

ENCYCLICAL FROM ARCHBISHOP GREGORIOS OF THYATEIRA AND GREAT BRITAIN ON THE FEAST OF THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

Dear Brethren, Beloved and Cherished Children in the Lord,

*“We praise your saving Passion, O Christ, and we glorify your Resurrection”.*¹

Christians are once more celebrating the great and wondrous events which took place in the holy city of Jerusalem, “the things that happened during these days”² almost two thousand years ago. After seven weeks of spiritual and physical preparation, we honour the day of Christ’s Resurrection. With the angelic powers and with the souls of our departed forefathers and mothers throughout the ages we celebrate the saving Passion and radiant Resurrection of our Lord. Rightly has the Church prepared us in order to give us the sacred opportunity to participate in the mystery of the Cross, Death and Resurrection of Christ the God-man, to worthily receive the joy and hope which saves and replenishes man and makes him a member of God’s Kingdom. St Paul reminds us that “as many as have been baptised into Christ have put on Christ. We were buried therefore with him by baptism unto death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in newness of life”.³ The events which we celebrate during these days are unique events of joy, salvation and the renewal of our blessed hope in Christ. This is a new way of life of which the hymnist of the Church sings: “Becoming a creature formed of the dust, our Fashioner, you make new those born of earth, and the shroud and the tomb point to the mystery within you, O Word”.⁴

This mystery of Divine Economy is what we Christians are celebrating, being filled with sacred happiness. This mystery was accomplished by Christ’s sacrifice upon Golgotha and reached up to heaven with His Resurrection from the dead. Rightly has the mystery been hailed thus: ‘Where, death, is your sting? Where, Hell, is your victory? Christ has risen! And you are abolished. Christ has risen! And the demons have fallen. Christ has risen! And angels rejoice. Christ has risen! And life has found freedom. Christ has risen! And there is no corpse in the grave’.⁵ These events have concerned and will continue to concern and nourish humanity until the end of time. The holy Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, describe their occurrence in a joyful, enthralling, simple and honest way. By the enlightenment and guidance of the Holy Spirit, the sacred authors of the New Testament immortalised the fundamental aspects of the Christian Faith which all generations of Christians throughout the world know well and safeguard as the apple of their eye with piety and sacred gratitude. We have made the Resurrection a ceaseless song, an eternal hymn, which the Faithful of every age, generation and class sing in adoration. Together with the hymnist, we repeat, “A sacred Pascha has been revealed to us today, a new and holy Pascha, a mystic Pascha, an all-venerable Pascha, a Pascha that is Christ the Redeemer”.⁶ These days remind us of our liberation from the slavery of sin and our entry into the freedom of joy and salvation. We are transferred from earth to heaven, from death to life and to the Resurrection of soul and body. Christ declared, “I am the resurrection and the life”.⁷ He reminded us that “God so

¹ Easter hymn

² Luke 24:18

³ Rom. 6:3-4

⁴ Great Saturday, Orthros, Canon, Ode 5, 1st Troparion

⁵ Catechetical Easter Sermon of St John Chrysostom (Chrysostom Vol. 2, p. 935)

⁶ Easter Stichera

⁷ John 11:25

loved the world that he gave his only-begotten son, that whoever believes in him may not perish, but have eternal life”.⁸

Christ declared that “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me does not walk in the darkness, but has the light of life”.⁹ Christ’s Resurrection enlightened the mind and thoughts of men and gave us true knowledge of divinity to believe in the one true God, as Christ revealed Him in His Life, Passion and radiant Resurrection. Rightly does the hymnist joyfully sing, “All things have been filled with light by your Resurrection O Lord”.¹⁰ It is no coincidence that Holy Week and the Resurrection of Christ constitute the focus of prayer and contemplation for millions of souls. Countless Faithful who are not regular church-goers go to church during these days, and they come to adorn and to venerate the *Epitaphios* – the tomb of Christ – to share in the feast, to offer gifts and to seek forgiveness and remission of their sins. They seek refuge in the Risen Christ that they may be delivered from the evils and sorrows of life which vex both young and old. Holy Week and Easter and the various religious symbols of the festivities of these days, not to mention the noble activities which each person undertakes, contribute religiously to peace within the family, co-operation and reconciliation, to love and respect towards all of our fellow human beings. It was characteristically said that Christ “brought into our life a new citizenship which is not of this world. Let us all rejoice, be glad and leap for joy”.¹¹

Therefore, beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord, let us celebrate in soul, heart and spirit. Let us live the joy of the Resurrection, as did the holy Apostles when they saw Christ risen from the dead and touched His wounds and saw with their very eyes His divine-human presence and heard from His own divine mouth: “Peace to you. As the Father sent me, so I send you. And having said this he breathed upon them saying, receive the holy Spirit. Whoever’s sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whoever’s sins you retain are retained”.¹² This profound knowledge and joy of the Resurrection the Church guards as the apple of the eye because it is the most perfect gift. It is given to the Faithful with forgiveness, sanctification, purification and faith. It renews our soul and mind, so that being revitalised by the joy of the Resurrection we may continue this temporal life, full of hope and strength, with trust and sacred courage before God.

Before I end this encyclical, I would like to remind you of some basic and fundamental issues which concern our Orthodox Christian identity and tradition. These days call us and teach us to entrust ourselves and our families, our problems, struggles and cares to the Risen Christ. Do not forget that not only joy, but also death, pain and many trials and tribulations are always around the corner. Therefore we must always have within us and upon us the armour and weapons of faith – our spiritual and practical relationship with the Risen Christ and His Church. This means a living and stable remembrance and continuation of the eternal presence of the love of our Lord Jesus Christ to all people who are downcast by the great economic crisis and uncertainty of both leaders and nations throughout the world. As conscientious, living members of the Orthodox Church and members of the Body of the Risen Christ, we are called to go to church with our families and to celebrate, to worship the Passion of Christ, to receive His precious Body and most holy Blood for the forgiveness of sins, that we may participate in the joy of the Resurrection. Only then will we be able to truly rejoice and become true followers and witnesses of the everlasting tradition which feeds and nourishes, upholds and sanctifies the world, and which has held together the establishment of the Church until today. To the Risen Christ belongs glory, the Kingdom and boundless mercy to the ages of ages. Amen.

London, Easter 2009

Gregorios, Archbishop of
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⁸ John 3:16

⁹ John 8:12

¹⁰ Easter hymn

¹¹ Chrysostom. Vol. 2. pp. 906-907

¹² John 20:22-23