

A. Pascha

The Bright Resurrection of Christ

Neither "A very large stone", which was rolled against the door of the tomb of Christ by the diligence of the noble Joseph of Arimathea, nor the seal which was fixed on the stone by the evil enemies of Christ, nor the military guards, placed by them at the tomb of the Life-giver, - nothing could keep the pure body of the Lord in the tomb. The very moment of the glorious resurrection of the Lord is not announced in the Holy Gospel 1). The Holy Myrrh-bearing Women heard the first news about the resurrection from the angel sitting at the grave of the Lord. The appearance of the angel, who rolled the stone away from the door of the tomb, was accompanied by an earthquake, which terribly frightened the warriors, who were guarding the tomb, and who ran away from the tomb and were involuntary witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus Christ before His enemies. As the news about the glorious resurrection of Christ was announced first to the Holy Myrrh-bearing Women by the angel, and the appearance of the risen Lord followed first of all to one of the myrrh-bearers, Mary Magdalene, and then also to the other myrrh-bearers. "The woman", teaches St. Gregory the Theologian, "from the mouth of a serpent received the first lie, and the woman from the mouth of the very risen Lord heard the first joyful news; that whose hand mixed the mortal drink was also the very hand that submitted the cup of life". After His appearance to the myrrh bearers, on this same day the resurrected Lord appeared to the Apostle Peter and then to the two apostles going to Emmaus, and on this same day in the evening appeared to the eleven apostles assembled in the rooming house, whose doors "for fear of the Jews" were closed 2). The feast of the Resurrection of Christ is called Pascha (from the Jewish word *pesach*, that means passes over), according to the name of the Old Testament feast established in the memory of the deliverance of the Hebrews from Egyptian slavery. In conformity with the commemoration of this feast with the event of the resurrection of Christ, the name *Pascha* in the Christian Church received its special meaning and began to designate the passage from death to life, from earth to Heaven.

"The word Pascha", says St. Ambrose of Milan, "means passage. This feast of feasts is so named because it celebrates, in the Old Testament Church the memory of the exodus of the sons of Israel from Egypt and at the same time their deliverance from slavery; and in the New Testament Church that sign that the Son of God Himself, through the resurrection from the dead, passed over from this world to the Father, from earth to Heaven, freeing even us from eternal death and the work of the enemy, and granting us the "power to become children of God" (John 1:12)". "By the Resurrection of Christ the infernal regions is opened, the earth is renewed by the baptism of catechumens, Heaven reveals the Holy Spirit.

The open infernal regions returns the dead, the renewed earth grows those who are arising, the open Heaven receives those who are ascending. The infernal regions return those below to the high place, the earth sends the buried to Heaven, Heaven represents those received to the Lord".

According to the teaching of St. John Chrysostom, "by the resurrection of Christ the fire of Gehenna is quenched, the vigilant worm dies, Hades is overthrown, the devil groans, sin is destroyed, the evil spirits convert in flight, those passing from earth to Heaven rise, those who were in Hades were freed from the bonds of the devil". "Such is the light of our Pascha for those who worthily worship! Such is the mystery for the Christians! That is, we celebrate the feast of the resurrection of the dead and life eternal".

In the church hymns, Jesus Christ, "all who were subjected to death, through the power of His resurrection as the mighty God, raised us together and deified us", "from death to life and from earth to heaven He led us", and we, celebrating Pascha, "celebrate the annihilation of death, the destruction of Hades, the beginning of eternal life". In the ranking of the feasts of the Lord the feast of Pascha occupies the central place, and in the ranking of all Christian feasts it is the feast for the most part, that "surpasses all celebrations, even those of Christ and those fulfilled in honor of Christ, as much as the sun surpasses the stars".

