

The Confessor's Tongue for April 8, A. D. 2018

Great and Holy Pascha, the Feast of Feasts Christ is Risen! Indeed, He is Risen!
In honor of St. Maximus the Confessor, whose tongue and right hand were cut off in an attempt by compromising authorities to silence his uncompromising confession of Christ's full humanity & divinity.

A Paschal Note from the Priest

Beloved, we have reached the joy of the Feast of the Resurrection of the Lord after the labors of the Great Fast and Great and Holy Week. Let us feast with joy, not only physically, but spiritually; bountifully, but not to excess; with thanksgiving to God who gives us all good things for our use and enjoyment, lest we lose the benefit of our labors by gluttony or drunkenness. For the kingdom of God is not in food in drink, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Often it is the Paschal season that offers us a greater spiritual challenge and more temptations than the Fast. So be watchful and sober-minded with hearts joyfully uplifted to Christ so that we are not taken unaware in the Enemy's nets. *Fr. Justin*

Holy Pascha

The word *Pascha* means "passover" or "deliverance" in Hebrew. The Jews, in celebrating the Old Testament Passover, commemorated the liberation of their forbears from Egyptian slavery. Christians, on the other hand, in celebrating the New Testament Pascha, celebrate the deliverance through Jesus Christ of the entire human race from slavery to the Devil and His granting to us life and eternal blessedness. Due to the blessings we have received through the Resurrection of Christ, Pascha is the Feast of Feasts and the triumph of triumphs, and therefore its divine services are distinguished by magnificence and an exceptional solemn rejoicing.

An hour before midnight, the Midnight Office is served during which the Canon of Great Saturday is read. During the ninth ode of the canon, the priests silently take the Burial Shroud (*epitaphion, plasbchanitsa*) from the center of the church, bring into the Altar through the Royal Doors, and place it upon the Altar Table, where it remains until the Ascension of the Lord in commemoration of the Lord's abiding on earth forty days after His Resurrection from the dead.

The faithful now reverently await the hour of midnight when the radiant, Paschal joy of the greatest feast, the Resurrection of the Lord our Savior Jesus Christ begins.

This Paschal joy is a sacred rejoicing of which there is no likeness or equal on earth. It is the endless joy and blessedness of eternal life. It is of this joy that the Lord spoke when He said, "Your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you."

Just before midnight, festive bells peal out the announcement of the coming of the great moment of the light-bearing Feast of the Resurrection of Christ. The entire clergy, with crosses, candles, and incense, come out of the Altar in the darkened church and together with the people, like the Myrrhbearers who went very early to the tomb, circle the church and

chant, "Thy Resurrection, O Christ our Savior, the angels in heaven sing; enable us on earth, to glorify Thee with pure hearts." During the procession, the Paschal peal rings out from the heights of the bell tower as if from the heights of Heaven. All those who have come to pray walk with lit candles, thus expressing their joy of soul in the radiant feast.

The procession pauses at the closed western doors of the church, as if at the opening to the tomb of Christ. Here (in the Greek Tradition) the Resurrectional Gospel from Mark 1:1-8 telling of the empty tomb is read. Then the senior priest, like the angel who proclaimed the Resurrection to the Myrrhbearers at the tomb, is the first to proclaim the joyous verse, "Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death..." three times repeated three times by the choir. He then proclaims the verses of the ancient prophecy of the holy King David, "Let God arise, and let His enemies be scattered..." and all respond in answer to each verse of the psalm with "Christ is risen from the dead..."

The church's doors are opened, and the faithful, as once did the Myrrhbearers and Apostles, enter into the church, which is resplendent with the light of candles and lambs, chanting joyously, "Christ is risen..."

The Matins of the Resurrection which follows consists primarily of the Paschal Canon of St. John of Damascus. Each ode concludes with the victorious hymn, "Christ is risen from the dead..." During the singing of the canon, each of the clergy in turn, holding the cross with candles and preceded by candlebearers, go around the entire church censuring the faithful and joyously greeting everyone with the Paschal greeting, "Christ is risen!" The faithful respond loudly, "Indeed, He is risen!" The repeated procession of the clergy from the Altar commemorates the appearances of the Lord to His disciples after the Resurrection.

The Homily of St. John Chrysostom is read, calling all to rejoice in the day. "Let no one weep for his transgressions, for forgiveness hath dawned from the tomb. Let no one fear death, for the death of the Savior hath set us free..."

Immediately following Matins, the Hours and Liturgy are celebrated with the doors to the Altar open. Opened at the beginning of Matins, they remain open for the duration of Bright Week as a sign that Jesus Christ has opened the gates to the Heavenly Kingdom forever.

