

PASCHA 2007

Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!

To the Very Reverend and Reverend Clergy, Monastics, and Faithful
of The Orthodox Church in America

“If Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty....
And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!”
– 1 Corinthians 15:14,17



Recently, there have been a number of attempts to “disprove” the central tenet of our faith: that Christ is risen from the dead. Television documentaries claim that Our Lord’s grave – and that of his family – have been discovered. “Scholars” debate whether Christ really died on the cross, or whether He merely fell victim to a condition that mimics death, only to be “revived” while “resting” in the tomb. That which generated tremendous controversy 2000 years ago – even Our Lord’s murderers spread the belief that His disciples had stolen His body! – continues to breed controversy and attempts to prove or disprove the very foundation of our faith as Orthodox Christians.

Scientifically, the Resurrection cannot be proven. Ultimately, it is a Mystery – the greatest Mystery of all time. It is a Mystery that can only be understood through the eyes of faith, through an intense trust in the will of the Creator Who, as we sing in one Vesper hymn, can change the order of nature as He desires. It is a Mystery that simply cannot be understood by those who question or reject the very notion that God so loved the world that He sent His only-begotten Son to renew and restore all creation and its relationship to its Creator. For those who deny God, or who are indifferent to Him, or who refuse to embrace His very existence, the Resurrection is reduced to myth, even as it renders the death of Christ meaningless, just one more senseless death not unlike the countless others perpetrated by the civil authorities of the time.

While indeed we “preach Christ crucified,” as Saint Paul writes elsewhere, it is only through the glorious Resurrection that the Crucifixion holds any real meaning. The cross – that dreaded sign of death and corruption – is transformed into a sign of victory, the ultimate symbol of God’s presence and loving kindness and forgiveness. Hence, while we preach Christ crucified, we look beyond the cross to the empty tomb, in which we discover the Christ Who emptied Himself precisely to ensure that our preaching and faith are not empty or futile, the Christ Who loves us so much that He literally gives His life lest we remain captives to sin, corruption, and ultimately, death itself.

Someone once wrote that, when the Good News of the Resurrection ceases to be controversial, it loses its very power to transform lives. Today, as in centuries past, Our Lord's Resurrection remains the subject of controversy, doubt, and even blatant denial. But surely we must acknowledge that, despite 2000 years of controversy and scientific enquiry and archeological digs, the light of the risen Christ has not – and cannot – be extinguished.

The Resurrection remains at the heart of our faith and lives as Christians. The eyes of faith can see beyond the Mystery into the deepest reality of all: the very love of God that makes the Resurrection of Our Lord possible and holds for us the promise of our own resurrection and delight in life eternal.

This year, as we celebrate the Resurrection of Our Lord and Savior, let us arm ourselves against every temptation to doubt the central Mystery and reality of our faith. Let us be assured of the forgiveness and new life that shines forth from the empty tomb. And let us renew our commitment – and conviction – that only by and through the incomprehensible Mystery of the Resurrection can we discover our true destiny and calling as the People of God, living “in” this world, yet already delighting in the life of the world to come.

May the risen Savior renew, restore, and refresh us during this most joyous season, and every day of our lives, so that in all things, He and He alone may be glorified!

With love in the Risen Lord,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Herman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

+ **HERMAN**
Archbishop of Washington and New York
Metropolitan of All America and Canada