

PASTORAL LETTER 2023

RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD AND GOD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST

Christ is risen! Truly, He is risen!

"Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, 'This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things'."

Luke 24:45-48

Beloved Spiritual Children in Christ:
Reverend Clergy, Venerable Monastics and Devout Faithful of our God-protected Episcopate:

May God our Father and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ
Bestow on you his grace and peace, and from us, hierarchal blessings!

Dearly Beloved in our Risen Lord:

Saint Luke tells us the words of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ after his third-day resurrection from the tomb while he appeared to his disciples. He had spoken to many, among whom were two on their way to Emmaus. Conversing with them, Jesus called them "foolish," for they had read but not believed what the prophets had foretold about the Savior.

When Jesus then appeared to the eleven, he "opened their minds" so that they could understand the scriptures, the prophets who foretold the Savior's appearance on earth, his ministry of suffering to save humanity, his three-day burial, and his conquest over death.

Jesus then said to them, "*You are witnesses of these things,*" and sent them to all nations. Dearly beloved, our nations, Canada and The United States, are among all nations to which the forgiveness of sins and promise of unending life are given. This announcement is for all times, for all peoples, all nations. Let us ask him to open our minds, for we too, are witnesses to these things, in this time, to our nations.

Saint Clement of Alexandria encourages us as witnesses, saying, "*...such a change, then, from disbelief to faith and to trust in hope and fear, is divine. And*

in truth, faith is discovered by us to be the first movement toward salvation..." [Stromata, Book 2, Ch. 6 Mg 8,965]. As Orthodox Christians, we, too, are witnesses, and our lives must bear true witness, Orthodox witness, to Christ and his words of salvation. Therefore, let us beseech him that our hearts be opened.

Do you remember the scripture in which Jesus states that not everyone who says, " Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom? It is not enough to be an Orthodox Christian; we must live in Christ. Saint John Chrysostom warns us precisely about this when he says: *"Though a man believes rightly on the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, yet if he leads not a right life, his faith will avail nothing toward his salvation"* [Homilies on St. John 31:1]. Saint Paul also tells us: *"I no longer live, but Christ lives in me"* [Galatians 2:20]. These are reminders that we are to be Christ's witnesses, each and all.

Saint Ignatius of Antioch encourages us as he did Saint Polycarp, when he says: *"Please the leader under whom you serve, for from him you receive your pay. May none of you turn out a deserter. Let your baptism be ever your shield, your faith a helmet, your charity a spear, your patience a defense. Let your works be deposits, so that you may receive the sum that is due to you. In humility, be patient with one another, as God is with you"* [Letter to Polycarp, Ch. 6].

On this day when we gather as Church, Family, and Nation, let us rightly celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ in humble gratitude to him. He has taken away our sins and called us to bear witness, as the prophets foretold, and as he fulfilled all for all.

Dearly beloved, we have been baptized into Christ and put on Christ; we have been anointed with the oil of gladness and participate in the Lord's supper. Therefore, let our hearts respond to the great calling to be witnesses of the Risen Lord. Let us say, "Lord, open my mind!" and "Lord, open my heart!" that I may exclaim from the depths of my being that Christ is risen! Truly, he is risen!

In the Risen Christ,

+ Nathaniel

+NATHANIEL

By the Mercy of God, Archbishop of Detroit
and the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America and Canada
Orthodox Church in America