

**2023 PASTORAL LETTER OF THE UKRAINIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF CANADA
ON THE OCCASION OF THE FEAST OF THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD
9/16 APRIL 2023**

To the Reverend Fathers, Religious Sisters, Venerable Monastics, Brothers and Sisters in Christ!
“Were not our hearts burning inside... It is true. Our Lord is risen!” (Luke 24:32&34)

Christ is Risen!

Dearly Beloved in Christ!

Following the ancient tradition, our Church invited us to more intense prayer, penance and charity during the forty days of the Great Fast. This was not a forced imposition to make us sad or irritable. Rather, it was an invitation to transformation. It was a challenge to change our hearts, purify our souls and improve ourselves in order that we would be truly worthy to meet and enjoy the glorious Feast of our Lord’s Holy Resurrection.

Just prior to that first glorious Easter morning, there was betrayal, loneliness, suffering, passion and death. Faith was displaced by fear and sadness in the apostles and disciples of Christ. Their hope was buried in the tomb. The seemingly last act of love was the weeping women going to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus.

Let us recall the event at Emmaus. Two disheartened disciples, Cleopas and Luke, talk sadly along the way about Jesus’ passion and death. Unknown to them, our Lord joins them on the road and explains all those things that had to happen. Later, at the “breaking of bread”, the two disciples recognized the Risen Jesus, and as the Gospel tells us, “They said to one another, ‘Were not our hearts burning inside us as He talked to us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?’” They rush back to meet the other disciples and are greeted with the joyous news, “It is true. The Lord is risen.” (Lk. 24: 32 and 34)

During this whole period of Great Fast preparation, our Church led us gradually to these astonishing Gospel passages announcing the Resurrection of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ.

And every time we hear this “good news” our hearts should burn inside us as we marvel at all these things that were done for our salvation. We cannot remain silent. We cannot just whisper it. We have to shout it out! Not just you and I, but everyone, the whole Church: Christ is risen! Truly He is risen!

The Resurrection of Christ is the greatest proof of God’s love for us. Just like the disciples, we too realize that there is no Resurrection without suffering and the cross. Jesus wanted to suffer, die and rise from the dead for our sakes. Christ’s victory over death is also our victory because we have been baptized into His death and shall rise with Him in glory. We live according to Christ’s Gospel anticipating His blessings and eternal life.

The Resurrection of Christ validates everything He taught and did during His early mission. Faith in the Resurrection leads to life. Our faith in Easter goes beyond the tomb. Yes, we kiss the burial shroud with tears in our eyes. These tears of sadness are transformed into tears of gladness because of our faith in the Risen Christ. Our Lord lives.

We do not just read about the Resurrection once a year or celebrate Easter merely as a historical event. In times of uncertainty, confusion, helplessness and need of protection, we rush to the empty tomb and witness the love that conquered death. This faith has meaning for us today and every day of our lives. Christ’s Resurrection is reflected in our lives every time we choose life over death; when we prefer light to darkness; when we choose a life of grace rather than a life of sin; when we put love where there is hatred and indifference and when we choose peace over discord and war.

Particularly today we need to demonstrate this faith to everyone – together, in churches, at our Easter

meals, and say, “It is true, Christ is risen!” Just like the two disciples at Emmaus, Mary Magdalene and the myrrh-bearing women, Peter and John and the unbelieving Thomas, we proclaim: “Are not our hearts burning inside us ... It is true! Our Lord is risen!” (Lk. 24: 32 & 34).

There is no doubt that Christ’s resurrection constitutes the greatest and most important feast in our Church’s calendar. It is the Feast of Feasts, the Holy Day of Holy Days. However, it is possible that not everyone in our congregations will be able to go to their parish church or be home for Easter because they were destroyed or had to flee from it because of the war. Not everyone may be able to share with their loved ones the traditional Easter dinner and the joy of Easter. If you know someone who has no family or relatives close by, please invite them to come to church for Easter worship and then to your home for a meal of paska and other blessed foods. No one should be home alone this Easter! The ongoing war is not an excuse for self-isolation, self-pity and fear. We are people who believe in the Resurrection of Christ, a people of hope and light even in times of darkness. Faith gives strength, perseverance and endurance. Christ has conquered our greatest enemy – death, and we prevail over the powers of evil, all visible and invisible enemies with His help.

On this joyous, solemn and glorious Feast of Easter, we want to assure you of our prayers for great joy, abundant grace, good health and success in your daily struggles for the good of our families, beloved nations of Canada and Ukraine, and Christ’s Church. Let us be grateful for Almighty God’s great love for us and all His generous gifts.

May the abundant blessings of the Risen Christ and His promise of peace and eternal life be yours today and always!

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