The Paschal Message of Archbishop Mark
to the
Pious Flock of the
Diocese of Great Britain and Ireland

Christ is Risen!

O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?

I Cor 15: 55.

The sting of death is sin. The sting of death pierced the souls of our ancestors Adam and Eve and, through them, the souls of all succeeding generations. Every sin that we commit increases its lethalness, poisoning the soul. We are our own most merciless enemies; we darken our lives, turning them into death, condemning ourselves to captivity in *the nethermost parts of the earth*.

There would be no glimmer of light in this *shadow of death*, there would be no pause in this unceasing and ruinous descent, there would be no hope of deliverance from the captivity of sin, if the Lord Jesus Christ had not appeared.

Christ made all things new, restoring fallen man. Through his sacrifice, He took the sting out of our nature, he put death to death, He bestowed the hope of salvation on the living and the dead. Yes, indeed, on the dead also, because *he went down into the nethermost parts of the earth and shattered the everlasting bolts of the doors*, through His resurrection making himself *the first fruits of the dead* (I Cor 15:20) and *the firstborn from among the dead*, bestowing immortality on our nature, for since death came through the fall of man, so shall all be made alive in the sinless God-Man (See I Cor 15:21-22).

Henceforth immortality becomes reality for us, if we follow Christ in all things, turning away from the idols of our passions and wholeheartedly to our Heavenly Father, as to our True God and Father.

We shall not fear the cunning wiles of the enemy of mankind, who wishes to frighten us, suggesting that we shall not find salvation because of the multitude of our sins. The Lord is merciful to sinners who repent. Repentance is the providential lot of fallen man on earth, the

lot which cleanses us from the impurity of sin and sets us before the doors of Paradise. It was not for nothing that when the Lord Jesus Christ began preaching, He proclaimed: *Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand* (Matt. 4:17). King David sinned, but washed himself in repentance and was restored as a prophet by the All-Merciful God. Peter denied Christ three times and was restored as an apostle through threefold repentance. Thus, our immortality, our Paradise, our eternity, and our restoration as true human beings depend entirely on our repentance.

Through the Resurrection of Christ *the night is far spent, the day is at hand*. The Holy Apostle is calling us: *let us therefore cast off the works of darkness* (Romans 13:12). What are these works of darkness? First of all, the mother of all sin - disobedience, through which death entered the world, through which even now death lives on and is affirmed in this world, turning it into impenetrable night. But *those that await the coming of the bright and clear day of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ* put on *the armour of light* (Romans 13:12). They find the antidote to death-dealing poison, which is Divine obedience, the example of which was given to us by Christ Himself, and through this God-given armour they vanquish death.

Through the disobedience of one man, the old Adam, death entered the world. Through the obedience of the God-Man to the Heavenly Father, the Paradise that was created in the beginning is renewed and immortality is returned to mankind. Obedience is a holy, heavenly and God-like virtue, leading man up to heaven in the footsteps of Christ. Our obedience to the head of the Church, Christ, and His life-giving and saving commandments, is fulfilled in the obedience of laypeople to the head of their family, 'the little Church', and their spiritual father, in the obedience of those in the monastic life to their superiors, and, above all, in the obedience of all of us to the legitimate Church hierarchy. And *unto all them that obey Him,* Christ becomes *the author of eternal salvation* (Heb 5:9).

Thus, victory over death becomes the reality of our Christian life, the foundation of our pilgrimage *through all the night of this present life.*

Now, in these sacred days of Holy Pascha, this night is filled with light, illuminating our souls, giving us the undoubted assurance that we shall not languish for ever on this earth, which is condemned to be burnt up together with all the works that are therein (See 2 Peter 3:10). The promises of the Lord are true. Repentance and obedience will lead us up into the joy and the Divine bridal chamber of the glory of our Lord, *where the voice of those that make feast is unceasing and the sweetness of those that behold* the beauty of His radiant Countenance *is unutterable*. Amen.

Pascha 2007

+ Archbishop Mark