

† METROPOLITAN JOSEPH



PASTORAL LETTER  
ON THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD  
2024

**THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST – THE  
LIGHT THAT GIVES LIGHT TO ALL!**

TO ALL CLERGY, THE MONASTIC COMMUNITIES AND THE  
ORTHODOX FAITHFUL THROUGHOUT  
THE ARCHDIOCESE OF WESTERN EUROPE,  
THE DIOCESE OF GREAT BRITAIN  
AND  
THE DIOCESE OF IRELAND AND ICELAND

# The Romanian Orthodox Metropolis of Western and Southern Europe

## The Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese of Western Europe

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„Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.” (John 15,13)

Most reverend and most dear Fathers,  
Most reverend Sisters,  
Beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord,

Christ is risen!

*Come and take the light!* resounds the call to come to the Light, which the Lord Christ is constantly making, through the voice of His Church, throughout the world.

For two thousand years, the Risen Christ, in the Light of His Resurrection, has never ceased to pour out upon us, upon the whole human soul, the mystery of His tomb, left empty, from which He - the New Adam - gives us the blessed life for all eternity. Death and the tomb had to give back Life. In this night of Life and Light, death loses its power over us. Christ, once risen, shows us the tomb empty and shining with light, a sign that not everything ends for us too within the four walls of a tomb. From our mortal body, through his Resurrection, He wants to make the luminous temple of our encounter with God and the dwelling of the Most Holy Trinity in us.

From His hands, feet and side pierced on the Cross, as well as from His tomb, now springs the Light by which we are overwhelmed by the boundless love that God has for the man made in His image and likeness.

In the hearts of those who seek the path of their life here on earth, in the Light of the Resurrection, oriented towards eternity, the Holy Spirit pours out a multitude of grace and blessing, which bring hope and joy, as well as the faith that we have been called to life not for death, life is willed, created and given to us by God. The certainty of death we each have, the resurrection remains a promise, which we should desire with faith. We see that death draws ever closer to us with each passing moment. But in the light of the Resurrection of the only-begotten Son, the Heavenly Father puts before us, every day of the Passion Week, the fact that He does not leave us alone in any circumstance of our lives, whatever our sufferings, that His Son is with us in everything, even to the grave and in the grave, and in death, from which He can raise us up with Him, if we believe in Him.

In Him and through Him we are loosed from the bonds of unrelenting death, which He conquers for us by His own death. He does not conceal the sufferings He faces for us, nor the future persecutions which those who believe in Him will suffer, but neither does He conceal the fact that all sorrows suffered in His name will be turned into joy, the Holy Spirit bringing comfort to the tried soul. *"The Father Himself loves you,"* Jesus says to the disciples, *"because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God ... These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world"* (John 16:33).

Let us dare towards the Light of Christ, let us seek it and desire it, so that we may be emptied of ourselves, of the egos that dominate us and of all desires that are contrary to Him, so that through the illumination of the soul with the grace of the Resurrection we may see our life as He has prepared it for us and as He sees it for us.

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Beloved brothers and sisters,

Jesus Christ overcame the world of sin under the dominion of the fallen angels by the forgiveness He brought us, but he also conquered the fruit of Adam and Eve's disobedience - death (Genesis 2:16-17). In Him we dare to live our lives differently, to be filled not only with this earthly life which comes from the earth and returns to the earth, but with the new, divine-human life of Christ, which takes us with it beyond the grave, which fills everything around us with meaning and light. In Him, through faith, our life is changed into light and joy, because death and darkness no longer have power in us, everything is filled with hope. The Risen and Eternal Living One is whole in us and gives us to drink the "*living water*" (John 4:10) of His grace and feeds us with "*the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life...*" (John 6:33-41). This bread is Jesus Christ, Himself, - the Son of God. "*The bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat from it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world*" (John 6:50-51).

To him who feeds his soul with the living water of Christ, the Light of the Resurrection enlightens his whole life. He, who has become our solid and saving food, even from this life gives us the power to taste the truth and beauty of Heaven, of the Kingdom of God prepared for us by Him. "*I am the Resurrection and the Life*" - says the Saviour to Lazarus' sisters, Martha and Mary, before calling him back to life after having lain for four days in the tomb. Confessing this truth to them, now follows the reassurance of the spoken word, by raising Lazarus back to life, who had almost become earth, showing all the more His creating and life-giving power. The same word He says to us and will say to mankind until the end of time: "*I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die...*" (John 11:25-26).

When the Saviour tells us "*I am the resurrection and the life*", he sheds light in our hearts to understand first of all that the resurrection as a fact would not belong only to a distant future, to the Last Judgement or to the end of this world, but takes place here and now, in Christ present and alive in our lives. He assures us that the resurrection of the soul, of the inner man, is linked to the encounter with the Person of Jesus Christ and to the faith in Him. It also tells us that we live truly only when we have an authentic personal relationship with God.

