

## EASTER PASTORAL LETTER OF HIS BEATITUDE SVIATOSLAV

**Most Reverend Archbishops and Bishops, Very Reverend and Reverend Fathers,  
Venerable Brothers and Sisters in Monastic and Religious Life,  
Dearly Beloved Laity in Christ of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church**

### **Christ is Risen!**

*Having kept its seals intact, You rose from the grave, O Christ, Who preserved the Virgin's keys in Your birth, and opened for us the doors of Paradise. Ode 6, Paschal Canon*

### **Beloved in Christ!**

Once again, we celebrate the Pascha of Christ amid incredible suffering associated with the horrors of open warfare. Over the past year, there has been so much pain and trauma, so many deported and wounded, captured and missing in action, so many broken lives in every corner of Ukraine and in various countries where our people have settled! So many of our dead—our fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters—have sowed our land, the black-earth of Ukraine, with their bodies, as if with life-giving seeds! Sometimes we simply cry out to the Lord in pain: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?” (Ps 22:1). Our Saviour, crucified on the cross, also prayed with these words! But today, on this bright and joyful feast of Resurrection and life, the great mystery of victory opens up before us—of joy over sadness, truth over falsehood, glory over insult and mockery, light over darkness, good over evil, life over death. The crucified Lord lives! The Good Shepherd, tortured to death, reigns forever! Christ is risen – eternal joy!

*Having kept its seals intact, You rose from the grave, O Christ...*

It's difficult to seek healing when deep wounds afflict our body and soul. It is not easy to speak of the joy of resurrection when we see suffering and death everywhere. But let us note that the risen body of Jesus, whom we encounter today in our communities, still bears all the wounds of the crucifixion. After He appeared to His disciples for the first time on the day of Resurrection, the Apostle Thomas, who was absent on that occasion, did not want to believe: “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe” (Jn 20:25). However, Christ tells Thomas when he finally meets him: “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe” (Jn 20:27). He who was crucified and died is the same Lord who rose from the dead. As the Risen One, the conqueror of death, He allows Himself to be recognized by disciples of all nations and generations precisely by His wounds!

At the same time, the body of the risen Saviour is no longer subject to the usual laws of nature: it passes through the stone with which the entrance to the tomb was blocked, without breaking its seals. It passes through the locked door to the upper room, where the disciples hid for fear of the Jews (see Jn 20:19). The risen Christ bears the traces of a terrible death on his glorified body, but death no longer has power over him! Only in order to reveal the emptiness of Christ's tomb, the angel descends, moves away the stone, breaks the seals and says to the myrrh-bearers: “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him” (Mk 16:6).

Faith in the Resurrection of Christ is the basis for our belief in the resurrection of every person. What our resurrected bodies will be like in God's glory is hard to even imagine. However, celebrating the Lord's Pascha, we can be sure that it will be a glorification of the abused, a restoration of the broken and destroyed, a healing of the wounded. Today, the Risen Christ extends His life-giving and wounded right hand to a wounded Ukraine. His glorified wounds touch our wounds, which still bleed and hurt. The Crucified and Risen One makes our wounds His—and in the resurrection of Ukraine they become the glorified wounds of the victors!

To celebrate Easter for us today means to feel the healing touch of Christ's life-giving hand, which is pierced by His glorified wounds. This touch to our wounds infuses into us the strength of the wounds of the Risen One, the breath of the One who overcame death and gave life to those in the graves. On this great day, let's remember the words of the Apostle of the nations: “For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his” (Rom 6:5). The wounds of those who were wounded with Christ will inevitably turn into the wounds of the glorified Lord: because Christ is risen!

*... Who preserved the Virgin's keys in Your birth, and opened for us the doors of Paradise.*

In our tradition, we do not reproduce the Resurrection event itself in iconography. For us, the image of “The Descent into Hades” is the icon for the feast. One notes that in this icon at the bottom there are keys—a symbol of Christ’s victory over death and the power of hell. For God everything is open: a virgin’s womb, a tombstone, a locked door, human hearts... The Lord sees our affliction—we can be sure of His closeness in times of trouble. With His Passover, He has already opened the doors of paradise for us, but in order for us to enter, He needs our cooperation and our trust. So, let us firmly believe: just as neither the seals of the tomb nor the military guard could restrain Christ in His glorified body, so no aggressor and occupier will be able to defeat our wounded Ukraine. We will defeat the enemy, rebuild our destroyed cities, towns, and villages, heal our wounds by the power and action of the Holy Spirit—because Christ is risen!

The light of Christ’s Resurrection transforms our sadness and our tears into the joy of Pascha, as it was for the sorrowful myrrh-bearing women at the empty tomb of the Saviour. And today we see that what seems impossible and hopeless from a human point of view emerges victorious to the glory of the One who, having opened the doors of paradise, gives us eternal life.

If Christ on the cross, in the midst of incredible suffering, was able to raise His eyes to the Father with a hope that dispels despair, then let us have the courage today to speak to the resurrected Saviour together with the Psalmist: “For he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, and he has not hidden his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him... Posterity shall serve him; it shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation; they shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn, that he (the Lord) has done it” (Ps 22, 24, 30–31).

Let us remember that our victory depends not only on our military ability to resist the Russian troops, but also on our ability on the spiritual front to open ourselves to the power of the Resurrection and become an instrument of healing and peace in the Lord’s hands: Peace is brought by Christ Himself, Peace proclaimed to us from heaven, Let God’s peace be shared among us, Let God’s grace be given glory, Divine miracle of miracles: Christ is Risen! Christ is Risen! (see: Ukrainian Easter Hymn, *Khrystos Voskres! Radist z neba.*)

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ! I greet you on the feast of Christ’s victory over every evil and over death itself. Let our confidence in victory be a healing balm for all our wounds, spiritual and physical. In the joy of the Resurrection of our Lord, I greet all our defenders—heroes who are on the front lines today or who have been wounded. Open your heart to Christ, who sees your sacrifice and your pain, and makes them His own.

I embrace the families of our soldiers, especially of prisoners of war and those missing in action. I pray that your relatives will be found and will return home as soon as possible. Be joined with them through prayer because the Lord is always close to them.

I unite myself spiritually to those who are in the occupied territories and do not have an opportunity to go to their Church today but are waiting for liberation and pray for Ukraine’s victory. In the hope of the resurrection and with tears in my eyes, I embrace those who mourn their dead, both soldier—heroes and peaceful civilians who became victims of the criminal actions of the occupier. I greet our refugees and displaced persons who foster the hope of returning home after victory and rebuilding their native city or village.

With gratitude I greet our volunteers, our military and medical chaplains, each in their own place working to bring our common victory closer; those who labour to support a neighbour in need, both in Ukraine and abroad. You are awesome and we are proud of you! I embrace all Ukrainians—children, adults and the elderly, men and women. In sharing the Easter basket, may you experience profound joy, God’s mercy and blessings. I embrace with a fatherly love all the clergy, religious, and faithful in Ukraine and throughout the world, and sincerely wish you all a blessed Easter feast, a tasty sharing of our traditional blessed egg, and a Paschal joy that is full of light.

The grace of our Risen Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Christ is risen! Truly, He is risen!

† SVIATOSLAV

Given in Kyivat the Patriarchal Cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ, on the Day of the Holy Martyrs Sabinus and Pappas March 29 (16), 2023 A.D.