

PATRIARCHAL ENCYCLICAL
FOR HOLY PASCHA

PROT. NO. 251

+ 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 Christ Risen in Glory be with you All

Most honorable brother Hierarchs,

Dearly beloved children,

By God's mercy and strength, we have journeyed through prayer and fasting across the ocean of Holy and Great Lent, finally reaching the splendid feast of Pascha, and we praise the Lord of glory, who descended to the depths of Hades and "achieved the entrance for all to Paradise" through His raising from the dead.

The Resurrection is not the remembrance of an event from the past, but the "good change" of our existence, "another birth, an alternate life, a different kind of living, the transformation of our very being."¹ And in the Risen Christ, the entire creation is renewed together with humanity. When we chant in the 3rd Ode of the Paschal Canon, that "Now everything is filled with light—heaven, earth, and all things beneath the earth; therefore, let all creation celebrate the resurrection of Christ, in which everything has been established," we proclaim that the universe is founded on and filled with unfading light. The phrases "before Christ" and "after Christ" ring true not only for the history of the human race, but also for the sake of all creation.

The Lord's raising from the dead constitutes the nucleus of the Gospel, the stable point of reference for all the books of the New Testament, as well as for the liturgical life and devotion of the Orthodox Christians. Indeed, the words "Christ is Risen!" summarize the theology of the Church. The experience of the abolition of the dominion of death is a source of ineffable joy, "free from the bonds of this world." "All things are filled with joy upon

receiving the taste of resurrection.” The resurrection is an explosion “of great joy” and permeates the entire life, ethos and pastoral ministry of the church as the foretaste of the fullness of life, knowledge and life of the eternal kingdom of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Orthodox faith and pessimism are contradictory phenomena.

Pascha is for us a feast of freedom and victory over alienating forces; it is the churchification of our existence, an invitation to collaborate for the transfiguration of the world. The history of the Church is rendered “a great Pascha” as the journey toward “the liberation in glory of the children of God” (Rom. 8.21). The experience of resurrection reveals the center and eschatological dimension of freedom in Christ. Biblical references to the Savior’s resurrection demonstrate the power of our freedom as believers; it is in this freedom alone that the “great miracle” is manifested, which remains inaccessible to every oppression. “The mystery of salvation belongs to those who desire it freely, not to those who are tyrannized against their will.”² Accepting the divine gift as a “transition” of the believer toward Christ is the voluntary existential response to the loving and saving “transition” of the Risen Lord toward humankind. For “without me, you cannot do anything” (Jn 15.5).

The mystery of the Lord’s resurrection to this day continues to shatter the positivistic certainties of those who deny God as “the denial of human will,” as well as the advocates of “the fallacy of self-fulfillment without God” and the admirers of the contemporary “man-god.” The future does not belong to those imprisoned in a self-sufficient, stifling and narrow earthly existence. There is no authentic freedom without resurrection, without the perspective of eternity.

For the Holy Great Church of Christ, one source of such resurrectional joy is also found this year in the common celebration of Easter by the entire Christian world, along with the commemoration of the 1700th anniversary of the First Council of Nicaea, which condemned the heresy of Arius, who “diminished within the Trinity the one Son and Word of God,” and which

¹ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Resurrection of our Lord*, PG 46.604.

² Maximus Confessor, *On the Lord’s Prayer*, PG 90.880.

established the way of calculating the date for the feast of our Savior's resurrection.

The Council of Nicaea inaugurates a new age in the conciliar history of the Church, the transition from the local to the ecumenical synodal level. As we know, the First Ecumenical Council introduced the non-biblical term "homoousios (of one essence)" to the Symbol of Faith, albeit with a clear soteriological reference, which remains the essential characteristic of church doctrines. In this sense, the celebrations of this great anniversary are not a return to the past, inasmuch as the "spirit of Nicaea" exists unspoiled in the life of the Church, whose unity is associated with the correct understanding and development of its conciliar identity. Discussion on the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea reminds us of the common Christian archetypes and the meaning behind the struggle against the perversion of our spotless faith, encouraging us to turn toward the depth and essence of Church tradition. The joint celebration this year of the "most holy day of Pascha" highlights the timeliness of the subject, the solution of which not only expresses the respect of Christianity for the decrees of the Council of Nicaea, but also the awareness that "there should be no differentiation in such sacred matters."

With these sentiments, filled with the light and joy of the Resurrection, while proclaiming "Christ is Risen!" with jubilation, let us honor the chosen and holy day of Pascha with a heartfelt confession of our faith in the Redeemer, who trampled down death by death and granted life to all people and all creation, through our faithfulness to the sacred traditions of the Great Church as well as through sincere love for our neighbor, for the glorification by us all of the heavenly name of the Lord.

