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BY THE GRACE OF GOD
BISHOP OF EASTERN AMERICA
OF THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

Most beloved clergy and monastics, sons and daughters,
faithful children of our God-protected Diocese of Eastern America!

We greet you on this, The Feast of Feasts – The Resurrection of Christ, albeit during this most trying epoch of the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, from our paternal heart emanating with Paschal joy and emboldened by the hope-filled words of St. Gregory the Theologian, we exclaim the ever-resounding and victorious Christian greeting:

CHRIST IS RISEN!

*“Yesterday I was crucified with You, O Christ;
Today I abound with glory.
Yesterday I died with You;
Today I am filled with life.
Yesterday I was buried with You;
Today I arise with You.”
(St. Gregory the Theologian)*

Out of great love for one another, we have been separated, beloved, to repress the dire effects of the coronavirus pandemic, which rage throughout the world. The love of Christ keeps us together as a community bound in love and, indeed, a community of love! For no matter how weak and how frail we are as individual persons, when we are brought together as a community of faithful, with Christ is our midst, we become a perfected community of love – His love! We must then ask ourselves: *“who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?”* (Rom. 8:35). As nothing can separate us from the love of Christ or from one another, we must understand that our self-isolation remains an act of selflessness and not self-centeredness!

Rejoice, therefore, for He, Who was crucified for us and for our salvation, rose on the third day. Our life will, thereby, conclude not in death, but in the Victory of Life over death. Crowned no longer with a wreath of thorns, rather by self-sacrificial love, glowing in the radiance of the Resurrection, He filled all in all with light. For He is the light of this world! Now the eye of the heart can perceive, through this unique prism, the very meaning of life itself. Only then will we understand the abundant and deeply personal meaning of life, and none of the problems of this world will be able to detract us from the Risen Lord. As such, we have no need to fear, for if we apply **faith and reason** in our lives, *“neither height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Rom. 8:39).

In the ever-memorable words of St. Paisios the Athonite: *“Do not give in to panic. Cowards are of no use to anyone. God looks at a person’s situation and helps him... No matter what happens, we must continue to **pray, think and act**. It is best to always stand up to a difficult situation using spiritual means. However, that spiritual boldness, which is born of holiness and striving toward God, is missing today, as is the natural boldness needed in order not to turn coward in the face of danger.”* Spiritual and natural boldness come from Christ alone, Who said: *“My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness”* (II Cor. 12:9). Therefore, our interpersonal solidarity, our strength, can only be expressed *“with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love”* (Eph. 4:2).

Faith in Christ assumes that we have trust and that we allow Him, Who is Truth, to direct us on the path toward His full revelation. During this present Pascha, beloved, we have become pilgrims searching for that revelation. Listen to the voice of God, who directed Israel of Old during the first Pascha. Hear Him now and obey His life-saving directives on what to eat, how to eat, how to dress and be prepared to remain in our homes, yet ready to move at His command. The Lord also told us to mark our door posts with the sign of our faith. Thus, when He enters our homes and our hearts, He will prevent any misfortune from entering our lives (cf. Exodus 12:1-13). Through the Risen Savior, *“we know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another”* (I Jn. 3:14).

Therefore, beloved, let us together with the plentitude of Christ’s Holy Church, our firm community and our sure source of faith, hope and love, now, more than ever, from all our heart exclaim:

**CHRIST IS RISEN!
INDEED, HE IS RISEN!**

Given in New York, at Pascha in the year 2020.

YOUR FERVENT INTERCESSOR BEFORE THE RISEN LORD,

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