

The Orthodox Church in America
DIOCESE OF EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA
The Right Reverend Tikhon, Bishop of Philadelphia

PASCHA 2007

To the Venerable Pastors, God-loving Monastics and
Devout Faithful of the Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania

*We celebrate the death of death and the overthrow of hell, the beginning of another life which is eternal; and in exultation, we sing the praises of its source.
He alone is blessed and most glorious, the God of our Fathers. (Paschal Canon, Ode 7)*

Dearly Beloved in the Lord:

The central mystery of the Christian Faith is the glorious Resurrection of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ, through which mankind is offered the gift of *another life, which is eternal*. This gift of eternal life was wrought for us in a most remarkable way, for our Lord accomplished all this by voluntarily suffering His Passion, being nailed to the Cross and descending into the tomb.

To the world, suffering is something to be avoided at all costs, the Cross is foolishness, and death is spoken of as little as possible. But Christ takes those things that are feared by the world, and uses them to reveal His glory and His power. He undergoes suffering to free us from suffering; He ascends the Cross to bring joy to the world; and He voluntarily endures death so that He might trample it down.

Throughout our beautiful paschal services, we sing of this great paradox of eternal life which is accomplished through death: *trampling down death by death... From death to life...* Christ, Who is Life itself, dies for us so that we who are dead might live. We no longer fear the things that the world fears because they have no power over us. As St. John Chrysostom, in his magnificent paschal homily, reminds us: "Let no one fear death, for the Savior's death has set us free. He that was prisoner of it has annihilated it. By descending into hell, He made Hell captive."

Let us therefore rejoice in the Risen Lord and be encouraged to face our own struggles with courage and hope, knowing that the Lord is ever with us. And as we celebrate the bright and joyous day of His Resurrection, let us exclaim with the Apostle Paul: *O death, where is thy sting? O hell, where is thy victory?* (I Cor. 15:55). May we all be granted to partake of eternal life with joy at the Banquet of Immortality.

With love in the Risen Lord,

+ TIKHON
Bishop of Philadelphia and Eastern Pennsylvania