

Resurrection Feast 2016
Festal Message

My Beloved Children,

Christ is risen! Truly He is risen! I wish each of you a very blessed Resurrection Feast.

Nearly two months ago, we began the Holy Great Fast and chanted, "Blessed are those who have mercy and give to the poor." For nearly two more months during the Holy Fifty days, we will chant different hymns about the triumphant resurrection of Christ. However, throughout the year, "Lord Have Mercy" is the most recited and chanted prayer in our liturgical services and personal supplications. These few heartfelt words could change your eternal consequences. The Lord promised, "Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy" (Matthew 5:7). Acts of mercy require a cheerful presence genuinely engaged in the concerns of your fellow man. Mercy is actually giving something of yourself, your attention, your care, your time, and your love. Saint Isaac the Syrian explains, "If you give something to one in need, let the cheerfulness of your face precede your gift, and comfort his sorrow with kind words. When you do this, by your gift the gladness of his mind surpasses even the needs of his body."

Mercy is an important attribute at the heart of Christianity. Follow the example of the Lord Jesus Christ for His acts of mercy never ceased. Though He was barely able to speak while He hung on the cross, His mercy endured until His last breath. From the few passages that He spoke in those final hours, His concerns for others clearly carried a message of mercy. To His accusers and persecutors, He said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34). To the repentant thief that never witnessed His miracles, but was condemned to die with Him, He said to him as they both hung on their crosses awaiting their own deaths, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). As the only child to His widowed Virgin Mother, He entrusted her care to His beloved disciple John, and said, "Woman, behold your son" (John 19:26)! To Saint John the Beloved, the celibate young man and only disciple who remained loyal to Christ throughout His crucifixion and death, He honored him with the care of His mother, Saint Mary, and said, "Behold your mother" (John 19:27)!

We all have similar emotional needs beyond food and material provisions. We all have the need to be loved and appreciated. Instructions on how to give and how to show mercy were given long ago and the Church continues to teach them today. "For the poor will never cease from the land; therefore I command you, saying, 'You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land'" (Deuteronomy 15:11). The poor and those in need are not only the financially disadvantaged, but also anyone who is lonely or heart-broken and needs a gesture of love and kindness. Even, after His glorious resurrection, Christ's tenderheartedness and special attention to His disciples remained evident. The Holy Gospel recounts the time after the holy resurrection when Christ set out to meet His disciples in their familiar territory (cf. John 21). As fishermen by trade, they had

returned to the sea. Christ stood on the shore and observed their tiresome and unsuccessful efforts. Thus, He advised them of where to catch the fish, and they obeyed. Then, He proceeded to personally prepare a meal for them and called unto them to serve them.

Let us consider the fruits of our fasting this year so that rather than terminating God's blessings from the lessons gleaned throughout the months of fasting, we continue to cultivate His goodness into all aspects of our lives and into the lives of others. Since our fasting has now turned into feasting, let us remember those who remain restricted by various adversities, health, economy, stress, and hardships. Since our prayers and prostrations have been poured out before the Lord in penance, let us continue in prayer and remember those who remain entangled in the cares of the world. Since we have mindfully refrained from living extravagantly throughout the Holy Great Fast and offered alms to the church and to our brothers and sisters in need, let us now build and replenish our churches, aid those seeking employment, support those in need of guidance, and pursue opportunities for those desiring to further their knowledge and education. Fasting is a stepping-stone and not the goal in itself. Distribute love and mercy toward others, endeavoring to give more, not keep more. Do not go back to the enslavement of gluttony and superficiality. Indulge in bringing gladness to others and in sharing your blessings with everyone.

Saint John Chrysostom says, "Do you see that our practice has more power to do good? By practice I mean, not your fasting, nor yet your strewing sackcloth and ashes under you, but if you despise wealth, as it ought to be despised; if you be kindly affectionate, if you give your bread to the hungry, if you control anger, if you cast out vainglory, if you put away envy. So He Himself used to teach: for, 'Learn of me,' says He, 'for I am meek and lowly in heart' (cf. Matthew 11:29). He did not say, 'for I fasted'. Be delighted in the company of the meek and let your happiness be contagious. God's mercy endures forever (Psalm 136). We chant this beautiful verse in the Second Canticle of every Midnight Psalmody to remember God's goodness and infinite mercy. The glorious Resurrection Feast is a calling to the ministry of Christ as it was with His blessed disciples and honorable apostles. You have witnessed Christ's many examples demonstrating how we ought to live and serve. Get ready to begin your mission with seriousness as soldiers of Christ desiring goodwill and pursuing mercy all the days of your life.

Through the intercessions of Saint Mary the Ever-Virgin, we ask the Lord Jesus Christ to fill our hearts with His unlimited love and enduring mercy, to guard His Church throughout the ages, to preserve the life of our beloved father and patriarch, His Holiness Pope Tawadros II, and to confirm upon his throne for many years and peaceful times.

To God is all the glory, forever, Amen.

God bless you,

Bishop Youssef

Bishop, Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States