What is the basis of all sacred celebrations? "In the one", as His Eminence Innocent, Archbishop of Cherson teaches, "it is expressed mainly by the firmness and purity of faith; in the other it especially opens the grace of love and virtue; in still others by a perceptible image it radiates the height and holiness of Christian hope. But the resurrection of Jesus Christ combines in itself that quality in the highest degree. It is the highest celebration of faith, for it establishes us, it raises up, it deifies our faith; it is the highest celebration of virtue, for in it the purest virtue has triumphed over the greatest temptation; it is the highest celebration of hope, for it serves for the faithful as a pledge of the most majestic promise". That is why the day of the Resurrection of Christ really is "the feast of feasts and holy day of holy days" 3), and consequently it was celebrated and is celebrated with an especially bright and solemn paradigm. On "this chosen and holy day", sings the Holy Church, "is enlightened by divine rays and the life-bearing resurrection of the Son of God and joy is fulfilled in this pious assembly".

Troparion, tone 5

**Christ is risen from the dead,
Trampling down death by death,
And upon those in the tombs bestowing life.**

Kontakion, tone 8

**Thou didst descend into the tombs, O Immortal,
Thou didst destroy the power of death.
In victory didst Thou arise, O Christ God,
Proclaiming "Rejoice" to the myrrh-bearing women,
Granting peace to Thine apostles,
And bestowing resurrection on the fallen.**

Exapostilarion

**In the flesh Thou didst fall asleep as a mortal man, O King and Lord.
Thou didst rise on the third day,
Raising Adam from corruption and destroying death:
O Pascha of incorruption, the salvation of the world!**

Notes:

1) "No one who lives in the flesh" the ever memorable Metropolitan of Moscow teaches in one of his conversations, "has seen the resurrection of Christ in that secret moment of the night or early morning when it occurred. Maybe it was according to the attribute of this action, in which the visible body of Christ, being spiritually transfigured and glorified, acted within the limits of the visible world. But, besides, it was so arranged, probably and consequently, that the faith for this kind of high contemplation has not dawned yet: for the divine and heavenly appearance there for the prepared through faith, purity, piety, and humility is the enlightening and life-giving light, and for the unprepared and impure there is an amazing lightning. So it was arranged, probably, also to give a place for the elevated spiritual struggle of faith and to reward the best effort, according to the judgment of Christ: "blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe" (John 20:29)."

2) According to the belief of the Holy Church, the Theotokos was informed of the Resurrection of Christ before all the people: "therefore", is spoken in the Synaxarion for Holy Pascha, "the Mother of God was the first to come to know about the resurrection of Christ", i. e. before the Myrrh-bearing Women and the Apostles, the resurrection of the Lord was announced to the Mother of God. According to the explanation of some, it was done so that, according to the all-wise will of God, it was necessary that the redemptive mystery of the resurrection of Christ be immediately accepted by the people with a vibrant and firm faith, with deep understanding of its power and with full joy. But who among the people is more capable of accepting the redemptive mystery of the resurrection of Christ than the All Holy Virgin Theotokos? From the Gospel we see that the apostles and disciples of the Lord did not immediately believe in His resurrection. And

consequently only one, She, who is more honorable than the Cherubim and more glorious beyond compare than the Seraphim, would sooner, more vibrantly and firmer than anyone believe in the resurrection of the Lord, to penetrate deeper than all into the mystery of His resurrection, more perfectly than all to understand this mystery and more strongly than all others to feel the joy of the glorious and saving resurrection of Her Son, the Deliverer of the world. And the resurrection of Jesus Christ was announced to the Mother of God in that very moment when He rose from the tomb: the angel, appearing as the Benefactor, said to Her: "O pure Virgin, rejoice, and again I say rejoice, Thy Son is risen from His three days in the tomb". Is it impossible to believe that the Lord Himself is risen after the angelic annunciation, immediately before everything was revealed to the Most Pure Mother of God simply to calm and to please Her with His appearance? Although the Gospel is silent about this, the Holy Church not without justification in its hymns announces: "having beheld the resurrection of your Son and God, you rejoice with the apostles, O Pure One Full of Grace; and you were the first to hear the greeting, Rejoice, for you are the cause of joy for all". After His resurrection and before His ascension to heaven the Savior repeatedly appeared to the apostles during the 40 days. The first of His appearances had the purpose of giving full certification that He really rose from the dead; in other subsequent appearances He "spoke about the Kingdom of God" (Acts 1, 3), preached the highest knowledge of truth and the mysteries of faith and the establishment of His Church. Appearing "during the days of the forty" to the apostles, Jesus Christ, according to the commentary of St. John Chrysostom, was occasionally with them, not as He was before the resurrection. "Observe", teaches the Holy Father, "(the evangelist Luke) did not say: the forty days, but: "the days of the forty", as Christ appeared and again disappeared. Why is this so? This was to elevate the ideas of the disciples and not to allow them to turn to Him prematurely. And not without reason He revealed Himself to them, but also because He carefully cared about the establishment of two things: that they believed in the resurrection, and that they finally thought Him higher than a simple man. Why didn't He reveal Himself to everyone, but only to the apostles? Because the people did not know the ineffable mysteries, He would seem to them to be a ghost. If even the apostles at first did not believe, and became confused and required a touch of the hand and with (dialogue) a meal, what should be expected from the people?" "The occurrence of the Resurrection of the Lord was useless for the Jews, and if only there was a way possible to convert them, then undoubtedly, the Lord would not give them up to the Jews; but the consequences of the resurrection of Lazarus proved to them absolutely the opposite ". The resurrection of the man dead four days "instead of converting the Jews and leading them into the faith in the Savior, only strengthened their rage more, and was one of the main reasons, they decided to

