

Serbian Orthodox Church  
to her spiritual children  
on Pascha 2020

**IRINEJ**

By God's grace

*Orthodox Archbishop of Pech, Metropolitan of Belgrade-Karlovci and Serbian Patriarch, with all the hierarchs of the Serbian Orthodox Church – to the clergy, monastics and all the sons and daughters of our holy Church: grace, mercy and peace from God the Father, our Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, with a joyous Paschal greeting – Christ is risen!*

It is the day of Resurrection! Let us be illumined by the feast, let us embrace one another and let us say to all, even to those who hate us! Let us forgive all things with the Resurrection and thus let us cry out: Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death and upon those in the tombs bestowing life! (from the Paschal matins)

Brothers and sisters, our dear spiritual children, here we are in the joy of the great feast of the Resurrection. Today is the feast of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ – let us rejoice and be glad in it! Pascha is our greatest feast – the feast of the victory of Life over death, God over satan, Man in Jesus Christ over sin. Christ is risen from the dead! Let us say this to all and let us gladden all, even those who hate Him, the resurrected God-man, and us, His inheritance here on earth, and those who still doubt that He is the Redeemer and Savior of the world.

Brothers and sisters, our dear spiritual children, the essence of the mystery of Christ's Resurrection is in Him "Who Is", Son of God and Son of man, already on Holy Friday and finally on the day of Resurrection, defeating satan and trampling down his authority and power. Death and Hades have been defeated. Holy Apostle Paul says victoriously "O death where is your sting? O hades where is your victory?" And Saint Basil the Great, Archbishop of Cappadocia overcome with the mystery of the Resurrection, comments on the words of Holy Apostle Paul and says that Lord Jesus Christ gave Himself in exchange to death, "which kept us, who were sold to sin, in slavery and having descended into Hades through the Cross He destroyed the bonds of death; and He rose on the third day and opened the path for all to the resurrection from the dead. He, Christ the Lord, says Saint Basil, became the First-fruit of the dead, First-born of the dead, so that He may be all things, being first in all things."

Marveling at the wondrous Resurrection from the grave, hymnologist says, "Lord, how You were born of the Virgin and how You rose from the grave we do not know, but we glorify You as Savior and Redeemer." Celebrating the Resurrection of Christ along with him we also marvel at this great wonder and sing, "Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing life!" Like the sons of Israel who, having crossed the Red Sea, offered thanksgiving and praise to God, we also, our dear spiritual children, having passed through the sorrow and mourning of the Great Friday and Great Saturday, finding ourselves in

the joy of the Resurrection, let us offer thanksgiving to God and say: Glory to You O Lord, our Savior and Redeemer, for delivering us from the reign of sin, death and the devil!

On the truth of resurrected Christ Who appeared to the myrrh-bearing women, apostles and others, we stand and exist! Resurrected Lord Jesus Christ is an unshakeable Foundation not only of our faith and our Church but of our entire being and of all that is. "If Christ did not rise from the dead, our faith is in vain, our hope is in vain, we are still under sin!" says Holy Apostle Paul. Meaning of everything that exists is in the Resurrection. Without the Resurrection everything, even life itself, is meaningless. In the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ one discovers the mystery of the Incarnation of God the Word, His birth in Bethlehem and His passion as the Lamb of God in Jerusalem, as well as of all that took place not just in Jerusalem and Judea but in the entire history of the world.

In the light of Christ's Resurrection, brothers and sisters, we the Christ-bearing Serbian people also reflect on ourselves and our history. We are a people that passed the Cross and the Resurrection. With Christ we suffer and with Him we resurrect. Our entire history is cross-bearing and resurrectional, placed between Golgotha and the Resurrection. Last year we celebrated a great jubilee, the eight hundredth anniversary of the Autocephaly of our Church. In that jubilee we considered the breadth, depth and height of our existence over the last eight hundred years. In this year of the Lord, however, we shall celebrate the one hundredth anniversary of the restoration of the renewal of the status of a Patriarchate of our Church. After the Golgothic suffering of our people in the 19th century and in the first decades of the 20th, metropolitanates and dioceses of our Church, fragmented along the border lines of former states and empires, united into the one Serbian Orthodox Church whereby our ancient Pech Patriarchate was restored. That was a blessing from God to our people and our Church in return for our unprecedented suffering and long suffering. Holy Martyr Deacon Avakum perhaps expressed it best when given the choice of renouncing his Faith or facing death he exclaimed, "A Serb is Christ's, he rejoices at death!" Our unity in our struggle for truth and justice was blessed. By the Grace of the Holy Spirit and the power of an unwavering faith, hope and love, we restored the Pech Patriarchate over the entire area inhabited by Orthodox Serbs, to the joy of our ancestors and pride of us all.

