



UKRAINIAN GREEK CATHOLIC CHURCH
SVIATOSLAV SHEVCHUK
MAJOR ARCHBISHOP OF KYIV-HALYCH

Prot. BA 24/075 ENG

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EASTER PASTORAL LETTER
OF HIS BEATITUDE SVIATOSLAV

Most Reverend Archbishops and Bishops,
Very Reverend and Reverend Fathers,
Venerable Brothers and Sisters in Monastic and Religious Life,
Dearly Beloved Laity in Christ of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church

O my Saviour, living and unconsumed sacrifice!
As God, you offered yourself willingly to the Father,
And you raised with you the forefather of all, Adam,
Having risen from the tomb.
Ode 6, Paschal Canon

Christ is Risen!

Beloved in Christ!

As we celebrate Christ's Pascha again amid the horrors of a full-scale war, now in its third year, we enter ever deeper into the great mystery of sacrifice offered by the Lord Jesus for our salvation. The Son of God, becoming man, gives back to the Father that which is the most precious—his life! The essence of Pascha's power, the only thing capable of overcoming violence, abuse, and death, is revealed to us in the voluntary self-sacrifice of Christ. This is beautifully stated in the anaphora of the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great: "And when He had descended through the Cross into Hades, so that He might fill all things with Himself, He loosed the pangs of death, and rose on the third day, and paved the way for all flesh by the resurrection from the dead, for it was not possible for the Prince of life to be mastered by corruption."

O my Saviour, living and unconsumed sacrifice!

Today, our hearts are filled with the joy of the resurrection of Christ, who emerges in radiance from the grave. The empty tomb reveals to us the fullness of life in the Lord to which we are called in the joy of God's children. This joy is given to all who see in the wood of the cross the door to renewed life in the resurrection. Because Christ, being the living God, out of great love for us, chose to voluntarily accept suffering, crucifixion, and death,

in order to resurrect fallen human nature with himself, and to give us eternal life in his resurrection. By uniting with Christ crucified on the cross, we receive the fruit of his sacrifice in the resurrection from the dead.

In proclaiming this Paschal Mystery, the Church today also directs us to our forefather Adam, whom Christ, in his resurrection, frees from the shackles of hell, and reveals to us the truth—that for humankind life after death really exists! In the person of Adam all humanity is depicted—past, present, and future. The risen Christ is the one who gives meaning to the fullness of human history, which leads from sin and the fall, slavery and bondage, to repentance, conversion, liberation, and salvation. In celebrating Christ's Pascha, today we reach beyond the limits of our time and space, and enter into the eternity of God. In the Risen Christ, we can boldly say: "Behold, now is a favourable time, behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2).

As God, you offered yourself willingly to the Father!

The resurrection of the Son of God demonstrates that his voluntary self-sacrifice is not the end but a new beginning of life for each of us. Christ's voluntary death on the cross is terrible, real, but life-giving, because it is a "living and unconsumed sacrifice." Indeed, we are not called to death and nothingness but to life and joy in God. Whoever sacrifices oneself not for the purpose of fulfilling one's own ambitions, personal goals, or human intentions but gives oneself voluntarily to the Father—is already risen! In this is found the essence of every true sacrifice—to give the Creator one's everything, that is, to return to God that which is God's because we are the creation of his hands! That is the meaning of human life itself: we received it as a gift from God and we are called to return it to him alone! By sacrificing ourselves to the Father, we complete ourselves fully in God's eternal love. By giving ourselves we do not lose anything, but on the contrary, we rise together with Christ! That is why we often repeat in our liturgical services: "let us commend ourselves, and one another, and our whole life to Christ our God." In the Risen Christ, the value and purpose of every human self-sacrifice is revealed.