destroy Him. They did not forgive Him the resurrection of another, would they forgive Him His own? Of course, they still did not have the power to do something personally to Him, but their relentless hatred, without any doubt, would not become lessened in new intrigues or in an attempt by this or that way for a new decide. Their conversion with the apostles proves it: they pursue and subject them to various tortures, and, when it is possible, they betray their death. If they acted so with the disciples, would they spare the Teacher? It was not to induce them to a new evil deed: and without that punishment of their merit, it was very difficult; the Savior spared them from the new, having hidden Himself after the resurrection from their sight".

To these words of St. John Chrysostom it would not be out of place to add that the appearance of the resurrected Lord among the people would not be without disturbance and agitation among them: the people would be divided in opinions: "while some said" again, "He is a good man"; others, belonging to the party of the Sanhedrin, would say: "no, but He lies to the people" (John 7:12). With all that they would raise in the minds of the Disciples of Christ, dispersed by the events after Golgotha, the dream of an earthly kingdom of the Messiah. The suspicious rulers of the Jews and Romans would not fail to use strict measures to suppress the upheaval of the people. The bloodshed would begin, and by the way in the name of Him Who is love. Jesus Christ valued the earthly rest and happiness of the people, and even His enemies, and did not want to serve as the cause for such a sorrowful event. His kingdom was not of this world! Although the resurrected Lord did not appear in the world among the people, He however appeared often enough and witnessed His resurrection among His disciples. The testimony of the apostles accompanied with obvious miracles served as the incontrovertible proof of the resurrection of the Crucified One. (See the Chernigov Eparchy News (Chernig. Ep. Ved.) 1893, 6; Voronezh Eparchy News (Voronezhskii Eparkh. ved.) 1894, 10).

3) "This feast", says St. Epiphanius, Archbishop of Cyprus, "is the holiest of all feasts. It puts together a feast and both renewal and salvation for the whole world. This feast is the head and the highest of all feasts. This is that day, which God blessed and sanctified, on which He rested from all His work, having completed the salvation of the earth together with the lower regions. On this day the God stopped the rites of services to idols and animals. On this day He ended the power of all opposition. On this day He stopped demonic feasts and celebrations. On this day He stopped the blood sacrifices to idols. On this day He stopped reign of tyranny (of the devil) and the sting of death wounding the people. On this day He gave His creation a new regulation and laws. On this day He stopped the Jewish Passover under the law. On this day He fulfilled all the Old Testament prototypes and prophecy. Our Pascha is the true Pascha, Christ who offered Himself as a sacrifice. In Christ is a new creature; in Christ is a new faith, a

new law, a new people of God, a new Israel instead of the old and even a new Passover (Pascha), a new and a spiritual circumcision (Holy Baptism), a new and bloodless sacrifice, and a new and divine covenant".

*S. V. Bulgakov, **Handbook for Church Servers**, 2nd ed., 1274 pp. (Kharkov, 1900) pp. 0560-0563
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