Previously, our dear spiritual children, we passed, just like Israel, through many Golgothas and horrors, across blue seas and sea depths, and then finally reached freedom and unity. Our Golgothic and Paschal history tells us that we should never, even on Holy Friday, lose faith and hope in God. Was not 1915 a Holy Friday year of our history? Was not 1916 a year of our Albanian Golgotha? And was not 1917 a year of our burial into the "blue tombs"? But lo the wonder! Year 1918 was already the year of our victory, our freedom and our resurrection while 1920 a year of our ecclesiastical and spiritual renewal.

Reflecting upon this wondrous act of God in our history we can cry out with the Psalmist, "Great are You O Lord and wondrous are Your works and there is no word sufficient to hymn Your wonders!" Marvelous indeed are the events of the liberation and unification of our people, which preceded the renewal of our church unity and our Patriarchate. Everything inexorably reminds us of a wondrous deliverance of the sons of Israel from Egypt, their wandering around Sinai and entrance into the Holy Land. Unfortunately, after all this, we found ourselves again on the

crossroads of history, both through our own fault and the fault of others, and then we resurrected again, and so on to these days!

As we celebrate the Resurrection of Christ, let us remember our brothers and sisters on the martyric Kosovo and Metohija! Let us pray for them, that the Lord would give them strength to overcome all the lawlessness and all the sufferings and thus work out their and our salvation, that they never lose faith in the ultimate victory of Good and that they know that the Lord is a God of mercy and goodness, always with them and with all who walk God's paths!

Likewise, brothers and sisters, let us remember our brethren in Montenegro who endure a great lawlessness and injustice. Lawless "laws" of the land have abolished truth and justice in Montenegro. Once proud and noble Montenegro, known for her chivalry and heroism, is now trying to plunder from our Church what has been hers for centuries, what the entire Serbian people with their bishops, priests and monastics built and created. Holy places of Montenegro, many of which older than Montenegro itself, are people's holy places and in them Liturgy will be served throughout the centuries, by the prayers of Saint Basil of Ostrog, Saint Petar of Cetinje, holy new martyrs killed by the hands of their godless, former brothers, and of all the saints.

Let us remember our martyred brethren in Syria, Iraq and all over the world, all those who suffer because of someone's greed! One of the most beautiful and most monumental countries in the world – Syria, has been almost demolished through evil and violence. Let us pray for all of them and for all those suffering, that the Lord would deliver them from hands of the unrighteous!

Today we especially remember and greet with Christ is Risen! all our brothers and sisters in Ukraine, headed by their Metropolitan Onufry, all the metropolitans, archbishops and bishops, monastics and clergy who are victims of unecclesiastical, uncatholic and obstinate dealings of our times! Let us pray for those who suffer, that the Resurrected Christ the Lord would deliver them from the hands of the lawless!

Dear brothers and sisters, our dear spiritual children,

This Pascha we meet and celebrate in difficult conditions, in troubles in which we hardly ever have before. We live in the days of a pandemic which suddenly came upon mankind. The entire world is overcome and threatened by a virus. Will the haughty and selfish contemporary man draw any conclusions from all this? Or will he carry on, without repentance or love, with his suicidal project of creating a false earthly paradise in which there is no room for either God or a Godlike man, a spiritual being? Having found ourselves in these troubles we must do everything we can to help ourselves and others, to understand and support the efforts and programs of the healthcare, sanitational and other institutions who are doing a lot of work to protect us from being infected. Perhaps this is difficult to accept right now, but we ought to accept and support everything that is unto the common good of us all, adjusting our behaviors and habits accordingly. Above all, let us pray to the Lord our God to deliver us from this epidemic and such dangers! Let us pray to God, let us participate regularly and actively in Divine Liturgy, let us repent of our sins and let us take care of our health and the health of others! This is a good opportunity to think about ourselves and the world we live in. Behold, a virus has shaken up and brought to their knees the entire world, and has endangered lives of millions of people! "Humble

yourself, o proud man!” Dostoyevsky said in his time. His message is, we could say, more current today than when it was written.

In the joy of the Resurrection of Christ, we remember all of you, our dear spiritual children, those in the motherland and those abroad, and we greet you with a fatherly and most joyous greeting:

Christ is risen!

Given at the Serbian Patriarchate in Beograd,  
At Pascha 2020

Your intercessors before the Resurrected Lord:

Archbishop of Pech,  
Metropolitan of Belgrade-Karlovci  
Serbian Patriarch IRINEJ

[With all the Hierarchs]