At the Phanar, Holy Pascha 2025
+ Bartholomew of Constantinople
Fervent supplicant for you all
to the Risen Lord

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

Αριθμ. Πρωτ. 251

† Β Α Ρ Θ Ο Λ Ο Μ Α Ι Ο Σ
ΕΛΕΩΙ ΘΕΟΥ ΑΡΧΙΕΠΙΣΚΟΠΟΣ
ΚΩΝΣΤΑΝΤΙΝΟΥΠΟΛΕΩΣ - ΝΕΑΣ ΡΩΜΗΣ
ΚΑΙ ΟΙΚΟΥΜΕΝΙΚΟΣ ΠΑΤΡΙΑΡΧΗΣ
ΠΡΟΣ ΟΛΟ ΤΟ ΠΛΗΡΩΜΑ ΤΗΣ ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑΣ ΧΑΡΗ, ΕΙΡΗΝΗ ΚΑΙ ΕΛΕΟΣ
ΑΠΟ ΤΟΝ ΕΝΔΟΞΩΣ ΑΝΑΣΤΑΝΤΑ ΧΡΙΣΤΟ

* * *

Τιμιώτατοι ἄδελφοὶ Ἱεράρχες καὶ τέκνα ἐν Κυρίῳ εὐλογημένα,

Αφοῦ ταξιδέψαμε στὸ πέλαγος τῆς Ἀγίας καὶ Μεγάλης Τεσσαρακοστῆς μὲ τὸ ἔλεος καὶ τὴ δύναμη τοῦ Θεοῦ, μὲ προσευχὴ καὶ νηστεία, καὶ φθάσαμε στὸ ὁλόφωτο Πάσχα, ἀνυμνοῦμε τὸν Κύριο τῆς δόξας, αὐτὸν ποὺ κατέβηκε μέχρι τὰ ταμεία τοῦ Ἄδη καὶ μὲ τὴν ἀνάστασή του ἀπὸ τοὺς νεκροὺς «ἔκανε τὸν παράδεισο προσιτὸ σὲ ὅλους τοὺς ἀνθρώπους».

Ἡ Ἀνάσταση δὲν εἶναι ἡ ἀνάμνηση ἐνὸς γεγονότος ἀπὸ τὸ παρελθόν, ἀλλὰ «καλὴ ἀλλοίωση» τῆς ὑπάρξεώς μας, «ἄλλη γέννηση, βίος ἕτερος, ἄλλο εἶδος ζωῆς, μεταστοιχείωση αὐτῆς τῆς ἴδιας τῆς φύσεώς μας»¹. Μὲ τὸν ἀναστημένο Χριστὸ ἀνακαινίζεται μαζί μὲ τὸν ἄνθρωπο ἡ σύμπασα κτίσις. Ὅταν ψάλλουμε τὴν Γ' ᾠδὴ τοῦ Κανόνος τοῦ Πάσχα, τὸ «Νῦν πάντα πεπλήρωται φωτός, οὐρανός τε καὶ γῆ καὶ τὰ καταχθόνια· ἑορταζέτω γοῦν πᾶσα κτίσις τὴν ἔγερσιν Χριστοῦ, ἐν ἣ ἑστερέωται», τότε διακηρύσσεται ὅτι ὁλόκληρο τὸ σύμπαν εἶναι στερεωμένον καὶ πλήρες ἀνεσπέρου φωτός. Ἡ διάκριση «πρὸ Χριστοῦ» καὶ «μετὰ Χριστόν» ἰσχύει ὄχι μόνον γιὰ τὴν ἱστορία τοῦ ἀνθρωπίνου γένους, ἀλλὰ καὶ γιὰ τὴν ὅλη δημιουργίαν.

Ἡ ἐκ νεκρῶν ἔγερση τοῦ Κυρίου ἀποτελεῖ τὸν πυρῆνα τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου, τὸ σταθερὸ σημεῖο ἀναφορᾶς ὅλων τῶν κειμένων τῆς Καινῆς Διαθήκης, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῆς λειτουργικῆς ζωῆς καὶ τῆς εὐσεβείας τῶν ὀρθοδόξων. Ὅντως, ἡ θεολογία τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας συνοψίζεται στὸ «Χριστὸς Ἀνέστη». Ἡ βίωση τῆς καταργήσεως τῆς δυνάμεως τοῦ θανάτου εἶναι πηγὴ ἀνείπωτης χαρᾶς, «ἐλεύθερης ἀπὸ τὶς δεσμεύσεις αὐτοῦ τοῦ κόσμου». «Χαρᾶς τὰ πάντα πεπλήρωται, τῆς ἀναστάσεως τὴν πεῖραν εἰληφότα». Ἐκρηξὴ «χαρᾶς μεγάλης» ἡ Ἀνάσταση, διαποτίζει ὁλόκληρὴ τὴν ἐκκλησιαστικὴ ζωὴν, τὸ ἦθος καὶ τὴν ποιμαντικὴ δράση, ὡς πρόγευση τῆς πληρότητας ζωῆς, γνώσεως καὶ χαρᾶς τῆς αἰώνιας Βασιλείας τοῦ Πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ Υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος. Ὁρθόδοξη πίστη καὶ ἀπαισιοδοξία εἶναι μεγέθη ἀσύμβατα μεταξύ τους.

