

Patriarchal Encyclical For Holy Pascha 2017

Prot. No. 315

+ B A R T H O L O M E W

By God's Mercy

Archbishop of Constantinople-New Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch
To the Plenitude of the Church: May the Grace, Peace and Mercy
of the Christ Risen in Glory be with you All

Beloved brothers and sisters, children in the risen Lord,

"In the world you shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16.33) is the reassurance of the Lord, who alone trampled upon death by death, to generations of men and women. "Christ is Risen!" is the cry that we, too, pronounce to all people far and wide from this Sacred See, which has experienced worldly crucifixion and tribulation; but it is also the See of resurrection inasmuch as it is from this corner of the planet, the City of Constantine, that we proclaim "the victory of life" that dispels every form of corruption and death itself.

During his earthly presence, the Lord frequently warned His disciples about the tribulation that would result from his sacrifice on the cross at Golgotha but also because of their ministry and life in this world – both their own as well as all those who believe in Christ. However, he also added a very significant detail: "You will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy . . . So you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you." (John 16.20-22)

This paschal and spiritual joy was first experienced by the Myrrh-bearing women, who came to the tomb of the life-giving Christ, with the Lord's greeting in a single word: "Rejoice!" (Matt. 28.9) The same paschal joy is emphatically professed by the Mother Church of Constantinople today: "This is the day of the Lord; let us rejoice and be glad in it." (Psalm 117.24) The final enemy, death, sorrow, our problems, corruption, tribulation, and trials: all of these are crushed and abolished by the victorious divine-human Lord.

However, we live in a world where the mass media of communication constantly transmit misfortunate news about terrorist attacks, local wars, destructive natural phenomena, problems of religious fanaticism, hunger, the refugee crisis, incurable diseases, poverty, psychological pressure, feelings of insecurity and other similarly undesirable conditions.

In the face of these daily "crosses," which human beings endure with reluctance, our holy mother Orthodox Church comes to remind us that, as Christians, we can be glad because our leader Christ has proved victorious over them as the bearer of joy, who brings gladness to the whole universe.

Our joy is based on the conviction of Christ's victory. We are completely assured that good has conquered all things, that Christ came to the world "and left us in order to be victorious." (Rev. 6.2) The world that we shall eternally inhabit is Christ, who is light, truth, life, joy and peace.

Despite its daily crosses and sorrows, the great Mother Church of Christ exclusively and solely experiences this phenomenon of joy. It experiences – from and within this life – the heavenly kingdom. From this sacred center of Orthodoxy, from the bosom of this martyric Phanar, "on this effulgent night," we proclaim that the extension and purpose of the cross and all tribulation, the resolution of all human pain and suffering, is the Lord's reassurance: "I will not leave you as orphans." (John 14.18-19) "Behold, I am with you all the days of your life, to the end of the ages." (Matt. 28.20) This is the message that all of us should hear, that the contemporary world should hear in order to surrender to and discern Christ on the road to Emmaus. Indeed, Christ is beside us. And we shall see Him only if we hear and experience His word in our life.

This message – of the victory of life over death, of the triumph of the joyful light of the paschal candle over the darkness of disorder and dissolution – is announced to the whole world from the Ecumenical Patriarchate with the invitation to experience the unwaning light of the resurrection. We invite you all to stand with faith and hope before the risen Christ and before the mystery of life. We invite all of you to trust the risen Lord, the master of joy and delight, who holds the reigns of the entire creation.

Christ is risen, then, brothers and sisters! May the grace and boundless mercy of the lord of life and master over death be with you all.

Phanar, Holy Pascha 2017

+Bartholomew of Constantinople
Your fervent supplicant to the risen Christ

To be read after the Holy Gospel during the Divine Liturgy on the Feast of Holy Pascha.