



The Greek Orthodox Church of Saint Nectarios  
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## Holy Pascha (Easter)

5 May 2024

The "feast of feasts and celebration of celebrations" has dawned, the great and glorious day of Pascha. The word "Pascha" is a Hebrew word which means "to pass over". When the Angel killed the firstborn of the Egyptians, he passed over the homes of the Hebrews, without entering within and killing the children of the Hebrews, being prevented from doing so by the blood of the sacrificial lamb which they painted on their lintels and door posts. The Hebrews celebrate Passover in memory of this event, as well as the event of the wondrous passing over of the Red Sea and their salvation from bondage under Pharaoh. But these events were at the same time a type with another higher meaning. Egypt signifies sin, while the tyrant Pharaoh signifies the devil. Our Lord, the Lamb of God, came down from heaven to earth and was crucified and buried and rose again, saving us from the land of our bitter bondage and bringing us to the "pasture of abundant flowers" of the spiritual life, and crushed our enemy the devil. This is the passing over we celebrate today. The passing over from the guilt of sin to justification, from the works of darkness to virtue, from the curse to the blessing, from corruption to incorruption, from death to life, from earth to heaven; therefore, "let us praise the Lord, for by glorifying Him we are glorified".

The Service of the Sunday of Pascha, which is Matins and the Divine Liturgy of John Chrysostom, usually takes place at midnight on Saturday into Sunday. It begins with the chanting of the Canon of Great Saturday "Wave of the Sea" and the troparion



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"When You Descended Unto Death". This is followed by "Come Receive the Light" and "Your Resurrection". When the Gospel (Mk. 16:1-8) is read, "Christ is Risen" is chanted ten times with verses, then the Canon for Pascha, which is a poem of Saint John of Damascus, a true masterpiece. As the divine Nikodemos the Hagiorite says: "John, who was bright in life, brighter in word, and most bright in soul, wanted to brighten the bright day of the Resurrection of the Lord worthy of his own brightness with two bright things: first he brightened this Bright Day not with another tone, but with the first, because this tone has a melody that is straight forward, intense and noble...; secondly, the bright melodist brightened this Bright Day with the bright sayings of the most bright panegyrist Gregory the Theologian, so that a bright panegyrist, by a bright melodist, through a bright tone, with bright sayings, will brighten the bright day of Bright with the composition of a song" (Eortodromion, p. 148). The Canon is complete (with eight Odes). There is no acrostic. It begins with the Irmos "It is the Day of Resurrection". After the Exaposteilarion "You Awoke the Flesh", the Stichera of the Praises are chanted, as well as the particular Stichera of Pascha, namely "A Sacred Pascha", "Come Now From That Sight", etc. At the end of the Divine Liturgy the excellent "Catechetical Discourse of John Chrysostom" is read followed by his Apolytikion.

On the evening of Pascha Sunday the "Vespers of Love" takes place (in many churches today it takes place at either 10:00 or 11:00 in the morning). It is called this, because in olden times the Christians exchanged between themselves a kiss of love. It is called the "Second Resurrection", just as the Vespers of Great Saturday is called the "First Resurrection". During the Vespers is read, according to an old custom, the Gospel in various languages. This occurs because of the world-historic and universal character the event of the Resurrection of the Lord has had in its dissemination. Therefore, "It is the day of Resurrection, let us be radiant, O peoples! Pascha, the Lord's Pascha; for Christ God has brought us from death to life, and from earth to heaven, as we sing the triumphal song."



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Easter Homily by Saint Nikolai Velimirovich

Each Christian feast raises hundreds of questions and gives hundreds of answers. The questions are from men, the answers come from God through the feasts. This is especially true with the feast of Christ's Resurrection. Here He opens for us with His keys hundreds of locked doors. For God has more answers than man has questions; He has more keys than man has mysteries. Let us, then, consider a few such questions.

Here is a mystery: Why did Christ rise from the dead?

The key: Because Life could not remain in the grave. A thousand years before, the Prophet foretold concerning Christ:

"...nor wilt Thou suffer Thy Holy One to see corruption" (Ps. 15:10)

Christ revealed the living God, the Father, to the world; He revealed the heavens, the living realm of angelic hosts; He revealed life after death and the eternal heavenly kingdom. Would, then, the Restorer of life remain in the darkness of the grave and the embrace of death? Christ raised Jairus' daughter and the son of the widow of Nain and Lazarus of Bethany. Would He Who raised others not raise up Himself? Truly He arose; He could not do otherwise by virtue of His essence, His power, His greatness. Weak is the force of death that aspired to hold down the Giver of Life in its abyss. Small is the mouth of death that aspired to strangle the Bestower of resurrection. Only in the light of the Resurrection can one comprehend Christ's deeds on earth, His love for men and His divinity.



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Here is another mystery: How has the belief in the Resurrection of Christ been preserved through so many centuries?

The key: In the same way that a well rooted tree withstands the winds, as light is preserved in darkness, and as truth is preserved amidst lies.

A third mystery: Is the Resurrection of Christ still felt today?

The key: It is powerfully felt, throughout the entire world. Gazing with the eyes of the spirit at the resurrected Lord, the weak are strengthened, the sorrowful are comforted, the sad rejoice, sinners repent, the wicked are corrected, the impure are cleansed, the persecuted are encouraged, the despondent hope, sufferers pray, and those on their deathbeds no longer fear death.

"Today the Master spoiled hell and raised the prisoners from all ages whom it had held in bitter bondage." (from the Paschal canon)

A fourth mystery: What are the conditions for our own resurrection?

The key: To imitate here on earth Christ and His Apostles and all these righteous ones who pleased God, according to one's strength and God-given talents. To be humble, modest, compassionate, merciful, just, peace loving and persistent in every virtue. To pray to God, to repent of our sins, to constantly correct ourselves. To read and listen to the Joyous News that is the Gospel of Christ, to accept every word of the Lord as sacred and to treasure it as a pearl, every word, every word. To believe all that Christ said, confessed or promised. And so we can not but have hope that we will rise up in this life from spiritual death, and in the life to come from eternal death. Thus spoke the resurrected Lord:



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"I am the Resurrection and the Life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die." (John 1 1:25-26)

Let us, therefore, believe in Him, for in Him we shall find all the conditions for our resurrection.

And so, let us fervently say: I believe, O Lord. Help my weak faith. And with joy let us greet one another, brother to brother:

**CHRIST IS RISEN! TRULY HE IS RISEN!**

The "feast of feasts and celebration of celebrations" has dawned, the great and glorious day of Pascha. The word "Pascha" is a Hebrew word which means "to pass over". When the Angel killed the firstborn of the Egyptians, he passed over the homes of the Hebrews, without entering within and killing the children of the Hebrews, being prevented from doing so by the blood of the sacrificial lamb which they painted on their lintels and door posts. The Hebrews celebrate Passover in memory of this event, as well as the event of the wondrous passing over of the Red Sea and their salvation from bondage under Pharaoh. But these events were at the same time a type with another higher meaning. Egypt signifies sin, while the tyrant Pharaoh signifies the devil. Our Lord, the Lamb of God, came down from heaven to earth and was crucified and buried and rose again, saving us from the land of our bitter bondage and bringing us to the "pasture of abundant flowers" of the spiritual life, and crushed our enemy the devil. This is the passing over we celebrate today. The passing over from the guilt of sin to justification, from the works of darkness to virtue, from the curse to the blessing, from corruption to incorruption, from death to life, from earth to heaven; therefore, "let us praise the Lord, for by glorifying Him we are glorified".



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