¹ Γρηγορίου Νύσσης, *Περὶ τῆς τριημέρου προθεσμίας τῆς Ἀναστάσεως τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ*, PG 46, 604.

Τὸ Πάσχα εἶναι γιὰ τὸν ἄνθρωπο ἑορτὴ ἐλευθερίας καὶ νίκη κατὰ τῶν ἀλλοτρίωτικῶν δυνάμεων, ἐκκλησιοποίηση τῆς ὑπάρξεώς μας, πρόσκληση σὲ συνέργεια γιὰ τὴ μεταμόρφωση τοῦ κόσμου. Ἡ ἱστορία τῆς Ἐκκλησίας γίνεται «ἓνα μεγάλο Πάσχα», ὡς πορεία πρὸς «τὴν ἐλευθερίαν τῆς δόξας τῶν παιδιῶν τοῦ Θεοῦ»². Τὸ βίωμα τῆς Ἀναστάσεως ἀποκαλύπτει τὸ κέντρο καὶ τὴν ἐσχατολογικὴ διάσταση τῆς ἐν Χριστῷ ἐλευθερίας. Οἱ βιβλικὲς μαρτυρίες περὶ τῆς ἀναστάσεως τοῦ Σωτῆρος ἀναδεικνύουν τὴ δύναμη τῆς ἐλευθερίας τῶν πιστῶν, στὴ ὁποία καὶ μόνη φανερῶνεται τὸ «μέγα θαῦμα», τὸ ὁποῖο παραμένει ἀπρόσιτον σὲ κάθε καταναγκασμό. «Τὸ μυστήριον τῆς σωτηρίας ἀνήκει σὲ ἀνθρώπους μὲ ἐλεύθερη βούληση καὶ ὄχι σὲ ἀνθρώπους ὑπὸ καθεστῶς τυραννίας»³. Ἡ ἀποδοχὴ τῆς θείας δωρεᾶς ὡς «διάβαση» τοῦ πιστοῦ πρὸς τὸν Χριστό, εἶναι ἡ ἐλεύθερη ὑπαρκτικὴ ἀπάντηση στὴν ἀγαπητικὴ καὶ σωστικὴ «διάβασιν» τοῦ ἀναστημένου Χριστοῦ πρὸς τὸν ἄνθρωπο. «Χωρὶς ἐμένα τίποτα δὲν μπορεῖτε νὰ κάνετε»⁴.

Τὸ μυστήριον τῆς Ἀναστάσεως τοῦ Κυρίου συνεχίζει καὶ σήμερον νὰ κλονίζει τὶς θετικιστικὰς βεβαιότητες τῶν ἀρνητῶν τοῦ Θεοῦ ὡς «ἀρνήσεως τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης ἐλευθερίας», τοὺς ὁπαδοὺς τῆς «φενάκης τῆς αὐτοπραγματώσεως χωρὶς Θεό» καὶ τοὺς θαυμαστὰς τοῦ συγχρόνου «ἀνθρωποθεοῦ». Δὲν ἀνήκει τὸ μέλλον στὸν ἐγκλωβισμό στὴν αὐτάρεσκον, συρρικνωτικὴ καὶ κλειστὴ ἐνθαδικότητα. Δὲν ὑπάρχει ἀληθινὴ ἐλευθερία χωρὶς ἀνάσταση, χωρὶς προοπτικὴ αἰωνιότητος.

Πηγὴ ἀναστάσιμης εὐφροσύνης γιὰ τὴν Ἁγία τοῦ Χριστοῦ Μεγάλῃ Ἐκκλησίᾳ ἀποτελεῖ ἐφέτος καὶ ὁ κοινὸς ἑορτασμός τοῦ Πάσχα ὑπὸ σύμπαντος τοῦ χριστιανικοῦ κόσμου, μαζὶ μὲ τὴν χιλιοστὴ ἑπτακοσιοστὴ ἐπέτειο τῆς Πρώτης ἐν Νικαίᾳ Οἰκουμενικῆς Συνόδου, ἡ ὁποία καταδίκασε τὴν κακοδοξίαν τοῦ Ἀρείου, αὐτοῦ ὁ ὁποῖος «κατασμίκρυνε τὸν ἓνα τῆς Τριάδος, ὁ ὁποῖος εἶναι Υἱὸς καὶ Λόγος τοῦ Θεοῦ», καὶ θέσπισε τὸν τρόπο τοῦ καθορισμοῦ τῆς ἡμερομηνίας γιὰ τὴν ἑορτὴ τῆς Ἀναστάσεως τοῦ Σωτῆρος.

