



COPTIC ORTHODOX DIOCESE OF NORTH, SOUTH CAROLINA & KENTUCKY

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

CHRIST IS RISEN! TRULY HE IS RISEN!

My beloved, priests, deacons, servants, members of church committees, and all the congregation, it is with great joy that I congratulate you on the occasion of the Feast of the Glorious Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. This glorious feast is the cornerstone of our faith and the foundation of our hope. It is the day when death was conquered and the power of sin was broken and the way to eternal life was made clear.

St. Cyril of Alexandria tells us:

"For Christ arose from the dead on the third day, on which he also entered into heaven... So when our Lord Jesus Christ arose and waved himself as the first fruits of mankind before God the Father, it was then that our very depths were changed into a new life."

New life, that is what this feast is all about. The old is put away and all things are made new in Christ. Through His death and resurrection, sin has been conquered and the power of death destroyed, once and for all. We are no longer slaves to sin. We have been given freedom and a new life in Christ!

As St. Paul says,

"Just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." (Romans 6:4)

That is what the resurrection of our Lord offers to each one of us tonight: newness of life.

But how can we get that new life? Where does it come from? How do we avoid going back to our old lives, especially now that Pascha week is over and we return back to our jobs and day-to-day responsibilities? How can we walk in that "newness of life"?

The answer lies in the final words of Lord Jesus Christ to His disciples, which we read this past week on the Eve of Great Friday. Jesus began by addressing the condition that He knew His disciples would soon find themselves – a condition we can all relate to after a powerful Pascha week:

"Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, 'Where I am going, you cannot come,' so now I say to you." (John 13:33)

I'm sure many of us can relate to this verse. This is how we often feel in our spiritual lives. We know that God is always with us, but we aren't always sure where to find Him. We felt Him during Pascha week and we loved it, but soon thereafter, it seems like He's gone. It feels like He's up there enjoying His time in heaven while we're down here wandering on earth – lost, confused, and alone.

But see what He says next:

"A new commandment I give to you, that you LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS I HAVE LOVED YOU, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35)

He speaks about love – the fulfillment of all the commandments. He says you can not be with Me where I am going, but I will be with you when you do this one thing: WALK IN LOVE.



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Love is the answer. Love is how we can keep what we have gained. Love is how we can continue to walk with our Savior in newness of life. Love is what changes everything.

Why? Because **"God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him."**
(1 John 4:16)

Because what distinguishes you, as a Christian, from the world if you hate those who hate you, or if you return evil for evil? This will characterize you as belonging to the world, not the Savior of the world.

St. John the beloved tells us:

"He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked." (1 John 2:6)

St. John meant by the word "He" Our Lord Jesus Christ, who loved us to the end.

My beloved, if we want to live a new life with God and continue on the path that we began this past week, that life must be one that is characterized by love. Love is the defining feature.

Love for our families by seeking to sacrifice for one another and serve one another as Christ, the Son of Man, who did not come to be served but to serve and give His life a ransom for many.

Love for our neighbors and the world around us by bearing witness to the truth and living out the gospel with both our words and our actions.

Love for those with whom we struggle to get along with by bearing with one another and accepting one another, just as Christ has accepted us.

And to even love our enemies and those who have wronged us – this is the true sign that we are new creations in Christ.

My brothers and sisters, if we want to walk in newness of life, it is love that must be the defining characteristic of all our interactions – at home, in our churches, and everywhere we go.

Because there is no life with Christ apart from a life of love.

"He who raised him (Jesus) up from the dead will raise us up also – if we do his will, and walk in his commandments, and love what he loved, keeping ourselves from all unrighteousness." (St. Polycarp)

May the grace of God be with you all and may His resurrection inspire us to live a life of faith, a life of hope, and above all else, a life of love.

Through the never-ending intercessions of the Holy Theotokos, 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, Diocese of North, South Carolina & Kentucky
And Papal Vicar of the Churches of Virginia