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Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

May you always be consciously aware of the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the love and mercy of God the Father, and the communion of the Life-Giving Holy Spirit dwelling within your heart!

THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

*****DEATH IS RESURRECTION*****

Having beheld the Resurrection of Christ, let us worship the Holy Lord Jesus, the Only Sinless One. We venerate Your Cross, O Christ, and we praise and glorify Your Holy Resurrection. You are our God, we are Your people. We know no other than You, and we call upon Your Name. Come, all faithful, let us venerate the Holy Resurrection of Christ. For behold, through the Cross, joy has come to all the world. Blessing the Lord always, let us praise His Resurrection. For enduring the Cross for us, He has destroyed death by death (Priest prayer during Divine Liturgy when placing the precious Gifts in the chalice).

When Jesus preached the “good news” as recorded in the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, we see that he focuses on three themes, namely: 1) He announced the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God through himself: 2) He predicted, fulfilling all the Old Testament in himself, that the Son of Man would be betrayed, and would suffer and die: 3) Yet he would rise from the dead and share his new resurrectional life with his followers on this earth and in the life to come.

Let us examine the full meaning of his death on the cross out of love for you and me and see how in him and in us death can be resurrection as we live out our Baptism of death to selfishness and rising to put on Jesus by an inner revolution as we live his new, eternal life.

GIVING US A NEW HEART

God had promised his people of the Old Testament that he would cleanse them with clean water and give them a new heart and a new spirit “I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and I shall purify you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. A new heart will I give you, a new spirit will I put within you; and I will remove the heart of stone out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my commandments, and you shall keep my judgments and do them (Ezekiel 36:25-27).

The first man and woman conceived by God in the garden of Eden are depicted as walking in his loving presence, communicating with God in the coolness of the evening. “The Lord created man from the earth and returned him to it again. He gave them a certain number of days and an appointed time. And He gave them authority over it. He clothed them in strength like His own and made them in His image. He put the fear of man upon all flesh and gave him dominion over wild animals and birds. He gave mankind the ability to deliberate, and a tongue, eyes and ears, and a heart to think with. He filled them with the skill of comprehension and showed them good and evil. He set His eye upon their hearts, to show them the majesty of His works. They will praise His holy name, so as to fully describe the majesty of His works. He added knowledge to them and gave them the law of life as a heritage. He established an eternal covenant with them. And He showed His judgments to them. Their eyes saw His glorious majesty, and their ears heard His glorious voice” (about 180 BC; Wisdom of Sirach 17: 1-11).

But we human beings lost the presence of God in our hearts. We have separated ourselves from The Trinitarian Community of Love by our free will choices. Instead of light, we have been born into an inner darkness that covers our hearts from our true identity in relationship to God. We have been created with a hunger for God's beauty, made, male and female, "according to God's image and after his likeness" (Genesis 1:26). Thus there is a burning searching in all of us human beings for our true identity in the loving relationship to God who communicates Himself to us always in and through His incarnate Word, Jesus Christ.

No matter how much darkness covers our hearts, we do seek frantically for a way out toward God's light of eternal illumination. We modern persons, sit on the roadside like the blind man Bartimaeus, we sit in our isolated corners, sick, disturbed, lonely, angry and shivering from fright. We have forgotten the language of communicating with God, the language of silent surrendering love. Materialism has dried up our hearts and strewn the arid desert with our tinsel and baubles, leaving us like a discarded Christmas tree on a dump heap.

JESUS, GOD'S PERFECT IMAGE

Yet God promises to cleanse us with clean water and give us a new heart, if we only wish to return back to Him through repentance, faith and trust. God's face would be uncovered as we would learn how to contemplate God's presence in the face of Jesus. "...The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face shine upon you and give you life; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace" (Numbers 6:24-26).

GOD SPEAKS TO US IN HIS ONE WORD, JESUS CHRIST SUFFERING

Jesus said, "I AM the good shepherd; a good shepherd risks his life for the sake of his sheep...I AM the good shepherd, and I know my own, and my own know me" (John 10:11;14). The Savior to come was likened to a fountain of salvation that would pour out life-giving water "Therefore with joy shall you draw water out of the spring of salvation" (Isaiah 12:3). Jesus cried out to the crowd in a loud voice: "...If any man is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, just as the scriptures have said, the rivers of living water shall flow from within him. He said this concerning the Spirit, which they who believe in him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified" (John 7:37-39).

