

The Paschal Message

Archbishop Mark

Christ is risen!

We have lived through the days of the Lord's Passion. The Giver of Life has been crucified on the Cross, the Creator of the Universe has been given up to death and burial. The Most Meek and Humble God-Man has suffered spittings, beatings, scourgings, the Cross and death for the salvation of the world.

Who of us has been able to remain indifferent in these last few days in church, when they handed over the King of kings to Pilate, when one of the Twelve betrayed his Teacher, when the disciples and wonderworkers fell asleep at Gethsemane and fled before his sufferings, when his Most Pure Mother wept at his grave? Were we not shaken to the depths of our souls, when we heard of the treachery of the disciples Peter and Judas, of the cowardice of all His disciples - those who heard his miraculous words and witnessed his miracles? Why have we once more lived through these dreadful events together? Of course, so that we could also live through his Resurrection together.

In the words of Paul the Apostle we have lived through these days, 'being made conformable unto His death... that we might attain unto the resurrection of the dead' (Phil. 3, 10-11). Starting from the Incarnation of the Son of God up until his sufferings on the Cross and his Resurrection, everything has been accomplished for the renewal of fallen man, his restoration to the dignity and glory of his first born state. Our faith is vain, if it is not crowned by salvation through the Resurrection.

However, as we examine and ponder the words of Paul the Apostle, we will understand that we can only attain resurrection by one means: by 'being made conformable unto His death'. Are we capable of this? We are capable of this, if we are prepared to cultivate our souls in such a way that they hunger and thirst after Christ every day and every minute, so that an ardent yearning for the Heavenly Bridegroom may be kindled within them.

This is why we have passed together through the holy forty days of Lent, having renounced 'another law... warring against the law of our mind, and bringing us into captivity to the law of sin which is in our members' (Rom. 7, 23). Now we can be filled with the joy of Easter inasmuch as we accept the law of God... and none of our steps shall slide (Ps. 36, 31). The Risen Lord Himself will teach us, if we have in our mouths and hearts the words of God from which we constantly learn, drawing wisdom and love of virtue from them.

It is the long Lenten services which have taught us to abide in prayer and the singing of psalms. Now the joy of Easter inspires us to become witnesses of the glorious Resurrection of Christ. So that we do not fall from the heights of our ascent to Christ, we must labour further, completing the feat of our salvation which is now assured. Now we can acquire that blessedness, which consists in the words of the Psalmist in our 'will...in the law of the Lord and in his law do we meditate day and night' (Ps 1, 2). The soul which acts thus will not lose the joy of Easter after a week or two, as often happens to us, but it will remain with us, continually enriching us with new strength, and growing 'unto the measure of the stature' (Eph. 4, 13) of the Risen Christ the Saviour. To have the memory of God, says St Basil the Great, is more vital than to breathe, for in this way we raise ourselves up to purity. Blessing the Lord at all times, we become theologians and wonderworkers, driving out of our souls the demons of fornication and adultery, calumny and lies, condemnation and pretension.

Resting on the power of the Risen Christ, we shall constantly cleanse our souls and our bodies will be radiant, for 'Pascha is purifying and from the grave the lovely sun of righteousness shines forth on us once more'. Christ like the sun of righteousness shines forth life on us all. Not wishing to return to our former spiritual death, may this Easter be for us a step towards everything new and new heights in the spiritual development of our life. The Lord Himself teaches and guides us: 'I strive to make the resurrection my own, because Jesus Christ has made me his own' (Phil. 3, 12).

✠ Archbishop Mark
Pascha, 2009