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THE BYZANTINE CATHOLIC EPARCHY OF PARMA

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

Pastoral Letter of Bishop Milan Lach for Pascha 2022

Christ is Risen!

Dear brothers and sisters! Throughout the Easter period we sing the troparion, *Christ is Risen*, as a refrain that wishes to configure and renew our whole life. What we are praying is part of our life of prayer, of our patrimony of prayer, and what we should then live in the daily life as the Christian faithful. During Lent and especially during Holy Week, we sang liturgical texts of a unique theological depth. The texts which are the troparia that led us to sing and live the mystery of the passion, death, and resurrection of the Lord, are texts that make us return to the Word of God which is given to us in the liturgy.

The homily of Saint John Chrysostom that is read at the end of Paschal matins is a true catechesis of the Christian faith, a text, like many other troparia, that makes us contemplate the victory of Christ over death, which is the center of our faith: "For the universal kingdom has been revealed. Let no one mourn that he has fallen again and again; for forgiveness has risen from the grave. Let no one fear death, for the death of our Savior has set us free." What does it mean for us to celebrate, to live the Passover of Christ, to proclaim our faith in the resurrection of the One who was hung on the wood of the cross? Firstly, for us Christians the death of Christ on the cross is not a failure. The death on the cross is a victory of love over death and these are not merely beautiful words, nor can we live them as such. The love of Christ is manifested fully on the cross. It manifests itself at different moments throughout Jesus' life as the Gospels teach us, but it is the cross where this love, this gift to the Father and to His brothers, becomes and still is a true Epiphany for the church and for all mankind. The love of Christ which is a suffering love has clashed and continues to clash with hate, with evil. Our reading of Sacred Scripture shows us that God created the world out of love, was born into this world as man out of love, and out of love took upon Himself our fragile humanity.

We are witnesses in our personal and ecclesial life that suffering can destroy everything, but one thing will always remain: the love that the Lord has planted in our hearts. Every time we give up something, or we endure something without a sense of rebellious bitterness but voluntarily and out of love, this makes us not weaker but stronger. The great power and strength of God manifests itself, more than in creation or even in some miracles, in the fact that He "emptied" Himself: "Rather, He emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross." (Phil 2: 7-8)

Easter is the victory of life over death, of love over hate. Love and hate are not two purely subjective feelings but are very objective realities that mark and change, or can change, our concrete reality as men, as Christians. Love is a creative reality in our life; hate is a destructive reality in it. So many times we experience how hate destroys and how love, despite difficulty in suffering, builds. Christ's victory on the cross and His resurrection give us Christians not merely a

fine example to imitate, and this itself would wonderful, but much more: the victory of Christ over death, His total love in suffering has a creative strength in us, transforms our hearts and enables us to love to an extent beyond our abilities. "A clean heart create for me, O God; renew within me a steadfast spirit. Restore to me the gladness of your salvation" (Psalm 50,12.14). Thus, as St. Basil says, the death of Christ on the cross is a death that creates life.

During Lent we lived and are still living the experience of a war between Russia and Ukraine which has led us to touch with our hands the tears of so many men and women, elderly, children, and young people forced to leave everything and flee their land because of the experience of a war. However, we must also say that this pain and suffering has made us discover fraternal and supportive solidarity in helping and being near to our brothers and sisters through charity. Thank you so much for your generosity and financial support for the Eparchy of Mukachevo in Ukraine. The experience of war should, above all, make us live the Gospel of the Lord always and without delay, making us men and women of peace as we find the example of the Lord in His Gospel.

As Christians, we need to open our hearts to the life of God. In other words, we need to care for our life of faith, our life in Christ. One of the greatest dangers we have in our lives is that of the carelessness of our own life, a carelessness regarding our relationship with God, with others, and with ourselves. In our concrete life we must let ourselves be transformed by the Lord, let Him transform our hearts in His risen life, and this requires on our part a daily fidelity to the Gospel, to the proclamation of His Good News, and to prayer on a personal level and in the family as well.

We as the Eparchy of Parma, as a church, are gathered around the empty tomb of Christ, around that beautiful tomb to profess our faith, to sing that He, the Life put in the tomb is also the source of the renewed life through His death and resurrection. I would like to encourage you to live these holy days with a new heart recreated by the strength of the Lord's resurrection. To live His life as Byzantine Catholics in the United States, for we are called to announce that He, the Lord, has risen from the dead. To live His life as the church of Christ, small and weak in so many things but strengthened and vivified by the hope of knowing how to be loved, guided, and desired by the Risen Lord.

Christ is Risen!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Milan", with a stylized flourish at the end.

The Most Reverend. Milan Lach, S.J.
Bishop of the Eparchy of Parma of the Ruthenians