



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.

My beloved sons and daughters in the Lord, Christ is risen! Truly He is risen!

It is with great joy that I greet you on this glorious Feast of the Resurrection, the feast of all feasts. The Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ is not only the victory over death, but the beginning of a new life for humanity and for the Church. His resurrection not only gives us hope for life after the grave, it also reveals our calling of how to live together as His Body on earth.

As we celebrate tonight's feast – after 55 days of fasting and prayer and lengthy hours in church – we ask ourselves the following question: where do we go from here? What comes next?

To discover the answer, let us look at Jesus' final speech and prayer, recorded by St. John in 17th chapter of his gospel. On the final night before His death, our Savior lifts His eyes to heaven and prays for His disciples and for all who will believe through their word and says:

"That they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me" (John 17:21)

These words reveal the true heart of Christ. On the night before His crucifixion, when He knew the suffering that awaited Him, Jesus did not pray for comfort or relief. Instead, He prayed for unity among His followers – knowing that the mission of His Church would depend on it.

We live today in a world marked by division – division in our homes, division in our nation, and sadly, division in our churches. This is all the work of the devil; in fact, the very word *diabolos* means to divide and to separate.

Jesus knew this would happen and maybe that is why He prayed so fervently for our unity. He believed that our unity would be mission-critical. If we are not united, we cannot succeed – but if we are united, we cannot fail. Therefore, we must fight for it, as His mission relies on it.

The Church therefore is called to be something radically different from the world around it. In the Church we do not merely tolerate one another; we need one another. We do not simply endure our differences; we learn to embrace them in love.

"There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all." 1 Corinthians 12:5-6

The early disciples themselves were a strikingly diverse group. Among them were fishermen and tax collectors, zealots and ordinary laborers, men and women from different regions and backgrounds. Our Lord intentionally brought together people who might otherwise never have walked the same road. And He taught them to walk hand-in-hand, even when they didn't always see eye-to-eye.

The fathers of the Church also remind us that unity is not optional but essential to our life in Christ. St. Cyprian of Carthage famously wrote:

"He cannot have God as Father who does not have the Church as Mother." (St. Cyprian of Carthage)

By this he meant that our relationship with God cannot be separated from our relationship with one another. To be united with Christ means to be united with one another.



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Likewise, St. John Chrysostom warned his flock about the danger of division, saying:

"Nothing so provokes God's wrath as division in the Church." (St. John Chrysostom)

For this reason, the unity of the Church becomes a powerful witness to the world. Imagine a community where people from different backgrounds, generations, and experiences truly love and support one another. Imagine a place where forgiveness is practiced, burdens are shared, and differences are met with humility rather than hostility. Such a community would reflect the very life of the Holy Trinity – as Christ said,

"By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35)

Notice Christ did not say that the world would recognize His disciples by their knowledge, their rituals, or even their traditions – important as these things are. Rather, He said the world would know them by their love.

This love is not an ordinary love but love as manifested by Christ. His love was sacrificial, patient, forgiving, and inclusive. He welcomed the outcast, the sinner, the stranger, and the seeker.

"It is not enough not to be an enemy; you must also increase in love. Remember that this is what Christ commanded, and that is enough." (St. John Chrysostom)

Being a member of the Body of Christ is not only a vertical relationship with God, but a horizontal one with our neighbor as well.

Therefore, my beloved children, during this joyful season, let us renew our commitment to this calling. Let us seek reconciliation where there is conflict. Offer kindness where there is misunderstanding. Choose humility instead of pride, patience instead of judgment, and compassion instead of indifference.

Our mission is too important to allow division to weaken our witness. May our homes, our churches, and our communities become places where the love of the risen Lord is clearly seen and felt by all. That is not only my prayer for us all, but also the prayer of our Lord before His death.

"that they may be one... that the world may believe that You sent Me" (John 17:21)

May the light of the Resurrection fill your hearts with joy, strengthen you in faith, and unite us ever more deeply as one Body in Christ. Through the never-ending intercessions of the Holy Theotokos, St. Mary, and the intercessions of 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
And Papal Vicar of the Churches of Virginia