



**The Serbian Orthodox Church
to her spiritual children at Pascha, 2018**

+IRINEJ

By the Grace of God

Orthodox Archbishop of Pec, Metropolitan of Belgrade Karlovci and Serbian Patriarch, with all the Hierarchs of the Serbian Orthodox Church to all the clergy, monastics, and all the sons and daughters of our Holy Church: grace, mercy and peace from God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, with the joyous Paschal greeting:

Christ is Risen!

We have completed the time of the Great and Holy Lent, during which in daily services with repentance, confession and tearful prayers we co-suffered with our Lord, accompanied Him on the way of the Cross leading to the Resurrection, and chanted gratefully: “Glory to thy long-suffering, O Lord!” We have lived through His voluntary suffering, humiliation, spitting and death on the Cross so that we may today, by God’s immeasurable mercy, welcome Christ’s glorious Resurrection. By participating in these events we live through them, overcoming death and every sadness; for just as without death there is no Resurrection, so likewise without spiritual struggle carried out in hope and long-suffering there is no consolation. That is why we worship and give thanks to the Lord risen from the dead, because He has made us, His faithful people, worthy to be communicants of his miraculous works, feeling in our souls the new life that conquers all tribulations.

Let us celebrate today’s bright Feast Day with joy, our dear spiritual children, for its grace and light come not from the Sun, nor from angels, but rather they come from the Unapproachable Light which dispels the darkness, and the eyes of the people see all the beauty and harmony of God’s world. Only in this Light can we clearly see the meaning of the existence of mankind and of the world in honor, which belongs to them as God has ordained. On this day we are reminded and counseled together with our God-bearing fathers of Christ’s Church that the cause and goal of creation is God. Each of us, as God’s co-worker, is responsible not only for ourself and our people, but for all people and all nations, for all of God’s creation. This is the universal human philosophy by which our faith has lived and worked through the ages, demonstrating what today is now called “ecological consciousness.” Therefore, on today’s Feast Day, which is an oasis of peace and joy, we are doing a spiritual review, arming ourselves with hope so that, with the help of God’s full arsenal that is found in the Church, we may endure all tribulations and all temptations, drawing strength from the Lord Who encourages us with these words: “But be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33) The Resurrection is the greatest victory over evil, sin and death, which reminds us that we have the possibility and duty to stand up against every spiritual fall and against everything that prevents us from walking towards the good. Let us not despair, but rather let us hope in the Lord, so that we may receive God’s grace and help in every struggle. Faith in the Resurrected God-Man reveals the cure for the increasing depression found in the modern world. According to the words of St. Theophan

the Recluse, it gives us the possibility to “see over sin and suffering” with our spiritual eyes. If we sin according to our weaknesses, the Holy Gospel tells us: Arise, O you who sleeps – in sin – arise and resurrect from the dead – with repentance – and Christ will enlighten you. (cf. Ephesians 5:14)

The Lord Himself out of His exceedingly great mercy and love towards us takes upon Himself a wondrous ascetic feat – He becomes the God-Man, born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary for us and for our salvation, so that He might be “delivered up because of our offenses, and raised for our justification” (Romans 4:25), to return everything to its original harmony and to return to us the joy of gazing upon His face. So then our justification is our deification in Christ Jesus, and our joy is the eternal joy and hope of the Resurrection, upon which is established the Christian creed of faith, which brings with itself the greatest gift: the victory of life over death. The Incarnation, as the beginning of the economy of the salvation of mankind in the Resurrection, accomplishes the final fulfillment of the saving work which is constantly celebrated by the Orthodox Church every Sunday. According to the golden-winged words of the Saintly Bishop Nikolai, this annual cycle in which we live is not “only a listing of the dead”, but rather it is always the open dynamism of life, which goes to meet Christ Who is coming. This is why he who belongs to Christ and calls himself a Christian is freed from death, for the Lord Himself assures us of this: “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me, though he may die, yet he shall live.” (John 11:25) With these words He gives us hope for the true life which is the joy of our faith. From them we understand that His Resurrection is our resurrection, for Christ by his death destroys death, giving us eternal life.

This blessed life, life with all the saints, begins here and now on earth. Joy and peace begin here in this life for everyone who fills his or her soul with the eternal word of God and forgives everyone for everything. There is no one today, believing or non-believing, who would not want to participate in true joy, at least for even a moment. But peace and joy are to be found nowhere. All around is hopelessness, the soul is drenched with personal desires and wishes stemming from self-love and selfish living, leading to spiritual death and its consequences, aimlessness and negligence of eternal salvation.

We are witnesses of a general alienation and destruction, foremost in families, where community between spouses is increasingly destabilized, and the mutual disrespect between parents leaves an indelible wound on the souls of the children. We cannot seek our rights by violating the rights of others. We have forgotten that it is necessary to respect oneself and the holiness of one’s own body, which is the temple of the Holy Spirit (cf. Corinthians 6:19), so that we may come to the true measure of everything transient, respect our neighbor and his freedom, the holiness of all and the common good, as well as one’s personal needs.