At the Liturgy, the Gospel lesson that is read from John 1 does not tell of Christ's Resurrection, but of His pre-eternal birth from God the Father and of His Divinity, because Christ, by His Resurrection, manifests His Divinity. It is customary, on this day, to read the Gospel in several languages, so that each may hear the glad tidings in his own tongue.

Following Liturgy, eggs, cheese, fleshmeats, and the artos are blessed. The paschal baskets are uncovered, topped with a lit candle, and blessed. In many places, the faithful joyfully break the fast together with food from their baskets or (in our case) with food brought and blessed for that purpose.

Paschal Notes

During the 50 days of Pascha, ending with the Feast of Pentecost on June 7th, we do not kneel or make prostrations in church in keeping with the joyful, festal character of the season. We begin to kneel and do prostrations again only with the Kneeling Prayers of Pentecost.

The Paschal form of service and dismissal is used throughout Bright Week. The Sunday dismissal, "May He who is risen from the dead..." is used at all services after Bright Week until the Leavetaking. Liturgy during the festal season begins with the clergy singing "Christ is Risen" two and a half times with the choir finishing it.

The prayer "O Heavenly King" is not said at home or in church during this season until Pentecost. Until the Leavetaking of Pascha, May 16, we sing or say "Christ is risen from the dead..." three times in its place. From Ascension, May 17 on, we can use the Troparion of the Feast of Ascension.

For 40 days until the Feast of Ascension (May 28), we greet each other by saying, "Christ is Risen!" and replying, "Indeed, He is Risen!"

Through the Leavetaking of Pascha, (May 27) we use the Paschal Troparion before and the Kontakion after meals and when setting out on a trip.

The Paschal Troparion

Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing life!

Paschal Kontakion, tone 8

Thou didst descend into the tomb, O Immortal, /
Thou didst destroy the power of death. / In victory
didst Thou arise, O Christ God, / proclaiming,
"Rejoice!" to the myrrhbearing women, / granting
peace to Thine Apostles, and bestowing resurrection
on the fallen.

Paschal Office (Hours): A special short service of prayer known as the Paschal Office replaces the daily services of Hours, Compline, and the Midnight Office during Bright Week (see bulletin for text). The faithful also say the Paschal Office for the morning and evening prayers and for the Prayers of Thanksgiving after Holy Communion on these days. The Paschal Office is a beautiful distillation of the joyful prayer of the Feast.

Fasting: There is no fasting during Bright Week, because it is a joyous extension of Pascha Sunday. The services are substantially the same as Pascha Sunday. On Wednesdays and Fridays from Thomas Sunday until Pentecost, fasting is mitigated with wine and oil being permitted, and fish on the Wednesday of Mid-Pentecost.

The Week of Renewal

Bright Week, in Greek, has a particularly beautiful name: "The Week of Renewal," which suits the whole of the Paschal season. Jesus wished to die and to rise again at the threshold of spring. In the same way that Christ's Nativity (Christmas) coincides with the victory of light over darkness, when the days begin to lengthen, so Pascha coincides with the renewal of nature, when greenery and flowers appear.

The Universe itself is a symbol of spiritual realities. Springtime speaks to us—if we know how to interpret God's creation—of inner renewal. There is a springtime of the soul. Pascha, like springtime in nature, brings us a message of hope. Christ's Resurrection tells us that we can be changed. We need to feel the 'new green' of the Paschal season, to which some sayings in Holy Scripture well apply:

Purge out the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven...but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

...that like as Christ was raised up from the dead...even so we also should walk in newness of life...that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.

Bright Week has long been specially observed in the Church. The *Apostolic Constitutions* (dating no later than 380) mandate: "Let slaves rest from their work all the Great Week [Holy Week] and that which follows it [Bright Week]—for the one in memory of the Passion, and for the other of the Resurrection; and there is need they should be instructed who it is that suffered and rose again, and who it is that permitted Him to suffer, and raised him again" (viii, 33).

Emperor Theodosius the Great (+ 395) banned court proceedings during the entire Bright Week, while Emperor Theodosius the Younger (+450) barred all performances in the theatre and circus. In Jerusalem, the most solemn days were the first three days of Bright Week, which are observed to the present day.

Concerning Bright Week, the Sixth Ecumenical Council (691) decreed: "From the holy day of the Resurrection of Christ our God to the new Sunday (Thomas Sunday) the faithful are required to spend the time in a state of leisure, frequent the church, and participate in singing psalms and spiritual hymns, rejoicing in Christ, and listening attentively to the readings of the Holy Scriptures, for in this way we shall rise with Christ and with Him be glorified. Therefore, during these days no horse races or other public spectacles are to be held" (Tullo Canon 66).

