

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

PASCHA 2010

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

Christ is Risen!

Throughout the beautiful services of our Paschal celebrations, we proclaim in song, and without shame, the many paradoxes surrounding the present feast of Christ's Resurrection from the dead. These paradoxes are poetically set forth in the many images of our divine hymns which proclaim, among other things, that *life has arisen from the tomb*, that *hell has been filled with light* and that *death has been trampled down by death*.

These poetic images are paradoxical because it is very difficult for us, as human beings, to express the central mystery of the Christian Faith: the glorious Resurrection from the dead of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ. The poetic and paradoxical images of our hymns provide the clearest expression of the absolute reality of that mystery and also of the possibility of our participation in it.

During the Paschal Matins, we sing: *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). Christ is the source of the great gift of eternal life but we are given the opportunity to become recipients of that great gift and grace of eternal life.

On Holy Pascha, Christ, Who is Life itself, dies and rises for us so that we who are dead might live. And we, who are so often held captive by the fear of death and by the struggles with our passions, no longer fear the things that the world fears because we recognize that 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 death with courage, with hope and with the life that is now granted to us by Christ. Let us exclaim with the Apostle Paul: *O death, where is thy sting? O hell, where is thy victory?* (I Cor. 15:55) and joyfully enter into the reality of the resurrection.

With love in the Risen Lord,

+ TIKHON
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