

ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE
HOLY METROPOLITANATE OF HONG KONG AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

Encyclical
of His Eminence Metropolitan NEKTARIOS for Holy Pascha 2008

April 27, 2008
Holy Pascha
The Feast of Feast

*To the Reverend Priests and Deacons, the Monks and Nuns, the Members of the Parishes
of the Orthodox Metropolitanate of Hong Kong and South East Asia
and the entire Orthodox Family in South East Asia.*

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This glorious night we celebrate the resurrection of our Saviour Jesus Christ. On this radiant night of Pascha, we see the gates of Hades open wide, the light of Christ radiates throughout the world from the bottom of the abyss. All our churches resound with songs, with happiness, with shouts of joy.

Christ conquered death's dominion over us once and for all. I think that at this point we must see what is death and how was introduced into human nature.

Holy Scripture says repeatedly that God did not make death, but that death entered the world through Adam's sin. I would like to mention just two scriptural passages.

The first is from the Old Testament. It says: "God did not make death; He takes no pleasure in destroying the living. For He created all things to live; the creatures of the world are salutary, there is no fatal poison in them, and Hades has no power over the world... for righteousness is immortal" (Wisdom of Solomon 1, 13- 25).

The second passage is from the Apostle Paul's Epistle to the Romans: "...through one man sin entered the world, and through sin came death, and thus death spread to all men...But death reigned from Adam to Moses" (Romans 5, 12- 14).

In this passage death is seen to be an intruder, a parasite on human nature, an outcome and fruit of Adam's sin.

Death, according to St. John of Damascus, came into the world "like some wild and savage beast to destroy the life of man". This is a very beautiful image, which vividly expresses the whole reality. Death is indeed like a wild, untamed beast which ravages and destroys men's lives. And all of us really taste this wildness of death in those dear to us.

In patristic teaching it is clear that God permitted the entrance of death into human nature, out of love and philanthropy. According to St. Basil the Great, God permitted death in order that man should not remain forever in a living death. This view was formulated by the Church in a prayer of forgiveness that is said by the Bishop at the funeral service. Among other things it says that God in His love for mankind, in order that evil might not become immortal and eternal, permitted the unbreakable bond of soul and body to be dissolved by His will, that is to say, He permitted death to take place.

Christ's incarnation was in order that death and sin might be destroyed and the devil might be conquered. In fact Christ assumed a mortal and vulnerable body in order to conquer death. Through His Crucifixion and Resurrection He overcame death and gave man the possibility, after being united with Him, to overcome it himself in his personal life. This aim is achieved through the sacraments of the Church. They do not free man from what is called psychological quilt, nor do they propitiate God for Adam's sin, but they conquer death. Through Baptism we become members of the risen Body of Christ, and through Holy Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ we receive the medicine of immortality. Not only is the soul united with God, but also the body receives a sense of this inner change and transformation of the soul. This is seen clearly in the relics of the saints of the Church.

You wonder why after Baptism and Holy Communion, death still remains; St Maximus the Confessor explains that in a baptized person his nature remains perishable after baptism, not as a condemnation of his sinful nature, but as a means of condemning and abolishing sin. Through Baptism man is enabled, of his free choice, to fight sin, which is inseparably linked with the perishability and mortality of his body. In this sense man's salvation is God's operation but also man's cooperation.

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In Christ death is overcome. Those who unite with Christ are unafraid of death, but they see it as a transition into life. We see this in billions of Saints, martyrs, holy people, married people who have departed to Christ with joy and hope.

Let us repeat the triumphant words of St John's Chrysostom Pascal sermon: "O death, where is thy sting? O Hell, where is thy victory? Christ is risen, and thou art overthrown. Christ is risen, and the demons are fallen. Christ is risen, and the angels rejoice. Christ is risen, and life reigns. Christ is risen, and not one remains in the grave. For Christ, being risen from the dead, is become the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep. To him be glory and dominion unto the ages of ages. Amen."

- ❖ Χριστός Ἀνέστη!
- ❖ Christ is risen! Truly the Lord is Risen!
- ❖ Hristos vosskresse; vo iss-ti-nou vosskresse
- ❖ Jidu fuhuo liao; zhende, ta fuhuo liao.
- ❖ Massih jee uthhā hai; vāstav mē vo jee uthhā hai.
- ❖ Si Kristo ay nabuhay; totoo ngang nabuhay.
- ❖ Krist sudah membangun; sesung guhnya dia sudah membangun.
- ❖ Kristus telah bangkit.
- ❖ Kirsthu ujirthu elunthar; unmaiya gave ujirthu elunthar.
- ❖ Ya-So Deng Lāi Lô ; I ka'-sit Go Deng Lāi Lô.
- ❖ Pha Kristo Tiao klap pen kune m lèò; ting ting phra tong klap pén kune ma.
- ❖ Cristo ressuscitou; em verdade ressuscitou.
- ❖ Hristos a-înviat; adevărat a-înviat.
- ❖ Krist je uskrsnuo; zaista je uskrsnuo.
- ❖ Hristos váskrse; vařtinu váskrse.

With my warmest Paschal wishes
and love in the Risen Christ,

+ Nektarios of Hong Kong

+ NEKTARIOS

Metropolitan of Hong Kong and South East Asia