Sentenced to Immortality
St. Justin of Chelije

Man sentenced God to death; by His Resurrection, Christ God sentenced man to immortality. In return for a beating, He gives an embrace; for abuse, a blessing; for death, immortality. Man never showed so much hate for God as when he crucified Him; and God never showed more love for man than when He arose. Man even wanted to reduce God to a mortal, but God by His Resurrection made man immortal. The crucified God is Risen and has killed death. Death is no more. Immortality has surrounded man and all the world.

By the Resurrection of the God-Man, human nature has been led irreversibly onto the path of immortality, and has become dreadful to death itself. For before the Resurrection of Christ, death was dreadful to man, but after the Resurrection of Christ, man has become more dreadful to death. When man lives by faith in the Risen God-Man, he lives above death, out of its reach; it is a footstool for his feet: "O Death, where is thy sting? O Hades, where is thy victory?" (I Cor. 15:55). When a man belonging to Christ dies, he simply sets aside his body like clothing, in which he will again be vested on the day of Dread Judgement.

Before the Resurrection of the God-Man, death was the second nature of man: life first, death second. But by His Resurrection, the Lord has changed everything: immortality has become the second nature of man, it has become natural for man; and death – unnatural. As before the Resurrection of Christ, it was natural for men to be mortal, so after the Resurrection of Christ, it was natural for men to be immortal.

By sin, man became mortal and transient; by the Resurrection of the God-Man, he became immortal and perpetual. In this is the power, the might, the all-mightiness of the Resurrection of Christ. Without it, there would have been no Christianity. Of all miracles, this is the greatest miracle. All other miracles have it as their source and lead to it. From it grow faith, love, hope, prayer, and love for God. Behold: the fugitive disciples, having run away from Jesus when He died, return to Him because He is risen. Behold: the Centurion confessed Christ as the Son of God when he saw the Resurrection from the grave. Behold: all the first Christians became Christian because the Lord Jesus is risen, because death was vanquished. This is what no other faith has; this is what lifts the Lord Christ above all other gods and men; this is what, in the most undoubted manner, shows and demonstrates that Jesus Christ is the One True God and Lord in all the world.

Because of the Resurrection of Christ, because of His victory over death, men have become, continue to become, and will continue becoming Christians. The entire history of Christianity is nothing other than the history of a unique miracle, namely, the Resurrection of Christ, which is unbrokenly threaded

through the hearts of Christians from one day to the next, from year to year, across the centuries, until the Dread Judgment.

Man is born, in fact, not when his mother bring him into the world, but when he comes to believe in the Risen Christ, for then he is born to life eternal, whereas a mother bears children for death, for the grave. The Resurrection of Christ is the mother of us all, all Christians, the mother of immortals. By faith in the Resurrection, man is born anew, born for eternity. "That is impossible!" says the skeptic. But you listen to what the Risen God-Man says: "All things are possible to him that believeth!" (Mark 9:23). The believer is he who lives, with all his heart, with all his soul, with all his being, according to the Gospel of the Risen Lord Jesus.

Faith is our victory, by which we conquer death; faith in the Risen Lord Jesus. Death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin. The Lord "has removed the sting of death." Death is a serpent; sin is its fangs. By sin, death puts its poison into the soul and into the body of man. The more sins a man has, the more bites, through which death puts its poison in him.

When a wasp stings a man, he uses all his strength to remove the sting. But when sin wounds him, this sting of death, what should be done? One must call upon the Risen Lord Jesus in faith and prayer, that He may remove the sting of death from the soul. He, in His great loving-kindness, will do this, for He is overflowing with mercy and love. When many wasps attack a man's body and wound it with many stings, that man is poisoned and dies. The same happens with a man's soul, when many sins wound it with their stings: it is poisoned and dies a death with no resurrection.

Conquering sin in himself through Christ, man overcomes death. If you have lived the day without vanquishing a single sin of yours, know that you have become deadened. Vanquish one, two, or three of your sins, and behold: you have become younger than the youth which does not age, young in immortality and eternity. Never forget that to believe in the Resurrection of the Lord Christ means to carry out a continuous fight with sins, with evil, with death.

If a man fights with sins and passions, this demonstrates that he indeed believes in the Risen Lord; if the fights with them, he fights for life eternal. If he does not fight, his faith is in vain. If man's faith is not a fight for immortality and eternity, than tell me, what is it? If faith in Christ does not bring us to resurrection and life eternal, than what use is it to us? If Christ is not risen, that meant that neither sin nor death has been vanquished, than why believe in Christ?

For the one who by faith in the Risen Lord fights with each of his sins there will be affirmed in him gradually the feeling that Christ is indeed risen, has indeed vanquished the sting of sin, has indeed vanquished death on all the fronts of combat. Sin gradually diminishes the soul in man, driving it into

death, transforming it from immortality to mortality, from incorruption to corruption. The more the sins, the more mortal the man. If man does not feel immortality in himself, know that he is in sins, in bad thoughts, in languid feelings. Christianity is an appeal: Fight with death until the last breath, fight until a final victory has been reached. Every sin is a desertion; every passion is a retreat; every vice is a defeat.