In Bethany, at the tomb where His friend Lazarus was laid, seeing the suffering brought to man by the destroying presence of death, Jesus "*groaned in the spirit and was troubled*" says St. John the Evangelist (John 11:33). He wept seeing and knowing all the suffering that death causes to man, to whom the Lord became his brother, all the more so because He came so that men "*may have life and that they may have it more abundantly*" (John 10:10). Lazarus' return to life is a sign of the power of the Son of God over life and death, foreshadowing both His own death and burial and His own resurrection, of which He spoke to His disciples (John 12:7 and Matthew 26:61). This makes Him show even more to His disciples and to those who saw and listened to Him that the tomb, firstly the one of Lazarus, but also ours, inhabited by death and darkness, will become, through faith, the place of the manifestation of God's saving presence, will become the place of encounter with the divine, everlasting Light of Christ, which could not be overwhelmed by the opposing darkness of sin. This is the Light that gives meaning and understanding to the existence of the world and life. The Apostles Peter, James and John, in order to bear witness to the world, first witnessed this divine Light on Tabor. "*And He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.*" (Matthew 17:2) The same Light was also seen by those who were guarding the Lord's Tomb - the Roman soldiers, who were unwittingly guarding the Life Itself which was buried- awakening them to another reality, a divine and human one, filled with a Light other than the known, which they did not even suspect. And it also gives us the power to understand that

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Christ, God – Man, through the Resurrection forever puts a new beginning to creation, re-creates man in Himself, He is the New Adam. From now on man is taken out of the pit and the clay of death and brought into His Light which will guide him eternally to the Kingdom of God, to salvation. Now, on the night of the Resurrection of Christ - the divine Logos, the word spoken by God at the Creation of the world "*Let there be light*" (Genesis 1:3) is fulfilled in its deeper and more eternal meaning, for only now does the true and only Light reveal God to us "as He is", and in the plan of His boundless love by which He has prepared for us true sight and understanding. All began anew with His Resurrection!

Beloved brothers and sisters,

In the Gospels, the Lord Christ shows Himself as Light, and we have seen from the above that He revealed His Light to His disciples, and not only to them. The Apostle and Evangelist John records in the prologue of his Gospel: "*The Word was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world.*" (John 1 : 9). The Saviour draws our attention to the choices we make in life and the deeds we do, for there will come a time of judgment in the Light He has shown us, sin being precisely the failure to receive the Light: "*And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practising evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.*" (John 3:19-20). Let each one of us be mindful, according to the word of the Lord: "*Take heed that the light which is in you is not darkness*" (Luke 11:35); let us therefore make room for the knowledge and the dwelling of the Light of Christ in our hearts, and not stifle it in evil deeds. Whoever receives the Light also receives salvation.

The Light of Christ reaches us through the Cross, for it is through the Cross that God descends to earth and man ascends to Heaven, that is, only through the Cross can he see the Light of the Resurrection. Through the Cross He conquered death, but also everything that leads to death: hatred and unforgiveness, foolish pride and violence. The Light of the Resurrection is a different kind of light, which gives us a different view of life and the world, of Heaven and Earth, of all that the God who gave Himself to us wants from us.

*"The Lord is called: Light, Life, Resurrection and Truth" we read in St Maximus Confessor. Light, as He who gives brightness to souls, banishes the darkness of ignorance, enlightens the mind to the understanding of mysterious things and reveals the mysteries that can only be seen by the pure in heart; Life, as He who gives to souls who love the Lord the power to move towards the divine; Resurrection, as He who raises the mind from dead bondage to material things, cleansing it from all corruption and dullness; Truth, as He who gives to the worthy the unchangeable grasp of what is good. "*<sup>1</sup>

Through the deeds of our love for our neighbour, done in the Light of Christ, our souls receive the radiance of His Light and the power to understand the mysteries of God's love. The Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church dedicates each year a theme to be deepened within the communities, a priority in pastoral and philanthropic needs, as well as in spiritual needs and theological thinking. This year, 2024, has been proposed as the *Year of Pastoral and Medical Care of the Unwell and the Commemorative Year of All Holy Unmercenary Healers*. Christ's Church calls us to be attentive to our neighbours in suffering and need of every kind, by which we become obedient and followers of Christ, the merciful and loving One, suffering with those who suffer and rejoicing with those who rejoice.

The world we live in today needs our actions filled with the light of faith. Christ comes to meet us as sinners and heals us of sin through forgiveness and teaches us: "*And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses*" (Mark 11:25). Let forgiveness from the heart always be followed by the visible, bodily deed which the Saviour Himself showed to His disciples: "*If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet*" (John, 13:14). What a lesson of humility from God to make the disciples understand the mystery of forgiveness that is hidden in the mystery of His love for man! Nothing

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<sup>1</sup> Saint Maximus the Confessor, Philokalia II, Ed IBMB, 2021, Theological Heads, second hundred, page 23.

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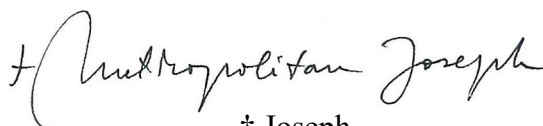
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can prevent the Lord Christ from loving man: neither the fact of humbling Himself, nor the suffering of the Cross, nor man's indifference, nor his arrogance, nor his blindness, nor his ignorance, nor his lying, nor his unrestraint, nor his hatred! He takes them all upon Himself, washes them all in the bath of His infinite and all-knowing mercy, asking us to follow Him in deeds.

Christ has risen and brought us Life and Light from beyond death as a gift, that is, Himself. How and when do we receive the Life and Light brought by Christ, through which He has given us the power to pass beyond darkness and death? It is through the sacraments that we receive them. Through the Holy Spirit, in Holy Baptism and in the Divine Liturgy, we receive the Light and Life of Christ into us and become beings of the Resurrection. In this Light of the Resurrection we all try to spend our lives, taking heed of the truth that the Apostle Peter puts before us: *"But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light"* (1 Peter 2:9).

I wish you to spend this year's Holy Feast of the Resurrection of Our Lord with joy and peace, in prayer for all the world, and especially for those who are suffering, that peace and harmony among peoples may return, and that we may rejoice forever in the fact that Christ the Lord has given us the hope of life and salvation and has made us beings of the Light of His Resurrection!

Christ is risen!



† Joseph,  
Archbishop of Western Europe  
and Metropolitan of Western and Southern Europe

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