



بَطْرِيكِيَّة أَنْطَاكِيَّة وَسَائِرِ الْمَشْرِقِ لِلرُّومِ الْأَرْثُوذُكْسِ  
*Patriarcat Grec-Orthodoxe d'Antioche et de tout l'Orient*

**Paschal Letter 2013  
With the Mercy of God  
John Xth  
Patriarch of Antioch and all the East**

To all our beloved in the Lord  
the children of the Antiochian See, clergy and laypersons,

On the great day of Resurrection, on which Christ rose and raised us with Him, it pleases me to remember with you the meanings of Resurrection and to explain some of its aspects.

The resurrection of the Lord is the resurrection of each one of us. In the resurrection the power of the devil, our enemy, was brought to naught. Although death terrifies human beings, yet the Lord Jesus has defeated it with his life-giving resurrection. He descended in His death to the abode of death, that is, to Hades, and exploded it from within, abolishing its effects. It is true that death is still there, however it has become a mere passage to true life, a complete liberation from temporal things and a way to eternity. Resurrection gave us grace instead of sin, immortality instead of corruption, life instead of death. The rule of the evil one is gone and the kingdom of God has appeared. Darkness gives way to light.

The resurrection is a new creation, a new man, a new people. It is a proof of the power of life and the energy of renewal. It is the supremacy of light and the everlasting rule of truth "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come" (2 Cor 5: 17). The resurrection is the victory of God over the powers of sin and death which distort creation and humankind and seek to destroy them. It is the victory which inspired the Apostle Paul to proclaim: "Oh Death, where is your victory? Oh Death, where is your sting" (1 Cor 15: 55).

In His resurrection Christ has opened to man the way of true life, the life of happiness, light, love and renewal. In His resurrection Christ renewed our old nature, and made it in the beauty of His image, enabling us to become a people of resurrection in word and deed. If we believe and truly desire it then the resurrection of Christ becomes our own personal Pascha. "Christ is buried in us as in a tomb. He unites Himself with us and raises us again in Himself." (Saint Simeon the New Theologian) When we become pure vessels for the Holy Spirit, our celebration of

Pascha becomes a continuous celebration and “happens in us mysteriously at all times”.

True resurrection is never separated from the Cross. The Cross is the way that leads to it. The resurrection of the Lord cannot be lived without remembering His cross and carrying it. In order for us to participate personally in the resurrection of the Lord we must not forget the Cross which preceded it. Without the cross we cannot have a share in the glory of the risen Christ. If we are not aware of the Cross in our lives, from what will we be risen then? If we remain where we are now, where then are the signs of our resurrection? If the darkness of sin continues to prevail in us, how can the light of resurrection dwell in us? We cannot celebrate the resurrection of Christ if the light of the Saviour does not fully dispel from our souls the darkness of our sins.

Easter visits us now while our concerns increase, our fears grow greater, destruction expands, evil intensifies and killing is everywhere and at all times. How can we celebrate the resurrection while our country is doomed, the number of hungry and displaced people is increasing? How can we live the resurrection when the cross is always present?

This is the mystery of Christ, “Through the cross joy came to the whole world”. There, where the Cross is, true resurrection is to be found too. Otherwise Pascha would only be mere poetry and chanting. The world does not like the cross. It seeks to abolish it, while it is surrounded by crosses on all sides. True believers would never have these crosses out of sight; they face them with the spirit of resurrection and take from them the new life and put on them the clothes of the light of life. The energy of the resurrection which is in Christ transforms the cross into a tool of joy, a way of life, a witness of love and a sign of communion and solidarity.

How can we live the resurrection? How can we embody it in our lives? How can we translate it from books to the reality of our life?

We celebrate the resurrection and live it when we do not allow evil to enter us and dwell within us under any circumstances whatsoever. We live the resurrection when we do not answer evil with evil. We live it when we continuously purify ourselves from all traces of hatred and rancour. We live it when we stick with constructive truth which does not separate but gathers, which does not cause grief but happiness, and which does not destroy but builds. Let us behold then the truth to which we were called, (if we know it), the truth which liberates us from all sorts of chains of evil. Let us behold the truth which is in the others and respect it, so we might truly communicate with our fellow citizens and fulfill each other, in order to build both our homeland and humanity.

Beloved,

What we are saying about Cross and resurrection takes on today a deeper realistic meaning as some of our brethren have suffered the troubles connected to the painful events we are witnessing. Our brothers, that is a number of Metropolitans,

Priests and lay persons are still being held by their kidnappers. A number of priests and lay persons have been killed here and there, and thousands of believers have been displaced from their homes. We are carrying the cross of what all of them have suffered and are still suffering. We share the grief and the tragedy of the Archdiocese of Aleppo, as well as every parish. However, we should use this grief to make a way to a greater steadfastness and an occasion to proclaim our faith in the Resurrection. We have made until today every effort with international and local authorities, asking them to help in the release of the kidnapped. This is the least of what we could do. We need to work for peace to prevail in our regions and we call for an immediate cessation of violence in actions between fellow citizens. We will not surrender to these circumstances as the Lord did not succumb on the way to Golgotha. We shall continue in our way and we shall always claim the rights of man to a decent and peaceful life, mindful that the resurrection is certainly going to happen. For these reason I call upon you for more unity, more prayer, more steadfastness in your faith, more love for your homeland and more openness toward your fellow citizens. Only then can we be more powerful and more efficient in asking for the removal of oppression, a safe return of the kidnapped and the removal of every tear from the faces of those who are sad.

We become children of the Resurrection when we become bridges of communication and encounter between those who are separated, and between those who are in conflict. Let us be bridges exactly like the Lord who did not ask anything for Himself, but gave the world everything, to such an extent that He offered Himself for the salvation of the world. Let us serve as ways of rapprochement for all. Through love, sacrifice and in deeds and truth we shall build our countries.

We become children of Resurrection when we live our faith in genuineness, depth and meaningfulness. External expressions are bound to change with cultures and ways of living, but the genuine Christian content preserves the trust which has been handed down to the saints under many different circumstances, I cases and cultures. Let us imitate the courage of Christ who did not fear anything, even death. Instead He faced the cross with love and brought us to resurrection. Let us face the cross of this crucified East with overwhelming love for all those who are crucified on it, until we reach with them the resurrection we all expect. Let us live these painful days in simplicity, enjoying the bare necessities of life and experiencing the true wealth which is life with God. Let solidarity, cooperation and communion be for us a priority. Needy persons are numerous and the numbers of those affected by troubles are increasing. Let us all be one family and one household. Let us not forget the words of the Gospel, "and whoever... gives one of these little ones a cup of cold water to drink... he shall not lose his reward" (Matt 10:42).

At this stage I address our children in the diaspora wishing them blessed days and praying for their welfare and that they may receive the blessings of God, reminding them of their role and the necessity of expressing their love toward their peoples and countries and in their communion with them. You can extend to us a helpful hand in any way that would be suitable for you.

Last but not least, we do not forget that God is the Lord of history, so we may always hold to patience and hope which do not fade away. Let us remember the words of the prophets and how much they called, in times of distress, for repentance and faith, until God intervenes and removes the distress. In these troubled days we are witnessing, we are in sore need of faithful witnesses. Let us move out of our distress with more faith, more purity and greater loyalty. When we understand that we only need God and no one else, the effects of resurrection will appear in us and in all our humanity. When this happens all around us shall be transfigured.

Christ is risen!

Indeed, He is risen!