When God spoke his definitive Word in human form in the utter silence on the cross, his appearance was different from what the Jews were expecting of their Messiah. He came in no worldly power, but in the form of a weak baby infant. Instead of riches, he was born in a cave, wrapped in swaddling clothes and placed in a manger. He spent 30 years in hidden obscurity, poor, prayerful, engaged in the humble work of a carpenter, doing his Father's will and preparing himself for his "hour".

God was speaking, no longer through his chosen prophets, "From of old, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets in every manner and in all ways; and in these latter days he has spoken to us by his Son, Whom he has appointed heir of all things, and by whom also he made the ages" (Hebrews 1:1-2). Now God is speaking to us in this person, Jesus Christ. Not only does he speak to our ears in the teachings of Jesus, but he speaks also to our eyes. His Word is a visible Word to be seen and contemplated. He speaks only one Word. We hear it in silence by seeing Jesus on the cross, emptied out, for love of us.

This light, shining in our darkness, reflects the perfect image of the Father's countenance "He is the image of the Invisible God, and the first-born of every creature" (Colossians 1:15). God has now "pitched his tent" among us, the Voice, the Word of God, always present to us if we care to contemplate God in human form communicating perfect, eternal divine love poured out on the cross. Jesus has come to open us to a new age. He shows the beauty of our

heavenly Father through His humility, poverty, gentleness, kindness, loving mercy, compassion, healing and restoring our nature, zeal, joy and prayerfulness. "You brought us out of non-existence into being, and when we had fallen away from You, You raised us up again, and left nothing undone to lead us back to heaven, and bestow upon us Your Future Kingdom. For all this, we give thanks to You and Your Only-Begotten Son and Your Holy Spirit." ... "Remembering therefore the life-saving command (washing each others feet; celebrating the Eucharist) and all that has been done for us: the Cross, Your descent into Hades and the release of all it's captives, the Tomb, the Resurrection on the third day, the Ascension into heaven, the Sitting at the Right Hand of the Father, and the Second and Awesome Glorious Coming) (Divine Liturgy; Anaphora of St. John Chrysostom).

But He becomes God's light, shining before us most brilliantly when He is dying on the cross out of His infinite love for each of us. When the hill of Calvary was covered with darkness as of night and the Light of God's presence seemed totally extinguished, then the Light burst forth with the awesome Glory of God covering that mangled body of Jesus. He was stripped of all beauty and comeliness. He screamed out in his terrifying abandonment by his Father. Still there is more light to shine. Jesus has still more to give us, more love to show us, more of Himself to pour out for love of us in total self-emptying.

LOVE UNTO THE END

When Jesus gathered his disciples together for the last meal, the Mystical Supper, He is described as one with great excitement in His heart. He had now reached a peak moment in His life. Everything from the cave of Bethlehem, the small home in Nazareth, the desert temptations, the previous years of exhausting travels to preach and heal the multitudes led to this moment. "...Jesus knew the hour had come to depart from this world to His Father. He loved His own who were in the world, and He loved them to the end" (John 13:1). Jesus manifested how perfect was His love.

Periodically during His public life this burning love in His heart to accomplish what His Father had sent Him to do would flare out in words of ardent longing. "I came to set the earth on fire; and I wish to do it, if it has not already been kindled. I have a baptism to be baptized with; and I AM oppressed until it is fulfilled" (Luke 12:49-50). His baptism would be of water and blood poured out from His loving heart, the heart of the suffering God imaged in the humanity of Jesus. When the spear would open his heart and there would pour forth the last drops of water and blood, then Jesus' work would be consummated. "It is accomplished" (John 19:30). What is accomplished?

The goal of the Incarnation is about to be reached. God in man has now finally spoken His definitive Word in Jesus Christ. Saint John standing at the foot of the cross has nothing more to say. He invites us to "see" the Word of God being spoken clearly in the singleness of His total person, telling us at that moment of God's infinite and perfect love for us. The horrendous folly of the sufferings of Christ is sheer nonsense except in terms of the logic of divine love! For the contemplative Christian, poor in spirit, this divine *kenosis* or self-emptying even to the last drop of blood and water has fullest meaning only in being an exact *image* of the heart of God the Father in His infinite tender, self-sacrificing love for each individual, unique person.

JESUS THE ROCK

Because Jesus was obedient to His Father, even unto death, "Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, of those on earth, and those under the earth, and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is the **Lord**, to the glory of God His

Father” (Philippians 2:9-11). Like a dying man who sees a light coming toward him to bring him into eternal life, so Jesus sees again the bright light of His Father’s countenance. His hour has arrived. He is now the perfect image of the Father’s love for all of us human beings. Becoming God’s communicating Word of Love in His total emptiness, Jesus is overcome with the Father’s love.