One need not be surprised that Christians also die bodily. This is because the death of the body is sowing. The mortal body is sown, says the Apostle Paul, and it grows, and is raised in an immortal body (I Corinthians 15:42-44). The body dissolves, like a sown seed, that the Holy Spirit may quicken and perfect it. If the Lord Christ had not been risen in body, what use would it have for Him? He would not have saved the entire man. If His body did not rise, then why was He incarnate?

Why did He take on Himself flesh, if He gave it nothing of His Divinity?

If Christ is not risen, then why believe in Him? To be honest, I would never have believed in Him had He not risen and had not therefore vanquished death. Our greatest enemy was killed and we were given immortality. Without this, our world is a noisy display of revolting stupidity and despair, for neither in Heaven nor under Heaven is there a greater stupidity than this world without the Resurrection; and there is not a greater despair than this life without immortality. There is no single being in the world more miserable than the man who does not believe in the resurrection of the dead. It would have been better for such a man never to have been born.

In our human world, death is the greatest torment and inhumane horror. Freedom from this torment and horror is salvation. Such a salvation was given the race of man by the Vanquisher of death – the Risen God-Man. He related to us all the mystery of salvation by His Resurrection. To be saved means to assure our body and soul of immortality and life eternal. How do we attain this? By no other way than by a theanthropic life, a new life, a life in the Risen Lord, in and by the Lord's Resurrection.

For us Christians, our life on earth is a school in which we learn how to assure ourselves of resurrection and life eternal. For what use is this life if we cannot acquire by it life eternal? But, in order to be resurrected with the Lord Christ, man must first suffer with Him, and live His life as his own. If he does this, then on Pascha he can say with Saint Gregory the Theologian: "Yesterday I was crucified with Him, today I live with Him; yesterday I was buried with Him, today I rise with Him" (Troparion 2, Ode 3, Matins, Pascha).

Christ's Four Gospels are summed up in only four words. They are: "Christ is Risen! Indeed He is risen!" In each of these words is a Gospel, and in the Four Gospels is all the meaning of all God's world, visible and invisible. When all knowledge and all the thoughts of men are concentrated in the cry of the Paschal salutation, "Christ is Risen!", then immortal

joy embraces all beings and in joy responds: "Indeed He is risen!"

On the Artos

The Artos is an appropriate symbol for the risen Christ, who is the Bread of Life and gives Himself to us as bread.

The word "Artos" is the Greek word for leavened bread. The historical origin of the Artos used at Pascha is as follows: the Apostles, who were accustomed to partake a meal together with the resurrected Lord (Acts 10:41), after His ascension began to leave an unoccupied place at the table with bread as if for Him, and each time after the end of the meal, lifting up thanksgiving to God, lifted this bread, saying: "Christ is Risen."

When the disciples of Jesus Christ went away to various countries for the proclamation of the Gospel, they whenever possible tried to observe this custom: each of the Holy Apostles in whatever country founded a new society of followers of Christ and when beginning a meal left a place and a fragment of bread in honor of the Savior, and after the end of the meal together with them glorified the risen Lord, raising up the fragment of bread placed in memory of Him.

Thus, following this precedent, the now places an Artos on Holy Pascha in the temple in full view of the faithful to serve as their same reminder of the invisible presence of the risen Lord with us. Thus, preparing the Artos, the Holy Church imitates the Apostles and by these blessed loaves remembers the appearances of the risen Lord to the Apostles.

At the same time the Artos reminds us that Jesus Christ by His death on the cross also has become for us the rising of the truly living bread. Such is the meaning of the Artos revealed in the prayer of its blessing. Also in this prayer the priest, calls down the blessing of God on the blessed Artos, asking the Lord to grant healing of any infirmity or illness to all who eat of the Artos.

The Artos is blessed at the end of the Paschal Divine Liturgy. After the Prayer before the Ambo, the Artos is blessed with prayer and sprinkling with Holy Water. The people then kiss the Artos as they receive the Antidoron. All during Bright Week, the Artos is placed on a table before the open Royal Doors in the church. It is carried in any cross processions around the temple.

On Bright Saturday after the Liturgy, the Artos is blessed again after Liturgy and then divided and distributed to the faithful. At St. Maximus, we do this on Thomas Sunday.

Upcoming Events 2018

7 April: Paschal Vigil starts at 11:30 p.m.
8 April: Agape Vespers 3:00 p.m., Picnic & Egg Hunt
28 May: Memorial Day Picnic

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!