



IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, ONE GOD. AMEN.

KHRISTÓS ANÉSTI! ALITHÓS ANÉSTI! CHRIST IS RISEN! TRULY HE IS RISEN!

My Beloved, Priests, Deacons, Servants, Members of Church Committees, and all the Congregation, my sincerest congratulations to you all for this Glorious Feast of the Resurrection that we celebrate tonight. The day has come for us to partake of the feast and receive the riches of God's goodness, as St. John Chrysostom said in his famous paschal homily:

“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.”

This is the Feast of all feasts. The day of great joy and celebration. The day that the final enemy, Death, has been defeated by the risen King of glory, our Lord Jesus Christ. As we read earlier this evening, **“THIS IS THE DAY THE LORD HAS MADE; WE WILL REJOICE AND BE GLAD IN IT” (PSALM 118:24).**

Remember that today the tomb is empty! What greater joy is there than seeing the seal broken and our faith restored! **“AND IF CHRIST IS NOT RISEN, THEN OUR PREACHING IS EMPTY, AND YOUR FAITH IS ALSO EMPTY” (1 CORINTHIANS 15:14).**

It is through the empty tomb that our faith is made full. Not only was the tomb empty but the angels declared the good news saying **“WHY DO YOU SEEK THE LIVING AMONG THE DEAD? HE IS NOT HERE BUT RISEN” (LUKE 24:5).** Today we can stand behind the words of St. Paul and confidently say, **“O DEATH WHERE IS YOUR STING? O HADES WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY?”**

On this triumphant and glorious occasion, I would like to shift your perspective and enlighten your eyes through God's grace, on a very personal scene. In tomorrow's gospel according to Saint Luke, we will hear of another encounter with Christ. On the road to Emmaus, there were two apostles, who as you can imagine, were feeling very discouraged and defeated. Discouraged to the point where, in their eyes, a stranger, questioned the matter of their conversation. In retrospect we know it is our Lord Jesus Christ who approaches them; however, I want you to totally embrace the role of the apostle at the time of this interaction.



You have just spent the past few years, listening to the One Man you gave everything up for. Now not only can you not recognize his voice, but you also can't recognize his face as he is walking by your side? How can this be? Maybe you may say, the weekend was long, I have been running from the people as Christ was being slaughtered like a lamb, I didn't have the most focus at the initial point of contact. However, Christ took with them the entire 7-mile road from Jerusalem to Emmaus, that's roughly a full day's journey. In all that time, still nothing? Something isn't quite right.

Christ responds to their despondency saying, **“O FOOLISH ONES, AND SLOW OF HEART TO BELIEVE IN ALL THE PROPHETS HAVE SPOKEN! OUGHT NOT THE CHRIST TO HAVE SUFFERED THESE THINGS AND ENTER INTO HIS GLORY” (LUKE 24:25-26)**. Are these not the same words they just heard when He predicted His death and resurrection saying, **“THE SON OF MAN MUST SUFFER MANY THINGS AND BE REJECTED BY THE ELDERS AND THE CHIEF PRIESTS AND SCRIBES, AND BE KILLED, AND BE RAISED THE THIRD DAY” (LUKE 9:22)**. It is evident that their hardness of heart and lack of faith resulted in their ignorance and blindness.

Christ never once forsook them in the years they spent together. Actually, the contrary. For every difficult moment, He showed his omnipotent glory. When thousands were hungry, he abundantly gave food to eat. When the lame couldn't move, he gave health to walk. When the blind couldn't see, he gave sight to their eyes. Why do we think that He would forsake us now? St. John Chrysostom writes saying, **“TO BE IN AFFLICTION IS NO PROOF OF BEING FORSAKEN.”** Sadly, we measure the economy of God with our earthly expectations and connect the failures of man to God. However, today he gave us the final proof that He has the power to conquer even death itself.

God created us with the purpose to live, be fruitful, and multiply. To truly live not in fear. This is why you saw the greatest struggle of Christ at the Garden of Gethsemane. The great anguish he was feeling was not to diminish his divinity but showed that being human, pain and suffering was not part of our original nature. It was then necessary that being human Christ embrace the pain and suffering of humanity, nail it to the cross, only to rise triumphantly on the third day. As we rhetorically asked in the reenactment, **“WHO IS THE KING OF GLORY?”** The deacons responded, **“THE LORD MAJESTIC, STRONG, POWERFUL, MIGHTY IN BATTLES, HE IS THE KING OF GLORY” (PSALM 24:8)**. This is my God and your God willing & able to save us from the destruction we were destined for.

Finally, at the end of their journey to Emmaus. The two disciples urge Christ to stay and dine with them, still not knowing that He is our Lord Jesus Christ, glory be to His name. At the table, **“HE TOOK BREAD, BLESSED AND BROKE IT, AND GAVE IT TO THEM. THEN THEIR EYES WERE OPENED, AND THEY KNEW HIM; AND HE VANISHED FROM THEIR SIGHT” (LUKE 24:30-31)**. What is this scene other than the Eucharist we receive here at the altar daily? It is when they finally abided in Him, and He in them that their eyes were opened, and they could see the glorious resurrected Christ.



Here we have to take notice that there is no salvation outside of the Church. It is through the Church that we are given the grace to partake of His Holy Body and precious Blood, and to be active participants in the sacraments leading to salvation. Rejoice greatly today for Christ has conquered death by His death. We have been given light when we were sitting in darkness, joy when we were sad, and life when we were dead. As we continue the next 50 days, do not easily throw away your encounters with Christ by the pool of Bethesda with the paralytic man, the Well with the Samaritan woman, or outside where he made eyes out of clay. Take heed to the instructions of St. Paul as he says, **“NOW THE PURPOSE OF THE COMMANDMENT IS LOVE FROM A PURE HEART, FROM A GOOD CONSCIENCE, AND FROM SINCERE FAITH, FROM WHICH HAVING STRAYED HAVE TURNED ASIDE TO IDLE TALK” (1 TIMOTHY 3:5-6).** Let us love from all our heart and seek not ourselves, but the company of the angels and saints to attain the unity of faith and knowledge of the Lord’s imperceptible and infinite glory as we are reminded at the conclusion of every hour.

May God bless you all and keep you and make His Face shine upon you. And may He give us the strength to continue to challenge ourselves to grow spiritually throughout these coming Holy 50 days of resurrection.

Through the intercessions of the Mother of God, St. Mary, and through the prayers of the first witness to the Resurrection, St. Mary Magdalene, and through the prayers of our holy Father and Shepherd His Holiness Pope Tawadros II.

CHRIST IS RISEN! TRULY HE IS RISEN!

Bishop Peter

Bishop, Coptic Orthodox Diocese of North & South Carolina & Kentucky.
And Papal Vicar of the Churches of Virginia.