His Holy Spirit comes upon Him and inundates Him with His fruit of love, peace and joy (Galatians 5:22). The Spirit reveals to us that, as St. Paul writes, the Israelites in the desert drank from the spiritual rock that followed them as they went, “And all drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them; and that Rock was Christ” (1Corinthians 10:4). Jesus’ side is pierced by a soldier’s spear and from the heart of Jesus, as Saint John notes, there flowed forth water and blood. “One of the soldiers pierced His side with a lance, and at once there came forth, blood and water, and he who saw it bore witness, and his testimony is true” (Proskomedia Prayers of Divine Liturgy). This is not only a detail given to reveal to us the total self-giving of Jesus and His Father for us, bought at a great price, but it is a revelation in symbol that now Jesus, dying, is glorified by being empowered by His Father to send us His Holy Spirit.

THE WORKING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Spirit is the living waters that in baptism come to us from the pierced heart of Jesus. He is the Lamb that is slain for us “Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing” (Revelations 5:12). The Spirit purifies our hearts, the deepest layers of our consciousness, by revealing the love of Jesus for us in the symbol of his pierced heart. Contemplating the depths of His love for us, we are cleansed of self-centeredness. We can continuously approach this sacred fountain, the Rock that is Jesus Christ, and be washed through the Spirit’s revelation of God’s love in the water and blood of Christ.

THE SPIRIT REVEALS THAT JESUS IS THE RISEN LORD

Through liturgical and biblical revival, Western Christianity seems to be recapturing the intimate connection between Holy and Great Friday and Pascha, between Christ’s sufferings and death and His entrance into His Glorification. The New Testament shows us that the glorification of Christ cannot be separated from Jesus’ suffering and death. Nor can the resurrection of Christ be separated from our new history in our life in the Risen Jesus. The early Christians rejoiced in Christ’s resurrection because of the saving power, not only of His death on the cross, but also because of His new glorious life which He shares with us. Saint Peter writes: “Blessed be God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who by his abundant mercy has again renewed us spiritually to a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, that does not fade away and is prepared in heaven for you” (1 Peter 1:3-4).

A NEW TIME

Jesus risen lives in a new time. It is the *kairos* or salvific time in which we can enter into His victory over sin and death and be healed of our death-dealing isolation and self-centeredness. We can now meet Jesus risen only by entering into his new existence. This is why we cannot study his resurrectional apparitions merely as historical happenings alone. Men and women in the New Testament witness to their encounter with the risen Jesus by faith. The Father of Jesus Christ, was able to send them the vivifying Spirit of our Risen Lord, who could lead them

into the *now* experience of Jesus raising them beyond sin and death into a sharing of his resurrection and eternal life.

Jesus meets us in his eternal *now kairos* moment which touches us in our historical (in Greek, *chronos*) moment of temporal time. Into this present moment of our brokenness in our history, Jesus comes with the Father to lift us to a similar resurrection: unto new life as in his Spirit we live out of love.

The apostles did not yearn in nostalgia for the historical past times in which they had experienced Jesus. They were experiencing him now in a progression forward to a new way in which they could live in his victory always, night and day. If they only wished, they needed never to be separated from the Indwelling Father, Son and Holy Spirit. No longer was Jesus physically present to them as before in one limited place in Palestine. Now wherever they went, they carried this transforming, conquering power with them. The “good news” is that we live in the faith, the unchanged truth (Orthodoxia) which those first Christian Communities passed on to us, who witnessed Jesus, who had died on the cross, but now was alive and through his Spirit they knew Jesus risen lived within them.

A NEW PRESENCE

To meet Jesus as the new creation, the disciples needed to make the step gradually from the historical Jesus to the risen Jesus. Thus those eyewitnesses had a direct and personal experience of a “bodied” Jesus. It was because they did, that successive generations of Christians, including ourselves, could be brought into a “faithful” experience of Jesus sharing with us his new and glorious resurrectional presence.

The good news that pervades every page of the New Testament is that Jesus has died for love of us, but is now risen and lives in us so that we, too, need never live under bondage of sin and death. God’s life within us, is the Trinitarian Community of three Persons existing as “Being” in total freedom and love. We are capable by the grace of the Holy Spirit of entering into Jesus’ glorious, eternal life by confessing our sins to the Divine Physician, and living our life in peace and repentance, living only for Him as our Lord. He is the first fruits of the new creation. He is the new Adam who brings us rebirth to new life through his Holy Spirit.

