

Patriarchal Encyclical for Holy Pascha

Prot. No. 388

† BARTHOLOMEW

By God's mercy

Archbishop of Constantinople-New Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch

To the plenitude of the Church

Grace, peace and mercy from Christ risen in glory

Beloved concelebrants and devout, god-loving children of the Church,

Christ is Risen!

The proclamation of the Resurrection by the myrrh-bearing women to the disciples of Christ was considered delirious. Yet, the word, formerly conceived as delirious, was confirmed as Truth. The risen Lord appeared to His disciples on several occasions.

In our time, the proclamation of the Resurrection is again considered delirious by rationalists. Nonetheless, we faithful not only believe in but also experience the Resurrection as a profoundly truthful **fact**. Indeed, if necessary, we seal our testimony with self-sacrifice because in the risen Christ we transcend death and are liberated from its fear. Our hearts are filled with joy when we repeat: **The Lord has risen**. Our saints, who have died according to the world, continue to live among us, responding to our petitions. The world that follows death is truer than the world that precedes death. Christ has risen and dwells among us. He has promised to be with us to the end of the world. And so He is – as our friend, brother, healer, who bestows all good things.

Blessed is our God, who has risen from the dead, granting eternal life to all people. O death, where is your sting? Christ has risen, revealing and ridiculing the one who formerly boasted without end to be a mockery. (*See the Canon of St. John Damascene, 4th tone, 9th ode*) Everything is filled with light and our hearts are replete with limitless joy.

And more than joy, they are filled with **strength**. For whoever believes in the Resurrection is unafraid of death; and whoever is unafraid of death is spiritually unyielding and unbending inasmuch as what may be the most terrible threat for the majority and for the disbelievers is of little significance to the Christian; for it is the **entrance** to life itself. The faithful Christian lives the Resurrection even prior to his or her natural death.

The consequence of experiencing the Resurrection is the **transformation** of the world. It inspires the soul. And an inspired soul also attracts other souls to its ways, when these souls are moved by the genuine joyous experience of immortality. Christ's Resurrection and our own resurrection are not simply an abstract truth. They are a **dogma** of faith. They are a tangible reality. They are a force that overcomes the world despite the extremely harsh persecutions waged against it. "This is the victory, which has conquered the world, namely our faith" (1 John 5.4) in His Resurrection. Through the Resurrection, humanity is called to divinity through grace. Through the victory of the light of Resurrection over the impure passions, divine eros and a strange love, which surpasses human boundaries, are established in our souls.

Therefore, Christ is Risen! Our hearts are filled with the light and joy of the Resurrection. We approach the Risen Lord with authenticity and simplicity. For, as the royal Prophet David says, our God, who supervises our hearts from above, "will not despise a broken and contrite heart." (Psalm 50.19)

The Resurrection is our strength, hope, joy, and delight. Through the Resurrection, we transcend pain and sorrow for all the evils of this natural, worldly life. The Resurrection is God's response to the helplessness of wounded humanity before the suffering of worldly humanity.

We do not surrender to the difficulties and challenges of the modern world. The gathering of the Lord's fearful disciples in the upper room in Jerusalem encourages us. We are not afraid because we love everyone, even as He loved us and gave His life for our sake. Mysteriously and invisibly, the Lord accompanies us. We only need to have – and we do have – **love**. For through love, we understand the power of the Mystery; we know the Mystery itself.

If others hesitate, "garnering their actions in thick sheaves" (Vespers of the Prodigal Son), yet we boast. And if we do not "winnow the chaff of our [sinful and passionate] actions with the wind of His loving-kindness or on the threshing floor of repentance," the Risen Lord is Love and disperses all forms of darkness and fear

that surrounds us, entering our hearts and our world, even when the doors are closed. He “remains with us” permanently through the **cross of love**. His calling is **peace**, and He grants us His peace. The powerful of this world pledge and promise peace, but can never produce or realize it. Whereas the power of divine Love, Peace and Wisdom remains beyond all human panic. It is not found on the margins of reality or the surface of human convictions. Instead, it is the **heart** of humanity, the **centre** of life, the lord of life and death. It is **Truth**.

The incontestable transcendence of **Power** invisibly controls the reigns and directs all things, especially at a time when “the minds of so many lie in darkness.”

At this time of widespread **dissolution** throughout the world, the hope of all throughout the universe, the Wisdom of God, is the presence of the heavenly **solution** and harmony. At a time of **collapse** and anticipated death, we have the reality of Resurrection and the strength of our conviction in Christ.

The peace that derives from Him who trampled down death by death through his self-emptying, together with the joy of love, flow and heal our contemporary humanity that sighs and suffers as well as all of creation that groans and laments with us, who “await adoption and redemption” as well as “the freedom of the glory of the children of God.” (Romans 8.20-23)

Truly the Lord is Risen, beloved fathers, brothers and sisters!

Holy Pascha 2013

† **Bartholomew of Constantinople**

Your fervent supplicant before God