

In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, One God, Amen.

The Holy Resurrection: Divine Justice Captured Freedom

My Beloved Brethren and Children,

I thank our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ for giving us this glorious day and the opportunity to wish each of you and each family a blessed resurrection feast. Christ is risen! Truly He is risen!

Christ arose with power and might and set the world free from Satan's clutches. Only those who do not desire liberty, continue to remain in Satan's grasp, *"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Romans 6:23). Only God incarnate who took human flesh to save humanity could pay the ransom. He took what is ours—death and suffering to give us what is His—forgiveness and eternal life. Divine Justice demanded His execution—the slaughtered Lamb who bore the sins of mankind. His sweet aroma, which He was determined to set upon the hill of Golgotha, was the acceptable sacrifice presented to satisfy Divine Justice. *"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me"* (Galatians 2:20).

God did not hedge us from temptations, but modeled righteousness endured in hardships as He did with Job. During Holy Week, Christ was humiliated, chained, scourged, crucified, and died. Upon His death, He descended into Hades, released its captives, bound Satan, opened the gates of Paradise, and resurrected on the third day. Thus, freedom was granted to us to live as Christians and imitate our Lord Jesus Christ in His goodness and in His endurance. There are five criteria pertaining to living in real freedom. Each criterion is comprised of these five components as described by the prophet Zephaniah (3:17):

*"The Lord your God in your midst,
The Mighty One, will save;
He will rejoice over you with gladness,
He will quiet you with His love,
He will rejoice over you with singing"*

Fear is non-existent. *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths"* (Proverbs 3:5-6). Fear cannot impact our inner peace and contentment, no matter the circumstances and adversities, for we are assured that God is in our midst. We live in the joy of the holy resurrection beyond the crucifixion. Thus, we have learned from many Christians who imitated Christ and accepted martyrdom with joy and song.

Forgiveness is acquired. *"Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy. He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea"* (Micah 7:18-19). Though sin

can be captivating, yet freedom from sin is readily available in living a life of repentance and embracing the holy sacraments, in which we unite with Christ. Forgiveness requires the highest standard of love that can only be experienced through Christ Jesus.

Confidence is cultivated. *“Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need”* (Hebrews 14:16). There is no necessity for self-confidence when one has security in God. Self-confidence can lead to arrogance, but confidence in God leads to justice, mercy, and goodwill. Confidence in God underscores our purpose in His service.

Hope is lived. *“For there is hope for a tree, if it is cut down, that it will sprout again, and that its tender shoots will not cease. Though its root may grow old in the earth, and its stump may die in the ground, yet at the scent of water it will bud and bring forth branches like a plant”* (Job 14:7-9). The righteous Job set an example of piety and love toward God despite Satan’s antagonistic assaults on him and his family—those dearest to him. Whether he had or had not possessions, did not define his love and devotion to God. He lived in hope even in his example of what many would have believed to be a dead tree. Nonetheless, to Job, this deadness could be resurrected unto life. Christ is the fountain of life—the true spring of water that refreshes our souls that are dead in sins, and can raise us from this deadness like the lifeless tree.

Life is anticipated. *“If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God”* (Colossians 3:1). Eternal life inseparable with Christ is what Christians live this day and anticipate for tomorrow and await unto everlasting life. All things are relevant in the scope of faith in Christ—nothing more and nothing less.

Thus, in imitating our Lord Jesus Christ, our countenance is joyful and peaceful. We are known to Him, and He is known to us. Therefore, we are elated to belong to Him. This grace and knowledge sets us apart, because by imitating Him, His light reflects in us and onto others. *“‘But I say to you,’ the Lord says, ‘love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, pray for those who persecute you.’ Why did He command these things? So that He might free you from hatred, sadness, anger and grudges, and might grant you the greatest possession of all, perfect love, which is impossible to possess except by the one who loves all equally in imitation of God”* —St. Maximus the Confessor.

We beseech the Lord our God, Jesus Christ, to bless the countries in which we live, and wherever we are called to witness to His holy name throughout the world, and also our mother country, Egypt, and to protect our blessed father and patriarch, His Holiness Pope Tawadros II, for many years and peaceful times.

To God be the glory, forever, Amen.

Bishop Youssef
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