

The Constant Pascha

By Metropolitan Saba (Isper)

Soon, we say goodbye to the Feast of Pascha. For forty days, we are in the midst of the joy of the resurrection. For forty days, we chant with joy, “Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing life!” at the beginning and the end of every individual or group prayer, at home or in the church. There is an Orthodox tradition in which Christians substitute “Christ is risen!” for their everyday greetings for the forty days that follow Holy Pascha.

Soon, we will say goodbye to the services of Pascha, while its spirit will remain with us, since we cannot live without it. “And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!” (1 Cor. 15:17).

Christ’s Resurrection loads us up with hope, strength, action, steadfastness, and the best life, which is always to come! It provides us with the strength to rise after every time we fall, to start building after every collapse, to once again spread the joyful spirit of life after every catastrophe—and there are so many in our tormented world! You live the resurrection every time you return in it to yourself and pay attention to what you have missed, when you rise to make right the sins you have realized in yourself and in your society. You live the resurrection when you realize that you are a child of life—not passing, temporary life, but eternal, lasting life—a child of the life that brings tenacity out of pain, patience out of trials, strength out of weakness, joy out of sorrow, and hope out of despair.

Believing in Christ’s resurrection from the dead means that you believe in your own resurrection and also in the resurrection of the world from every death. Or rather, you translate it in your life into resurrectional action, and because you are not happy to remain as you are, you continue the struggle, seeking what is higher and better, striving for the good portion which will not be taken from you (cf. Luke 10:42). A Christian is a person of the resurrection in the sense that he lives the resurrection at every moment. Otherwise, he has not yet stepped onto the threshold of Christianity. If he languishes under death, then he will quickly perceive his weakness and return to raise himself up by the grace of the resurrection of his Lord, to remain in the mystery of the resurrection, despite the many forms of death that may surround him. He receives from his risen Christ the pulse of life, hope,

optimism and especially a correction of vision toward the highest and most fundamental purpose of his life.

These are nice words, but how are they lived? How are they realized in daily life? We have memorized the golden answers to this by heart. Most of the time, we repeat them without any internal awareness. We say: Christ rose to grant salvation to humankind and to open to them the way to the second life, which had been closed by Adam and Eve's departure from living in the shelter of God. He rose to grant us the power to live eternal life, which had been constantly forgotten by humankind. He rose because God cannot die. And we have other correct answers that we have become accustomed to repeating. But we often forget that their living and demonstrable activity within us is the most important thing.

A person is aware of the activity of the resurrection and lives it when he realizes that he is created for eternal life and arranges his life on the basis of that conscious realization. He sees that he will not live upon this earth more than a number of years that, no matter how long, will not be more than a hundred in the best of circumstances, most of which are labor and sorrow, as the Psalm says (90:10). He is aware that he is created for unending life and not to pass away with the passing away of his earthly life, but that life only starts in its fullness at that moment.

This consciousness grants him a new reading of his earthly life, its pains and difficulties. He sees in it what he did not see before and realizes that through his resurrectional faith he is able to derive benefit for himself and for others. The words of the Apostle Paul become true in him, "All things work together for good to those who love God" (Romans 8:28). In the cross, he sees joy and consolation because it makes it possible for him to struggle and ascend. He learns patience, kindness, mercy and sensitivity to those in pain, those suffering, those who are abandoned, and acquires from his Lord an inexhaustible wellspring of tender compassion that can only be acquired through sincere suffering. He experiences the serene joy that wells forth from the presence of his Lord within him, where he had prepared a place for Him and where He will come to him and make a home with him (cf. John 14:23). He tastes the peace that no evil, no matter how great, can take away from him (cf. John 14:27).

The best sign that we have attained this level of faith is the degree to which we have been freed from that which binds us in this world and its lusts. Seeking eternal

life requires of us constant change and an experience of God's presence in our life. So let us love simplicity of life. Let us seek what is essential and not give any importance to showy material gain. Let us be strangers to extravagance and spectacle, and instead be disgusted by them. Let us feel the suffering of others and be delighted to share in it with them. Let us sit, like Mary, at the feet of the Lord because our joy at that point is indescribable. Those who have touched it experience the grace of the resurrection and have truly known a change of mind and thus a change of their entire being.

The cross leads those of little faith to disbelief and perplexity, but it brings those who believe to grasp the most perfect meaning of life. The unbeliever detests hardship, trials and suffering, and so despairs and rages at life, taking vengeance out on others, and his despair may lead him to suicide since he has no hope. The true believer sees ways to transcend his stumbles and space to make his love active, to give life to his faith, and a resurrection unto the best life, which leads him to thank God in good times and bad.

Many seek joy in the wrong place. They become dejected at the plight of our country and flee to a way out. They vent their anxiety and seek an outlet in things that grant them imagined happiness and temporary joy, winding up with what they had sought to replace and finding themselves in greater anxiety and deeper fear. Is there any clearer sign of the absence of the resurrection from our lives than our failure to realize it, despite the adversities and fears that we are experiencing on account of what is happening in our country? If the resurrection is not present in us today, when will it be?

The Leavetaking of Pascha is a reminder to us to live it throughout the year.

Originally published in 2017.