Bishops to the God-loving Flock

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Dear in Christ fathers, brothers, sisters, loyal children of the Russian Church Abroad:

Christ is Risen!

“As the sun outshines the stars,” writes bishop Gregory of Nissa, “so does Holy Pascha surpass all other church celebrations.” The church refers to “the Beautiful Pascha”, “the Feast of feasts and the celebration of celebrations.” Blessed Metropolitan Anthony profoundly explained that, if every feast is a mystery, then the Feast of feasts, Pascha, is the mystery of mysteries. The first Christians called Pascha “the Day of the Lord”, for it embraces with its light the whole Universe, “the seen and the unseen worlds,” the worlds of the living and the dead. Everyone tries to come to church on the day of Pascha in order to greet the mysterious holy joy. The best expression of Christians’ Paschal joy lies in the celebratory words: “Christ is Risen!” – “Indeed He is Risen!”

The Pascha of the Lord is the cornerstone of the new, true life of the world. Pascha forever confirmed faith in the eternity of life. The Apostle Paul wrote that “If Christ did not rise, then our faith is in vain.” Is it not for this reason that our heart trembles and glows with the fire of life, seeing the “eternal joy” and feeling the authentic celebration of the church day “which the Lord hath made”?

How can one become worthy of the great holiness of Pascha? How can one live Pascha in all its fullness? How can one cleanse oneself of sins and passions in order that one may with a clean heart, together with the angels, glorify the Resurrection of Christ, bow to Him, as the only One who is Holy and Without Sin, the One who defeated death and gave “those in the tombs” eternal life? How should one spend these bright days, leading to the reestablishment of peace and unity of the Local Russian Orthodox Church, which will occur on the feast of the Ascension of the Lord? How can one prepare for these events?

“Come close to God,” writes the apostle James, “and He will come close to you.” Bishop Tikhon of Zadonsk teaches that “When one prays with all one’s strength and all one’s heart, one’s heart will be filled with God’s love.” It is necessary to have constant heartfelt prayer, to participate in the mysteries of the church, to have the correct manner of life, to fulfill the tenants of the faith, to actively do good. Let us turn our hearts to Christ and ask Him for forgiveness of all of our sins that prevent us from “partaking of the feast of faith and receiving the riches of holiness.” Let us fight our weaknesses, work within the laws of Christ, “be active for the faith, which at one time was committed to the saints,” in order to attain the Life-giving Christ in our hearts.

We call on the God-loving clergy and flock to pray in this bright state that the forthcoming visit to Russia by the delegation of the Russian Church Abroad goes well and serves for the benefit of the entire Russian Orthodox Church. It is necessary that the prayerful preparation for the coming celebrations in Moscow take place not only in private prayers, but among everyone together in church at Holy Liturgy. Therefore, the Synod of Bishops has adopted the following petition to be pronounced during the Litany of Great Supplication starting today and continuing until the 6th Sunday of Pascha: “Bless oh Savior the good intentions, of thy servants, the Most Reverened Metropolitan Laurus, First Hierarch of the Russian Church Abroad, and his companions, and accept their prayers, grant them a spirit of wisdom and reason, place in their hearts a spirit of fear of Thee, a spirit of piety and zealousness for the glory of Thy Holy Name, in order that they may in a well-pleasing manner fulfill the task of building up the unity of the Holy Russian Church, as one Body of Christ. Grant them safe travel in the air and a safe return, hear and have mercy.”

In this we again and again underline that our Church does not intend to step away from the path our fathers taught us, to change anything in its complete rejection of any false teachings, such as “ecumenism,” which distort the purity of the Orthodox Confession of Faith. On the contrary, beloved in Christ, by the will of God we are now receiving the opportunity to meekly, but without any stepping away from the Truth of the Holy Fathers, provide feasible help to our Orthodox people and to warn them about all manner of “liberal” and “syncretical” interpretations of the words of Christ and the dogma of the One, Holy and Apostolic Church.

The prayer “Receive Ye the Body of Christ, taste ye of the fountain of immortality,” which usually accompanies those communing from the chalice, during the Paschal period is sung before its appearance, as if calling all to come forward. For this reason, let us come frequently to the communion of the Holy Mysteries of Christ during these bright days. Then our Pascha on earth will be unto us a foreshadowing of the future Pascha, “opening the gates of Heaven for us.” Such a celebration of Pascha will help us to resurrect together with the Man-loving God and to prepare in a proper manner for the coming reestablishment of full brotherly relations within the Local Russian Orthodox Church. Amen.

Truly Christ is Risen!

With Paschal joy in the Risen Christ,

Metropolitan Laurus of Eastern America and New York
First Hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia

Archbishop Mark of Berlin and Germany

Archbishop Hilarion of Sydney, Australia and New Zealand

Archbishop Kyrill of San Francisco and Western America

Bishop Michael of Geneva and Western Europe

Bishop Gabriel of Manhattan

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