

**To the Reverend Fathers, Religious Sisters,
Venerable Monastics, Seminarians, & Brothers and Sisters in Christ!**

"Peace be with you! ... put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe." (John 20:26-28)

Christ is Risen! Indeed, He is Risen!

Dearly Beloved in Christ!

In the midst of the joy of the Resurrection, the Evangelist John presents us with the encounter of Thomas and the Risen Lord. (Jn. 21:24-29) Thomas could not accept the good news from the other disciples, who told him they had seen the Lord. Thomas had witnessed the tragedy of the last several days in Jerusalem, which ended with the death of Jesus on the cross. How could anyone hold out for a better conclusion to the final days of Jesus? If Jesus could not save himself, how could his followers expect him to bring salvation to them?

As we enter into the celebration of the Resurrection of Christ, many will find it difficult to feel joy in this feast day, even questioning where is salvation for this world in which we live today? This past February we marked the tragic anniversary of the war in Ukraine. How many of our brothers and sisters have fled their homes, uprooted their lives, and tragically died due to the cruelty of an unprovoked war? After initial promises of help, it seems Ukraine will be left to defend itself against uneven odds. With this background of war in Ukraine, Gaza and elsewhere throughout the world, it will be difficult to sing with joy: "Let God arise and let his enemies be scattered, and let those who hate him flee from before his face." (cf. *Easter Matins*)

Although Canada is not at war with any outside nation or political force, we see battles being fought in our parliament and in our hospitals and care homes, for the protection of life from conception through to natural death. More effort is seemingly being made through abortion and MAiD to end life, rather than to support and nourish it, especially in its most vulnerable states. In place of a culture of life, we face a culture of death. How hard it will be to sing: "Christ is risen from the grave, as He foretold, granting us everlasting life and mercy without measure." (cf. *Easter Matins*)

The celebration of Easter occurs traditionally in our churches and then continues in our homes. How do we celebrate in our homes with our families, when we see social support for family life waning? For many there will be little festive joy if there are no jobs to provide income, and little revenue to pay the utility, medical and grocery bills. And then there is the increasing number of people who have no homes and must live on the streets. It will be difficult to pray at the blessing of our Easter baskets: "For You are our true food and the Giver of all good things which You yourself bless and sanctify ...". (cf. *Blessing Easter Food*)

So how did the Apostle Thomas resolve his dilemma of faith? What led him to profess his belief in the Lord Jesus? Thomas is given the opportunity to encounter at the same time the one and the same Jesus, who was both crucified and who had risen from the grave. In another words, the Resurrected Jesus is the same Jesus who suffered on the cross. By allowing Thomas to touch his wounds, Jesus shows him that suffering and Resurrection

are intertwined. The Resurrection does not eliminate all suffering, rather it gives meaning to suffering and makes it bearable even in the worst of times. And thus, we have hope!

Dearly Beloved in Christ!

Our joy in the Risen Christ is not a joy that eliminates the troubles and pain in this life. Rather, Jesus suffered, died and rose from the dead out of love for us, giving us a foundation of hope in the midst of our trials. In providing Thomas an opportunity to reinforce his faith, Jesus first says to him: "Peace be with you!" This is the same divine peace that the Risen Lord offers to all of us in celebrating his Resurrection, even in the midst of our trials and tribulations.

Although we will not have the same opportunity as Thomas did to touch the painful wounds of Christ, Jesus certainly thought of us when He told Thomas: "Blessed are those who have not seen but believed." It is this same belief in the Risen Lord, that has been the foundation of our Ukrainian nation since the time of its baptism, over a thousand years ago. It is this same belief in the Risen Lord, that has sustained our pioneer Ukrainian settlers since their arrival in the Canadian wilderness over one hundred years ago. And it is this same belief in the Risen Lord, that has enabled so many of our people to find hope in their lives, burdened with health issues, family strife, and economic hardships in this land of plentiful blessings.

This Easter season it is our fervent prayer that all will find hope and joy in the Resurrection of the Lord. Let us take to heart the prayer found in the Resurrection Matins: "Come, all you faithful, and let us bow to the holy Resurrection of Christ, since through the cross, joy has come to all the world. Ever praising the Lord, let us extol his Resurrection, since He, having endured the crucifixion, has destroyed death by his death!" (cf. *Easter Matins*)

May the blessing of the Risen Lord descend upon you this Easter season and bring you the hope and joy that is so much needed in our world today.

Christ is Risen! Indeed, He is Risen!

+ Lawrence Huculak, OSBM

Metropolitan Archbishop of the Archeparchy of Winnipeg

+ David Motiuk

Bishop of the Eparchy of Edmonton

+ Bryan Bayda, CSsR

Bishop of the Eparchy of Toronto and Eastern Canada

+ Michael Kwiatkowski

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