Today, Ukraine is a victim-sacrifice of Russia's criminal war against our people. We often ask ourselves: is our fight really worth such a high price? Over these past years for what do we sacrifice that which for us is the most precious: our sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers; our cities and villages, our land and everything we possess? For what purpose do we live and die today? In response to this cry of anguish and tears of Ukraine, today the Risen Saviour comes forth from the empty tomb as a "living and unconsumed Sacrifice." It is He, the Victor, who speaks to us today in the voice of fallen heroes: "We fell so that you may live! We sacrificed our lives as an offering to God and to you! In our sacrifice the Lord's Pascha is proclaimed!" Our victory over the enemy is as certain and inevitable as the day that always follows the night, as the dawn of that morning when Christ was risen, changing the weeping and tears of the myrrh-bearers into the peace and joy of every person who today proclaims to the whole universe: "Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and to those in the tombs giving life!"

You raised with you the forefather of all, Adam, having risen from the tomb!

In his resurrection, Christ destroyed death and fear before those who carry it. The Apostle to the Nations states that it was through the fear of death that the devil held the human race in his slavery: "Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery" (Heb. 2:14-15). The Lord destroyed this fear once and for all, destroyed the power of the devil, the bearer of death, and that is why we call out to him today: My Saviour!

Today Ukrainians sense that in the third full-scale year of a ten-year war, which, in fact, has been going on for centuries, the time has come to destroy once and for all, in Europe and the world, the realm of deathly fear, carried by the insatiable Russian slavemaster and colonizer, to destroy the rule of those who for centuries kept in this slavery to fear our people and other enslaved nations. Today in Ukraine, the one who rains death onto the field of life is losing power. The power of Christ's Pascha put an end to the power of the devil, the author of slavery, insolence, falsehood, and violence. Indeed, in Christ we voluntarily give ourselves to the Father as a living and life-giving sacrifice. Today in the Paschal Victory the pascha of Ukraine is fulfilled. Today, Christ rises in our struggle against evil, in our efforts, in the flesh and blood of our people, in order to raise up humanity of the third millennium and give hope to the world – for in Ukraine, Christ is Risen!

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ! On this radiant day, one of victory of life over death, good over evil, truth over falsehood, I urge you to abide in the faith, hope, and love that the Risen Lord brings us. In the joy of the Resurrection, I greet our military heroes, sons and daughters of Ukraine, who defend us at the frontlines, are ready to sacrifice everything out of love for their land and their people. We believe in your God-given strength, we revere your resistance to evil, over which we shall inevitably prevail.

I greet all those who have suffered from the war – physically, materially, morally. Let today's feast above all feasts, and festival of festivals, be for you a balm in your suffering. In a special way, I embrace with my paternal love the families of the fallen, expressing my personal gratitude and the gratitude of all God's people to you, as you bear in the depths of your heart the indescribable pain of losing your son or daughter, brother or sister, husband or wife, father or mother. I embrace the wounded. You carry the seeds of resurrection together with Christ, for He too carried the wounds of the crucifixion on His hands and feet. May the joy of Pascha pave the way to your physical and moral healing. To the families of our prisoners and those missing in action, who are celebrating Easter today in tears, I express my compassion, support and prayerful closeness. To all those who have been deprived of their homes by the war and expelled from their hometowns or villages, to all internally displaced persons, and to all those who found temporary sanctuary outside their homeland, I wish you spiritual comfort and confidence, that where the Risen Lord is, there we are always at home.

I embrace all children, adults and the elderly, men and women—and my wish for you is that in sharing the Easter basket, you may experience profound joy, God's mercy and blessings. I embrace with a fatherly love all the volunteers and workers involved in works of charity, our clergy, religious, and faithful in Ukraine and throughout the world, and I sincerely wish you all a blessed Easter feast, a tasty sharing of our traditional blessed egg, and a Paschal joy that is full of light.

The grace of our Risen Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all!

Christ is risen! Truly, He is risen!



Given in Kyiv

at the Patriarchal Cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ,
on the Feastday of the Annunciation of the Most Holy Theotokos
March 25, 2024 A.D.