



UKRAINIAN GREEK CATHOLIC CHURCH
SVIATOSLAV SHEVCHUK
MAJOR ARCHBISHOP OF KYIV-HALYCH

Prot. N. 18/133 ENG

Page 1 of 3

EASTER PASTORAL LETTER
OF HIS BEATITUDE SVIATOSLAV

Most Reverend Archbishops and Bishops,
Very Reverend and Reverend Fathers,
Venerable Brothers and Sisters in Monastic and Religious Life,
Dearly Beloved Laity in Christ of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church

Christ is Risen!

David, ancestor of the Lord, danced and made music before the Ark, which was only a symbol.

*As God's holy people let us witness the symbol fulfilled,
And rejoice in spirit, for Christ, being almighty, is risen.*

From Ode 4, Paschal Canon

Beloved in Christ!

Today in all of Ukraine and in our settlements abroad Christians are filled with an inexpressible joy. From the moment we first hear our traditional Easter greeting "Christ is risen!" in each one of us, from the youngest to the oldest, our soul undergoes a profound change. We feel how all life's problems and challenges disappear, how all cares and sorrows are washed away "as wax melts before the fire." This joy is the fruit of the Holy Spirit and a true sign, that the risen Lord is present in our hearts.

David, ancestor of the Lord, danced and made music before the Ark, which was only a symbol.

In the sixth chapter of the second book of Samuel, we read how King David at the beginning of his reign arranged for the transfer of the Ark of the Covenant to his capital, Jerusalem. In this relic were contained the tablets of Divine Law, received by Moses: they were the most precious possession of Israel. The Ark was a guaranty of invincibility for the people of the Old Testament, of strength for the king. For this reason, David greets it with great joy, with dance. This presence of God in the midst of His people and their sense of duty to live according to the Lord's commandments will later allow the Psalmist to say: "Light dawns for the righteous, and joy for the upright in heart. Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous, and give thanks to His holy name!" (Ps. 97:11-12).

Our Paschal Matins see in the behavior of the king an image of our paschal joy today. And while the Ark-symbol was lost in the time of the Babylonian onslaught in the VI century

B.C., the risen Lord is eternally present in our midst: "And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Mt 28:20). This is no symbol or prediction of some unsure or unreachable future. Christ Himself, who rose from the dead, comes to us, His disciples, as a source of our strength and victory over evil. In the Resurrection, in the news of His victory over death is found the summit of our joy and the fulfillment of all prophecies and human aspirations.

To rejoice in God is to allow the victory of the risen Lord to penetrate my heart, to be fulfilled in my personal life. This is not merely some temporary feeling, but real participation and communion in Christ's Resurrection. Saint Paul wrote: "For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His" (Rom 6:5). To celebrate Pascha is to rise together with Christ, to triumph in Him and with Him. Thus, our joy in Him and with Him is no passing emotion, but the permanent state of one who lives in the faith of the risen Lord.

As God's holy people let us witness the symbol fulfilled...

In today's world people do not know how to rejoice—they find happiness in possessions, but largely cry over that which they would like to have but do not possess. Today there is an entire amusement industry that "sells joy," suggests that you "buy happiness" in the form of empty and short-term distractions, compulsions, or narcotics, promises quick satisfaction without responsibility, seeks to entice through an escape into virtual realities or the acquisition of temporal riches.

A person seeks happiness but cannot find it in those things. For joy is not possible without God. Happiness without God is an illusion which quickly dissipates. It is a dependency that simultaneously enslaves and saps one of strength.

How often in today's society we find irresponsible politicians, newfound messiahs, in the role of "purveyors of joy." With empty slogans they appeal to the lowest of human desires. At the price of the blood and tears of innocent victims, or even entire nations, they promise happiness "for the chosen" who belong to their "world" which they artificially designed, and count on the fact that in the face of their lawlessness, "in all tongues" — here we paraphrase our great Kobzar- Shevchenko, all will be silent. But such joy is built on the sand of idols, falsehood, and violence, and thus, sooner or later, it will collapse under its own weight.

We, on the other hand, are called to build our happiness and our joy as a community of children of God. It isn't easy to live in the joy of the Lord, especially in today's circumstances. We often ask ourselves: How can we rejoice today? Why are we suffering? Why is this happening to us? Is there any sense to our struggles, the blood and suffering, the deaths and devastation? Without the mystery of Christ's Pascha, these questions remain unanswered. For the risen Christ Himself opens up for us the meaning of human suffering — transforming it in our paschal journey into joy in the Lord. St. Maximus the Confessor wrote: "If God suffers in the flesh when He is made man, should we not rejoice when we suffer, for we have God to share our sufferings? This shared suffering confers the kingdom on us. For he spoke truly who said, 'If we suffer with Him, then we shall also be glorified with

Him' (Rom. 8:17).” The suffering and risen Lord is present in each person who undergoes suffering till the end of the world—in each human hurt, in each spilt tear and drop of blood—and He draws us into His Resurrection, grant us joy therein. The one who suffers in the name of love of God and neighbor, that person knows how to be glad in God, how to rejoice with the authentic and eternal joy of the Risen One.

And rejoice in spirit, for Christ, being almighty, is risen.

Therefore, let us view our personal, family, community, and national sufferings in light of our paschal journey led by the risen Christ, in light of our transformation into joy, our movement towards hope on this lightsome day, made by the Almighty. The Lord’s Pascha opens up for our people the truth that through our struggle we enter into His joy. Our love for the Fatherland, which calls us to self-sacrifice in the name of its freedom and independence is, indeed, a path to Resurrection. Our invincible spirit bears witness before the world that one need not be fearful before deadly falsehood and violence, for “Christ is risen, being almighty!”

Today the Lord Himself gladdens us, changing our sorrow into joy, as it was for the myrrh-bearing women. They went to the Lord’s tomb crying and returned filled with authentic joy in God. They went in the darkness of hopelessness and received the light of the Risen One and proclaimed to the Apostles and the entire world that Christ was truly risen. May we be transformed by this “miracle above all miracles,” and through us—our society and land, wherever we may live.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ! May the victory of Jesus Christ over death and evil dispel our doubts and renew hope and joy in our hearts. To all of you, in Ukraine and throughout the world, I send you my heartfelt greeting together with sincere prayers. To all the soldiers and their families, to all refugees, all who lament on the occupied territories and in the Crimea, all captives and prisoners for the sake of their conscience and love for Ukraine, to all the sick and suffering, to those who labor abroad, I wish all of you divine joy above all! I send you my sincere wishes for a blessed Easter feast, a tasty sharing of our traditional blessed egg, and a Paschal joy that is full of light.

The grace of our Risen Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Christ is risen! – Truly, He is risen!



Given in Kyiv
at the Patriarchal Cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ,
on the Fifth Sunday of Lent
March 25, 2018 A.D.