

The Truth and Power of the Resurrection

The mind can prove the truth of the Resurrection through reason based on the scriptures, and a non-believer cannot but admit the power of its arguments, as long as a sense of truth is not yet dead in him. A believer does not need proof, because the Church of God is filled with the light of the Resurrection. Both of these indicators of truth are faithful and convincing. But counter-reasoning can spring up and contradict mind's reason, and faith can be trampled and shaken by perplexities and doubts, coming from without and arising within.

Is there no invincible wall around the truth of the Resurrection? There is. It will occur when the power of the Resurrection, received already at baptism, begins to actively be revealed as it purges the corruption of soul and body, and establishes within them the beginnings of a new life. He who experiences this will walk in the light of the Resurrection, and anyone talking against the truth of the Resurrection will seem to him insane, like a person saying in the daytime that it is night.

Saint Theophan the Recluse



On Sunday 12 April 2015, we celebrate the Great and Holy Pascha of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ

Resurrection Gospel:
Mark 16:1-8

Epistle: Acts 1:1-8

Gospel: John 1:1-17

Apolytikion for the Feast:

Christ has risen from the dead, by death He has trampled on death, and to those in the graves He has given life.

Seasonal Kontakion

Though You went down into the tomb, You destroyed Hades' power, and You rose the victor, Christ God, saying to the myrrh-bearing women, "Hail!" and granting peace to Your disciples, You who raise up the fallen.



Evangelion

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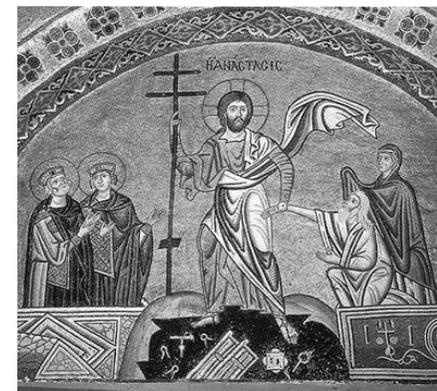
Christ is Risen!

Today, on Easter Sunday, we celebrate the great event of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ and His victory over the powers of death. "Christ is risen, and the demons are fallen! Christ is risen, and the angels rejoice! Christ is risen, and life reigns!" as we hear Saint John Chrysostom proclaim in his Paschal Homily.

The Church refers to Easter as the Pascha of the Lord because it sees His Resurrection as a new Passover. The word "Pascha" comes from the Hebrew word "Pesach," which refers to the Jewish Passover from slavery in Egypt. Led by the prophet Moses, God delivered His people from slavery and led them into freedom in the promised land.

The early Christians understood the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ to be a new Passover, which frees us from the slavery to sin and leads us into true freedom. He is the true Lamb who has been sacrificed for us, and through His death He has conquered death forever.

This Passover of the Lord is one that we are invited to share in. The liturgical texts for Holy Week and Pascha speak not so much about historical events, but repeatedly refer to "today," reminding us that Christ's victory over death is a present reality and something that we need to enter into. For, through our baptism, we too have died with Him and have been given the promise of a new life in Him.



Readings and saints for this week:

Monday: Acts 1:12-17, 21-26; John 1:18-28
Martin the Confessor

Tuesday: Acts 2:14-21; Luke 24:12-35
Saints Raphael, Nicholas, Irene, and the Other Newly-revealed Martyrs of Lesbos; Aristarchus, Pudens, & Trophimus of the 70; Thomais the Martyr of Alexandria

Wednesday: Acts 2:22-38; John 1:35-52
Martyr Crescens; Hieromartyr Leonidas

Thursday: Acts 2:38-43; John 3:1-15
Virgin Martyrs Agape, Chionia, & Irene

Friday: Acts 3:1-8; John 2:12-22
Theotokos of the Life-giving Spring; Hieromartyr Symeon; Makarios, Abp. of Corinth

Saturday: Acts 3:11-16; John 3:22-33
John the Righteous; Euthemios the Enlightener of Karelia

The light shines in darkness, in this life and in the flesh, and is chased by the darkness but is not overtaken by it. By this I mean the adverse power leaping up in its shamelessness against the visible Adam but encountering God and being defeated – in order that we, putting away the darkness, may draw near to the Light and may become perfect Light, the children of perfect Light.

