

**EASTER PASTORAL LETTER
OF THE HIERARCHS OF THE UKRAINIAN GREEK-CATHOLIC CHURCH
IN WESTERN EUROPE**

**Reverend Fathers,
Venerable Brothers and Sisters,
Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ!**

Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

For the second year running we are celebrating Pascha in the midst of a global pandemic. Once again, we have completed the Great Fast under Covid-19 restrictions. We have accompanied Jesus through Passion Week on the way of the Cross, mindful of the crosses and burdens we continue to carry. Our life has become, in a sense, a passion story. Circumstances require us to renounce ourselves and pick up our crosses, each and every day. And for us Christians this journey is bearable and meaningful because we are following our Divine Teacher and Master. He leads the way, and we know that His Passion on the Cross leads to His and to our Resurrection.

While we might be tempted to focus on our suffering, our “passion story”, there is nothing that can compare to the horror that our Lord experienced — His arrest, trial, mocking and abuse, torture and crucifixion. We would like to think that, unlike the Apostles, we would have not abandoned our Lord in those final days and hours. Unlike Peter, we would have had the courage to admit not only that we know Jesus, but that we are His followers and He is our Teacher. However, even though we know how the story ends, we know the victory over death that Resurrection brings, we still hesitate, we still doubt, we still are afraid to bear witness to the Gospel, to stand up for our Christian beliefs. We have become silent and fearful, surrounded by a secular society that is full of contradictions—seeking to save lives while freely supporting those who wish to end theirs, developing incredible medical technologies while allowing the miracle of life to be violently taken from innocents before they are able to take their first breath. This pandemic has shown how we live in a society that is fearful of death, yet simultaneously wilfully dismissive of it. A society that seems to cherish life, but does not have the spiritual perspective to truly appreciate its value.

We Christians embrace death, having already experienced it through Holy Baptism. We have already died with the Lord, and have already risen with him unto eternal life. St. Paul writes to the Romans: *“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”* (Romans 6:3-4) That is what we celebrate today!

So, what is this “newness of life” that is ours? It is, of course, a life that reaches beyond our physical limitations and confines. It is the gift of sharing in the Bread of Life unto life everlasting, of being nourished by the Word of God and, especially, the Holy Eucharist. It is

the gift of fellowship and unity that we share as a Christian community. It is the love, care and support we offer one another, as brothers and sisters – children of our Heavenly Father. It is the witness that we bear before the world, as missionary disciples of our Risen Lord. When we think of the richness and wealth of what Jesus Christ offers us, and the spiritual and moral support Christians give one another in times of crisis, we are saddened and astounded that Christian worship and all that it entails is considered a “non-essential service” by those who would govern over us, but forget that there is a God above us all!

We have seen the impact of lockdowns on the mental health of the most isolated. It is foolish to think that physical and mental health can be separated from spiritual health, that is, from a trusting relationship with our Heavenly Father. We think of Jesus and his most profound moments of doubt and anguish in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the Cross. What the Gospels seem to record as an experience of total abandonment: *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”* (Psalm 22:1) is, in fact, a hymn of deliverance and victory which Jesus prayed on the Cross—something we can only understand if we continue reading the psalm: *“You who fear the Lord, praise him! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him, and stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel! For he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, and he has not hidden his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him.”* (Psalm 22:23-24). Yes, our Lord experienced human anguish and pain, but ultimately his relationship with the Father is what gave Him the courage to fully accept and drink His Cup. And in His Resurrection he leaves us, even in the darkest of days, a shining light at the end of the tunnel.

On this day that the Lord has made, let us not be sad, but full of joy and confidence in the victory that is already ours. In the Easter homily delivered by the famous Church Father, St. John Chrysostom (the “Golden-mouthed”), Archbishop of Constantinople (397-405), which we customarily read on Eastern morning, he encourages us: *“Let no one fear death, for the Saviour’s death has set us free. He that was held prisoner of it has annihilated it.”* Having encountered Christ, Hell is described as abolished, mocked, slain, overthrown, bound in chains: *“It took a body, and met God face to face. It took earth, and encountered Heaven. It took that which was seen, and fell upon the unseen.”*

Quoting St. Paul, *“O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?”* (1 Cor 15:55), in a final crescendo, over and over, Chrysostom repeats the customary Easter greeting “Christ is risen!”, explaining ever deeper the fullness of our salvation: *“you [Hades] are overthrown... the demons are fallen... the angels rejoice... life reigns... the tomb is emptied of the dead.”*

Dear Sisters and Brothers, we the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Hierarchs of Western Europe are united with you, as together with you we sing “Christ is Risen! Indeed, He is Risen!” May the joy of this Feast of Feasts fill the hearts of all. May your festive tables be laden with our traditional Easter foods, and your homes be filled with the blessing of peace and good health.

The blessing of the Risen Lord, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all!

Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!

Given in London, Munich, Rome, Paris & Kyiv
on 25 March / 7 April 2021 on the Feast of the Annunciation

+ **Kenneth Nowakowski**

Bishop of the Eparchy of the Holy Family of London

+ **Dionisio Lachovicz**

Apostolic Exarch for Ukrainian Catholics of the Byzantine Rite in Italy

+ **Petro Kryk**

Apostolic Administrator for Ukrainians in Germany and Scandinavia

+ **Hlib Lonchyna**

Apostolic Administrator of the Eparchy of St Volodymyr in Paris

+ **Bohdan Dzyurakh**

Apostolic Exarch Elect for Ukrainians in Germany and Scandinavia

+ **Stepan Sus**

Head of the Pastoral Missions department of the Patriarchal Curia