

Diocese of Pallini and Western Europe

Paschal Encyclical 2020

O death, where is thy sting?
O Hades, where is thy victory?

-Paschal Catechetical Homily of St. John Chrysostom

From the day of the glorious Resurrection of Christ, our very vocabulary has changed. From the fall of our ancestors Adam and Eve, we spoke about “death” and “Hades” for all mankind. Now after the Resurrection of our Lord, we speak of the “falling asleep in the Lord” of a Christian. For the followers of the Resurrected Christ, death has lost its sting and Hades has lost its victory.

Our Great Lent and Pascha this year were full of trials which sought to bring us a sense of hopelessness. However, we must not “grieve like the rest, who have no hope” (1 Thessalonians 4:13). Nothing and no one can take the joy of the Resurrection of Christ away from us.

When St. Alexander (later Bishop of Jerusalem, 251 AD) arrived in the Holy Land from his home of Cappadocia, he found idols that the Pagan rulers had placed at all the great shrines of our Faith, including the Most Holy Sepulchre. However, he points out that the veneration at the Most Holy Tomb of Christ never ceased, even if idols were placed on top of it. Many idols were strewn out this year to distract us, but who can take the Resurrection of our Lord away from us? “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?” (Romans 8:35), or may I say some virus? The desire of our heart is the eternal life, the life of the Resurrection.

Christ’s victory over death gives us unending victory. During the days of the great martyrs, Christians were victorious because they remained with Christ. During the worse years of Soviet power, the catacomb faithful were victorious because they kept the Faith. During this time of “lock-down’”, those few true followers of Christ who are spread out all over the world are victorious because the celebration of the Resurrection of Christ cannot be stopped in our hearts no matter what measures are placed upon us. Together with the angels in heaven, we Christians glorify Christ’s Holy Resurrection!

There is one freedom that no one can take away from us. That is the freedom from sin and eternal death. It was won for us by our Savior with His death and resurrection and that only essential freedom belongs to us His children forever.

Today is a day of joy. We don’t look upon our own weakness but rather upon the strength of the One who raises us up.

Let each of us carry gifts on this Feast of Feasts. Small gifts or large gifts according to our ability. First let us bring most of all our unchanging love for the risen Christ and hope.

Every tribulation in the life of a Christian is simply birthgiving pain. Christ is risen, and the demons are fallen!

In the love of our Risen Savior,

+ Philaretos, Bishop of Pallini and Western Europe