Saint Gregory the Theologian

The Resurrection of Christ in the Church's Icons

Saint Gregory the Theologian calls Easter the "feast of feasts and the celebration of celebrations." Like the Birth of Christ, it is a great mystery and cannot be explained or depicted, for it involves the breaking in of eternity into our world of time and space. The Orthodox Church therefore does not depict the actual moment of the Resurrection of Christ in icons. Instead, the two icons that are used for the Resurrection that depict the events just before and just after the Resurrection. These are the Descent of Christ into Hell, which we commemorate on Holy Saturday, and the visit of the Myrrhbearing Women to His Empty Tomb.



You went down to the deepest parts of the earth, and you shattered the everlasting bars of those that those that were fettered, O Christ. And on the third day, like Jonas from the whale, you arose from the tomb. (Easter Matins)



When those who were with Mary came, anticipating the dawn, and found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre, they heard from the Angel, 'Why do you seek among the dead, as though he were mortal, the One who exists in everlasting light. See the grave clothes. Run and proclaim to the world that the Lord has been raised, and has put death to death; for he is the Son of God, who saves the human race. (Easter Matins)

The icon of Christ's Descent into Hell encapsulates, as it were, our whole understanding of the mystery of our salvation. Adam was dead in sin because he was cut off from God, but in His death Jesus Christ descended into the very depths of death. Saint Peter tells us that Christ "went and preached unto the spirits in prison" (1 Peter 3:19). In voluntarily entering into the depths of our human condition and encountering evil and suffering at its very heart, Jesus Christ conquers death and His Light began to shine into the darkness of hell.

In the icon we see the radiance of Christ's glory dispelling the darkness of sin as he draws Adam and Eve out of hell and towards the Light. Around them we see groups of Old Testaments saints who represent all who have been waiting for Christ in hope.

The icon of the Myrrhbearing Women depicts the visit of these women to Christ's tomb early in the morning on the first day of the week, as the Gospels recount. There they encountered an angel, who announced to them that Christ was not there, but had Risen and gone ahead of them to Galilee.

This icon depicts the Resurrection as already having occurred. These women encounter the empty tomb of Christ and the reality that Christ is Risen. As Saint John of Damascus writes:

When He had freed those who were bound from the beginning of time, Christ returned again from the dead, having opened for us the way to resurrection.

Today, Christ is Risen, and Life Reigns

From the Paschal Homily of Saint John Chrysostom

If anyone is devout and a lover of God, let them enjoy this beautiful and radiant festival.
If anyone is a grateful servant, let them, rejoicing, enter into the joy of his Lord.
If anyone has wearied themselves in fasting, let them now receive recompense.
If anyone has laboured from the first hour, let them today receive the just reward.
If anyone has come at the third hour, with thanksgiving let them feast.
If anyone has arrived at the sixth hour, let them have no misgivings; for they shall suffer no loss.
If anyone has delayed until the ninth hour, let them draw near without hesitation.
If anyone has arrived even at the eleventh hour, let them not fear on account of tardiness.

For the Master is gracious and receives the last even as the first; He gives rest to him that comes at the eleventh hour, just as to him who has laboured from the first. He has mercy upon the last and cares for the first; to the one He gives, and to the other He is gracious. He both honours the work and praises the intention.

Enter all of you, therefore, into the joy of our Lord, and, whether first or last, receive your reward. O rich and poor, one with another, dance for joy! O you ascetics and you negligent, celebrate the day! You that have fasted and you that have disregarded the fast, rejoice today!

The table is rich-laden: feast royally, all of you! The calf is fatted: let no one go forth hungry!

Let all partake of the feast of faith. Let all receive the riches of goodness. Let no one lament their poverty, for the universal kingdom has been revealed. Let no one mourn their transgressions, for pardon has dawned from the grave. Let no one fear death, for the Saviour's death has set us free.

He that was taken by death has annihilated it! He descended into Hades and took Hades captive! He embittered it when it tasted His flesh! And anticipating this, Isaiah exclaimed: "Hades was embittered when it encountered Thee in the lower regions".

It was embittered, for it was abolished! It was embittered, for it was mocked! It was embittered, for it was purged! It was embittered, for it was despoiled! It was embittered, for it was bound in chains! It took a body and came upon God! It took earth and encountered Heaven! It took what it saw, but crumbled before what it had not seen!

O death, where is thy sting?
O Hades, where is thy victory?
Christ is risen, and you are overthrown!
Christ is risen, and the demons are fallen!
Christ is risen, and the angels rejoice!
Christ is risen, and life reigns!
Christ is risen, and not one dead remains in a tomb!

For Christ, being raised from the dead, has become the first-fruits of them that have slept.

To Him be glory and might unto the ages of ages. Amen.