Ἡ Σύνοδος τῆς Νικαίας ἐγκαινιάζει μίαν νέα περίοδο στὴ συνοδικὴ ἱστορία τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, τὴ μετάβαση ἀπὸ τὸ τοπικὸ στὸ οἰκουμενικὸ συνοδικὸ ἐπίπεδο. Ὡς γνωστόν, ἡ Πρῶτη Οἰκουμενικὴ Σύνοδος εἰσήγαγε στὸ Σύμβολο τῆς πίστεως τὸν «ἄγραφον» ὄρο «ὁμοούσιος», μὲ σαφῆ σωτηριολογικὴ ἀναφορά, ἡ ὁποία παραμένει τὸ οὐσιῶδες χαρακτηριστικὸ τῶν δογμάτων τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Ὑπὸ τὴν ἔννοια αὐτή, οἱ ἑορτασμοὶ τῆς μεγάλῃς ἐπετείου δὲν εἶναι στροφὴ πρὸς τὸ παρελθόν, ἐφ' ὅσον τὸ «πνεῦμα τῆς Νικαίας» ἐνυπάρχει ἀδιάπτωτα στὴ ζωὴ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, ἡ ἐνότητα τῆς ὁποίας συναρτᾶται μὲ τὴν ὀρθὴ κατανόηση καὶ ἀνάπτυξη τῆς συνοδικῆς ταυτότητάς της. Ὁ λόγος περὶ τῆς Πρώτης ἐν Νικαίᾳ Οἰκουμενικῆς Συνόδου ὑπενθυμίζει τὰ κοινὰ χριστιανικὰ ἀρχέτυπα καὶ τὴ σημασίαν τοῦ ἀγῶνα κατὰ τῶν διαστρεβλώσεων τῆς ἀμώμητης πίστεώς μας καὶ μᾶς προτρέπει νὰ στραφοῦμε πρὸς τὸ βάθος καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν τῆς παραδόσεως τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Ὁ δὲ κατὰ τὸ παρὸν ἔτος κοινὸς ἑορτασμός τῆς «Ἀγιωτάτης τοῦ Πάσχα ἡμέρας» ἀναδεικνύει τὴν ἐπικαιρότητα τοῦ θέματος, ἡ λύση τοῦ ὁποίου ὄχι μόνον ἐκφράζει τὸ σεβασμὸ τῆς Χριστιανοσύνης πρὸς τὰ θεσπίσματα τῆς

² Ρωμ η', 21.

³ Μαξίμου Ὁμολογητοῦ, *Εἰς τὴν προσευχὴν τοῦ Πάτερ ἡμῶν, πρὸς ἓνα φιλόχριστον*, PG 90, 880.

⁴ Ἰωάν. ιε', 5.

Συνόδου τῆς Νικαίας, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν συνείδηση ὅτι «δὲν πρέπει νὰ ὑπάρχει κάποια διαφορὰ στὴν ἀγιότητα αὐτή».

Μὲ τέτοια αἰσθήματα, γεμᾶτοι μὲ τὸ φῶς καὶ τὴ χαρὰ τῆς Ἀναστάσεως καὶ ἀναβοώντας τὸ κοσμοχαρμόσυνο «Χριστὸς Ἀνέστη», ἃς τιμήσουμε τὴν κλητὴ καὶ ἀγία ἡμέρα τοῦ Πάσχα μὲ τὴν ὁλόψυχη ὁμολογία τῆς πίστεώς μας σὲ αὐτὸν ποὺ πάτησε τὸν θάνατο μὲ τὸν θάνατο, στὸν Λυτρωτὴ ποὺ χάρισε ζωὴ σὲ ὅλους τοὺς ἀνθρώπους καὶ σὲ ὅλη τὴν κτίση, μὲ τὴν πιστότητά μας στὶς τίμιες παραδόσεις τῆς Μεγάλης Ἐκκλησίας καὶ μὲ τὴν ἀνυπόκριτη ἀγάπη πρὸς τὸν πλησίον, ὥστε νὰ δοξάζεται καὶ διὰ πάντων ἡμῶν τὸ ὑπερουράνιο ὄνομα τοῦ Κυρίου.

Φανάρι, Ἅγιο Πάσχα 2025
† Ὁ Κωνσταντινουπόλεως
διάπυρος πρὸς τὸν ἀναστημένο Χριστὸ
εὐχέτης ὅλων σας.

Νὰ ἀναγνωσθεῖ στὶς Ἐκκλησίες κατὰ τὴ Θεία Λειτουργία τῆς ἑορτῆς τοῦ Ἁγίου Πάσχα, μετὰ τὸ Ἱερὸ Εὐαγγέλιο.