Therefore, our spiritual children, respect and safeguard the holiness of marriage, for it is the foundation of a healthy and unbreakable family. In love guard the mystery of life sanctified by God Himself. May true faithfulness and mutual forgiveness adorn our every family, which is a domestic Church. Abortion, the greatest crime of our century, unfortunately, is present even among our people, for according to the statistics, the population in Serbia declines every year equivalent to that of a small town. Every conception, birth, and every human being in the light of Christ’s Resurrection is a gift from God which has eternal meaning and is born for eternity. Setting before you, dear brothers and sisters, these temptations of all mankind, we, with paternal love ask you to conduct yourselves in a sound and responsible way, redeeming soberly and in peace the time of your lives “because the days are evil.” (Ephesians 5:11) Let us pray to the Lord that peace may reign in places where it has been banished, firstly, in our hearts and our homes, but also in the entire suffering world!

We Christians do not hate this world and its people. We firmly walk upon this earth with

our eyes raised towards heaven. Respecting all human accomplishments, we want all to be sanctified with God's grace and power, for the Lord tells us: "You are the light of the world." (Matthew 5:14) Rejoice with the Paschal joy, for the Lord wishes "that your joy may be full." (I John 1:4) Victory with Christ, accomplished through grace and our efforts to follow God's commandments, is certain. It is when a person is born of water and the Spirit that his resurrection begins. This is the central point of eternal existence, which gathers together all the elements by which we arrive at knowledge of self and knowledge of God. Knowing Truth, real Truth, is faith in the Resurrection and the joy of the Resurrection.

In these bright days of our joy, we do not forget human pain, sorrow and suffering. We do not forget the sick, old and infirm, those in poverty, in exile and in misery, persecuted and expelled from their homesteads. We pray with faith and hope that God will erase every tear from their faces. (cf. Revelation 7:17) We incessantly co-suffer with our clergy and monastics, faithful people and children in Kosovo and Metohija, who are our conscience and without whom Serbian spiritual conscience would be weak and void. Encouraged by your strength and decisiveness, we always offer prayers on our knees that you may endure and that the Kosovo Oath will become a bridge between heavenly and earthly Serbia. We dare not, because of injustice, give in nor take fright, but instead we choose the Heavenly Kingdom along with the Holy Tsar Lazar, who offered a sacrifice just as you offer it today.

Injustice and misuse of the goods of this world did not bypass our greatly suffering but never crushed and humiliated people who, by the grace of God, will next year celebrate eight hundred years of autocephaly of the Church and state. This gives us self-confidence and confirmation that we are a people led by saints: Saint Simeon, Saint Sava and Saint King Stefan the first-crowned. They have forever planted the Serbian people on the corner-stone of the foundation, on the Resurrected Christ Himself.

We call upon all our sons and daughters, the spiritual children of our Church, who live on all continents, with whom we are united in prayer, to rejoice together in Christ's Resurrection. This resurrection calls upon us to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (Ephesians 4:3)

Wishing you every true good, forgiving one another, we invoke the grace, peace and power of the Resurrected Christ, so that we may with one mouth and one heart joyfully exclaim:

Christ is Risen!

Given at the Serbian Patriarchate in Belgrade on Pascha 2018.

Your intercessors before the Resurrected Christ:

**Archbishop of Pec,
Metropolitan of Belgrade-Karlovci and
Serbian Patriarch IRINEJ**

Metropolitan of Montenegro and the Coastlands **AMPHILOHIJE**

Metropolitan of Zagreb and Ljubljana **PORFIRIJE**

Metropolitan of Dabro-Bosna **CHRYSOSTOM**

Bishop of Sabac **LAVRENTIJE**

Bishop of Srem **VASILIJE**

Bishop of Banja Luka **JEFREM**
Bishop of Budim **LUKIJAN**
Bishop of Banat **NIKANOR**
Bishop of New Gracanica-Midwestern America **LONGIN**
Bishop of Canada **MITROPHAN**
Bishop of Backa **IRINEJ**
Bishop of Great Britain and Scandinavia **DOSITEJ**
Bishop of Western Europe **LUKA**
Bishop of Zicha **JUSTIN**
Bishop of Vranje **PAHOMIJE**
Bishop of Sumadija **JOVAN**
Bishop of Branicevo **IGNATIJE**
Bishop of Zvornik-Tuzla **FOTIJE**
Bishop of Mileseva **ATANASIJE**
Bishop of Budimlje and Niksic **JOANIKIJE**
Bishop of Zahumlje and Hercegovina **GRIGORIJE**
Bishop of Valjevo **MILUTIN**
Bishop of Ras and Prizren **TEODOSIJE**
Bishop of Western America **MAXIM**
Bishop of Gornji Karlovac **GERASIM**
Bishop of Eastern America **IRINEJ**
Bishop of Krusevac **DAVID**
Bishop of Slavonia **JOVAN**
Bishop of Austria and Switzerland **ANDREJ**
Bishop of Bihac-Petrovac **SERGIJE**
Bishop of Timok **ILARION**
Bishop of Nis **ARSENIJE**
Bishop of Australia and New Zealand Metropolitanate **SILUAN**
Bishop of Dalmatia **NIKODIM**

Vicar Bishop of Moravica **ANTONIJE**
Vicar Bishop of Diokleia **KIRIL**

THE ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF OCHRID:

Archbishop of Ochrid and Metropolitan of Skoplje **JOVAN**
Bishop of Polog and Kumanovo **JOAKIM**
Bishop of Bregalnica **MARKO**
Vicar Bishop of Stobi **DAVID**

[Path of Orthodoxy translation]