SHARING EVEN NOW IN CHRIST’S VICTORY

Jesus risen is glorified by his Father and is now becoming the Lord of the Universe (Pantocrator, ruler of all) by raising us up into a new creation. “Whoever from now on is a follower of Christ is a new creation; old things have passed away; and all things have become new through God who has reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:17-18). Jesus risen exerts a universal and absolute power and dominion over all creatures. “even to you, who in times past were alienated and hostile in your minds because of your evil works, peace now has been given, through the sacrifice of his body and his death, so that he may raise you before him, holy and without reproach and blameless, if you continue in your faith and your foundation is firm, and if you are not moved from the hope of the Gospel in which you have heard and which has been preached to every creature under heaven, and for which I, Paul, have become a minister” (Colossians 1:21-23).

Jesus’ total and complete victory over sin and death (He conquered and destroyed the kingdom of Hades) can be seen only in his members as we accept the good news of his victory and as we allow him, through his Holy Spirit, to enter into his glorious eternal life, by the forgiveness and remission of our sins and transgressions, and sharing in God’s divine life. Jesus in his risen humanity is the first fruit of the new creation, the new Adam, and he holds

out to all of us a rebirth unto new life through his Holy Spirit. "But after the goodness and kindness of God our Saviour was manifested, not by works of righteous which we have done, but according to his mercy, he saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, which he shed on us abundantly, through Jesus Christ our Saviour, that being justified by his Grace, we should be made heirs to the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:4-7).

The victory that you and I can share in as we enter more deeply into the contemplative life, the risen Jesus living within us brings us the knowledge of the Father and Jesus, his Son, through the Holy Spirit, a knowledge that brings eternal life and a share in the resurrection of Jesus "And this is eternal life, that they might know Thee, that Thou art the only true God, even the One Who sent Jesus Christ" (John 17:3).

A NOW RESURRECTION

Through the Spirit of the risen Jesus living in you, you are made an heir with Christ as you share in his sufferings, so you also will share in his glory, even in this life "And this Spirit bears witness to our spirit, that we are the children of God; and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with him, we shall also be glorified with him" (Romans 8:16-17); "And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts crying, Abba, Abon, O Father, our Father. From now on you are not servants but sons; and if sons, then heirs of God through Jesus Christ" (Galatians 4:6-7). Now hopefully you and I can break away from viewing our resurrection only as an objectified moment at the last moment of this world's material existence. You can discard picturing your soul as coming back into the same material body and becoming the informing source of a new, spiritualized person that is very much the same, in the words of St. Thomas Aquinas, as you were when you had reached the age of 33!

As you meet the risen Jesus in the new space of what Sacred Scripture calls your "*heart*", there in faith, hope and love you begin to experience your true self in being "in Christ Jesus." In the placeless place of your heart, in the deepest reaches of your consciousness you can encounter the risen Jesus who brings you already a sharing in his eternal life...now and at every moment of your existence.

You receive eternal life in your oneness with the risen Lord. This new life in Christ has been yours in Baptism. It grows each time you "put on Christ" by dying to selfishness and rising to a new oneness in him. The Church becomes the "space" where you can encounter Jesus and grow into a greater oneness with him risen in the sacraments, especially in the "breaking of the Bread." In the Sacrament of Sacraments, the Holy and Blessed Eucharist, you receive the new presence of the risen Jesus that goes beyond his physical presence and yet is also spatially found within the confines of the materiality of bread and wine and the Christian community, the Body of Christ. "As often as **you** eat this bread, and drink this cup, **you** proclaim My death, **you** confess My resurrection" (Anaphora in the Divine Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great).

Jesus' risen presence is also present in his Word as it is preached within the Body of Christ, the Church. He becomes present in his Word as it is taught by the Church through its hierarchical authority with its mystical charism to build up the Body in truth and love (Orthodoxia and Agape). The risen Lord floods you from within with his transforming Light. As you learn to surrender to his resurrectional presence living within you, you grow and mature daily into greater transformation and oneness with the Lord Jesus. You move away from the darkness of selfishness to the loving Light of Christ, "The Light of Christ, shines for all" (Divine Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts), who gradually as a "slow burn" permeates your body, soul and spirit relationships in all your thoughts, words and deeds.

As you allow the risen Jesus to take over in your life and you are guided by his inner Light, your thoughts become centered constantly upon God, your Creator, Refuge and Sustainer.

Let your thoughts, constantly guarded (with vigilance and watchfulness), be on heavenly things, not on the things that are on the earth, because you have died, and now the life you have is hidden with Christ in God. But when Christ is revealed---and He is your life---you too will be revealed in all your glory with him “If you then are risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sits at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on earth, for you are dead, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall you also appear with him in glory” (Colossians 3:1-4).

