



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, my sincerest congratulations to you all for this Glorious Feast of the Resurrection, as we celebrate the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ over death and over the power of the grave.

"O Death, where is your sting? O Hell, where is your 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 the grave. For Christ, being risen from the dead, is to become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep." St. John Chrysostom

Ever since the time of the Fall of mankind, death reigned over the earth and all its inhabitants. None was exempt from its rule. No matter how righteous a person was, we all shared the same fate: death. As we say in the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil "death, which had reigned over us, whereby we were bound and sold on account of our sins."

But thanks be to our God, who through His cross and through His holy resurrection, has restored man once again. By death, He defeated death and destroyed the power of the grave and freed us all from its grip. As the prophet Hosea says, ***"I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. O Death, I will be your plagues! O Grave, I will be your destruction!" (Hosea 13:14)***

Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ! O how great is our God and how mighty is His Name!

But let us realize my beloved brethren, that while in the resurrection we see the awesome power of Christ on full display, it was not that way for most of His life on earth. In fact, for most of His 33 years, the Lord Jesus lived in obscurity, not fame. He lived in poverty, not riches. He was treated with dishonor, not honor. With reproach, not respect. He was mocked and jeered, not esteemed or revered.

And the most incredible part is that He accepted it all willingly and without complaint. As we say during one of the Fraction prayers, ***"He preferred suffering to ease and comfort, toiling to rest, shame to glory and the Cross to the throne which is carried by the Cherubim."***



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Indeed, His life was not an easy one. Yes, He did many miracles and displayed His power on many occasions, but never were those miracles done for His own comfort or for His own needs. They were always done for others – to lift them up and never Himself. He however was ***“despised and rejected...a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.” (Isaiah 53:3).***

In fact, if you look at the totality of Christ's life, there is one overarching theme that is evident from start to finish – from the moment of His glorious Incarnation inside the womb of the Virgin, to His final utterances on the cross, when He said, “It is finished”.

That one theme is humility. That was the defining characteristic of His life on earth.

But not an ordinary humility – not the kind of humility that is done for show or for praise from people. His was a real, genuine humility – the kind that has never been seen before and will never be seen again.

The eternal Logos of the Father, “who is and who was and who is to come” (Revelation 1:4), took flesh and became man. He was born in a dirty manger, surrounded by smelly animals. He lived in an obscure town, one that made Him the subject of mockery. He worked with His hands – the same hands that fashioned the universe – as a simple carpenter.

He subjected Himself to His parents. He paid taxes to civil authorities. He lived among His creation for 33 years – healing their sicknesses, washing their feet, and eventually allowing Himself to be crucified at their hands.

“How could this be My Redeemer? What made You accept all this? Could the Great One be disgraced? Could the Glorified One be humiliated? Could the Most High be humbled? Oh how great is Your love!” Excerpt from the Fraction to the Son

Without His humility, there would be no Incarnation. Without His humility, there would be no cross. Without His humility there would be no redemption, no victory over death, and no forgiveness of sin. Our salvation could not and would not have been accomplished apart from the incomprehensible and unimaginable humility of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And now my beloved brethren, in light of the incomprehensible humility of Christ, let us take to heart the words of St. Paul as he calls us to adopt the same mindset in ourselves:



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"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross." (Philippians 2:5-8)

If the Master's life was characterized by humility, then the same should be true of His disciples. If humility was the means by which He accomplished victory, then it is also the only means by which we will live in that victory today. There is no other only path. As St. Augustine says, ***"If you ask me what the essential thing in the religion and discipline of Jesus Christ is, I shall reply: first, humility; second, humility, and third, humility."***

So my beloved brethren, let us seek to walk in humility as our Lord did. May that be our focus during these coming 50 days of resurrection.

By serving one another and washing one another's feet. By putting the interests of others above our own and truly esteeming others better than ourselves. By learning from one another – even those who seem to have very little to offer. May we never think so highly of ourselves that we think others have nothing to offer.

By accepting correction from one another without getting angry or upset or defensive. May we always be open to criticism, knowing that *"none is pure from blemish, even though his life on earth is a single day."*

When we do that, my brethren – when we walk in humility – then and only then will we experience the full power of Christ's resurrection in our lives.

May God bless us all, and may He grant us to walk in true humility. Through the never-ending intercessions of the Holy Theotokos, St. Mary, and the intercessions of the trumpeter of the Resurrection, the great Archangel Michael, 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
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