

Festal Message for the feast of resurrection 2023

My Beloved,

O Death, where is your sting? O Hell, where is your victory? Christ is risen, and you are overthrown. Christ is risen, and the demons are fallen. Christ is risen, and the angels rejoice. Christ is risen, and life reigns. Christ is risen, and not one dead remains in the grave. For Christ, being risen from the dead, is become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep St John Chrysostom, Paschal Homily

Christ is risen! Truly He is risen! Death is defeated and the demons no longer have a grip on humanity. The dead rise! Hope and joy are restored. Through His glorious resurrection, we see in the many resurrection accounts how the Lord Jesus Christ restores joy to humanity. Each one of us is called to have that same experience of the resurrection, to experience its transformative power and its ability to turn the sadness, the worries and the cares into inexpressible joy.

He is the restorer of joy to those who lost purpose. The disciples on the road to Emmaus had hoped Jesus was the Messiah and as they are walking and conversing, they no longer call Him the Messiah or the son of God, but simply a prophet. They couldn't comprehend His death and felt like they lost their purpose after following Him during His earthly ministry. Yet the Lord appears in their midst, seeking His sheep as He always does and explains Scripture. The disciples invite Him to stay with them and their blindness is taken away, recognizing Him in the "breaking of the bread" (Lk 24:35). Their joy was restored. They found their purpose and zeal again and rushed back to Jerusalem to share the joy.

There may be times in our lives when we seem to have also lost our purpose, and like those two disciples, we may experience the same sadness in not being able to recognize our Lord's presence in our lives. We should take example from their encounter and the remedy to their sadness, clinging to Scripture and inviting the Lord into our hearts in the partaking of the Eucharist. The Lord will appear to us in Scripture as He appeared to them. He will appear to us when we partake of the Eucharist, as He appeared to them, and when He does, we will be full of joy, for "in [His] presence is fullness of joy" (Ps 16:11). Never give up, but keep persevering for the Lord fills the heart of those who persevere, despite the loss of purpose, with the joy of the resurrection. Lord Jesus Christ, appear to me with the joy of Your resurrection.

He is also the restorer of joy to those held captive. Our Lord Jesus Christ descends into Hades to deliver those who were captive. We can imagine Adam and Eve in Hades all these years sentenced because of their sin. We can think of Moses who led the people of Israel out of captivity in Egypt yet he is held captive in Hades. We can picture David, who prophesied about the incarnation, death and resurrection our Lord and is awaiting in Hades for the fulfillment of all these prophesies. All of those in Hades waiting expectingly in hope despite their captivity, waiting on the Lord. And then the Lord descends into darkness of Hades, abolishing all darkness with His presence, His light. The tremendous joy of deliverance!

How often we find ourselves in captivity to sin. The sins of the mind, the sins of the flesh, the desires for material possessions, the desire for worldly glory, etc. At times, we find ourselves struggling with habitual sins, addictions that are holding us captive, unable to live life joyfully as the Lord intends. If we remain hopeful as those in Hades, waiting on the Lord (cf Ps 27:14) as they waited patiently, and struggling courageously against sin, the bonds will be loosed and our

good Savior will fill our hearts with the joy of the Resurrection. Lord Jesus Christ, shine upon me with the light and joy of Your resurrection and deliver me from the captivity of sin.

The Lord is also the restorer of joy to those who lost hope. On the Lord's right hand on the cross, a thief is crucified, condemned to death. And this thief knows that this is his end. This is it. Yet on the cross, he encounters the Savior of the world and in his beautiful cry of hope, he pleads "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." (Lk 23:42) The joy the thief experienced in hearing the Lord's response, 'today, you will be with Me in paradise' is the joy the Lord wishes all of us to experience everyday in our encounter with Him.

Perhaps there are times in our lives in which we lose hope in ourselves. We feel like we are lost and cannot find our way back. Or maybe there is a loved one - a son, a daughter, a friend, a sibling, a parent, a spouse - that we feel is lost. And we ask ourselves, 'how are they going to return?' We take example of this thief who in an instant won paradise in the last moment of his life, giving us hope that as long as we are still here on earth, the Lord simply awaits our repentance or that of our loved one. It can happen at any time. We need to keep calling on our good Savior for He fills the heart of those who call upon Him in hope when all seems lost with the joy of the Resurrection. Lord Jesus Christ, allow me to recognize the power and joy of Your resurrection that I may rise with You.

My beloved, St. Gregory the Theologian reminds us, "**Christ has risen from the dead. Rise with him. Christ has returned to himself. Return. Christ is freed from the tomb. Be freed from the bonds of sin.**" Truly, we are called to rise with Him. We are called to return to Him. We are called to be freed from the bonds of sin and be joyful. We wish you a blessed and glorious feast of the resurrection, praying that we all experience the inexpressible joy of the risen Lord in our lives. Through the intercession and prayers of Saint Mary, all the angels and saints, we ask the Lord to preserve the life of our beloved father, His Holiness Pope Tawadros II, the 118th Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of Saint Mark, and to keep him on his throne for many years and peaceful times..

God be the God forever, Amen.

Bishop Gregory

Bishop Basil

Metropolitan Youssef