RELEASING THE RISEN JESUS

To the degree that you become consciously aware of being in the risen Christ, to that degree Jesus risen will begin to operate in and through you to extend his Kingdom throughout all his creation, his reign of love, to other human beings. Christ is the Head and is present to you by his filling activity. With his glory, power and might, he is operating from within you with his infinite majestic merciful love and compassion, but quite dependently upon your readiness to allow his creative loving kindness to flow through you outwardly toward others.

He lives in you and me in different and unique ways. He manifests these diverse activities through the charisms that his Spirit of Love gives us. These charisms or gifts admit of innumerable types, but all are to aid in the building up of the Body of Christ that is his Church. “Now there are diversities of gifts, but there is only one Spirit. And there are diversities of ministries, but there is only one Lord. And there are diversities of powers, but it is one God who works all things in men. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man as help to him. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit. To another faith by the same Spirit; to another gifts of healing by the same Spirit; to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another the means to distinguish the true Spirit; to another different languages; to another the interpretation of languages. But all of these gifts are wrought by that one and the same Spirit, dividing to everyone severally as he will. For as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, even though many, are one body, so also is Christ. For all of us are baptized by one Spirit into one Body, whether Jews or Arameans, whether bond or free; and we have all received through the one Spirit. The body is not one member, but many” (1 Corinthians 12:4-14).

What a responsibility for us Christians to break away from praying to a risen Jesus, who sits up in a place called Heaven, and to discover each day that the risen presence of the Lord of the universe lives within us and wants us to release his powerful, conquering, transforming power within the context of our daily situations! “...and deem it proper to impart to us with Your mighty hand, Your spotless Body and precious blood, and through us, to ALL Your people” (Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom).

AMBASSADORS OF CHRIST

Jesus brings all things into completion by sending us his Holy Spirit who imparts to us the very “uncreated energies” of God, divinizing us into his children. As Jesus risen meets us in the human context of our daily lives and we surrender to live in love toward him and our neighbor, we too, even now pass from death to life...we even now share in his resurrectional life. Our final resurrection is already being realized in a limited way as we are swept up into his transforming power of love. We can enter now into the progressive growth and maturity and fullness and completion within God’s eternal plan of salvation.

“You brought us out of non-existence into being, and when we had fallen away from You, You raised us up again, and left nothing undone to lead us back to heaven, and bestow upon us, Your future kingdom” (Anaphora of Saint John Chrysostom).

To the degree that we have entered into his death-resurrection, we will be able to extend the resurrectional, transforming power of Jesus into the material world around us. Jesus risen becomes more risen in his Body the Church, as we and others allow him to effect the reconciliation of the divided world through our creative efforts. He hands on to us the great work of reconciliation of a world that is torn by dissension and separation (sin). Saint Paul exhorts us, “And all things have become new through God who has reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation; for God was in Christ, who has reconciled the world with his majesty, not counting their sins against them; and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we beseech you for Christ, to be reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:18-20).

Your work is most important in the eyes of God. It is through your cooperation with the loving energies of God that this world can evolve into its full (pleroma) transformation into Christ’s Body, the Church. Whatever work you do to make this world a bit better, on any level of political, social, scientific, technological, artistic endeavor, you are contributing to the fulfillment of all God’s creation, visible and invisible. With our synergy in working together in His universal and providential plan, we can hasten the second coming of Christ in the fullness of his glory.

And to the degree that you die to your self-centeredness and live unto Christ by loving service to all whom you meet, to that degree you have become risen with Jesus. The great paradox of Christianity that Jesus lived and taught us to live is that Death IS Resurrection! That is, if we meet the risen Lord living within us and die to all the obstacles of brokenness and sinfulness which prevent us from living in love of God and the world around us, to that degree we already are sharing in his resurrectional glory. Jesus is the Way that makes this possible through the mystery of living in the love, of truth and freedom and life, which is his Spirit.

In Jesus risen we discover the supreme center of all unity, harmony and cohesion, which gives to the created world its true reality and value. He is the “focus” or meeting-point, the “Stillpoint”, where all creative energies of God’s universe are brought together into a wholeness, a unity in diversity, which is possible only through our cooperation by living our own sharing with Christ risen that death to sin, is the resurrection. When we love God with our whole heart, mind, soul and strength, including our neighbor, then God’s created world becomes more beautiful and we ourselves become the “new creation”, as we form the risen Christ.

**Christ is Risen!
Indeed He is Risen!
And We are Risen in Him!**

Fr. John Michael Zboyovski