



UKRAINIAN GREEK CATHOLIC CHURCH
SVIATOSLAV SHEVCHUK
MAJOR ARCHBISHOP OF KYIV-HALYCH

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**EASTER PASTORAL LETTER
OF HIS BEATITUDE SVIATOSLAV**

**Most Reverend Archbishops and Bishops,
Very Reverend and Reverend Fathers,
Venerable Brothers and Sisters in Monastic and Religious Life,
Dearly Beloved Laity in Christ of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church**

Christ is Risen!

*Having kept its seals intact,
You rose from the grave, O Christ,
Who preserved the Virgin's keys in Your birth,
and opened for us the doors of Paradise.
Ode 6, Paschal Canon*

Beloved in Christ!

Once again, we celebrate the Pascha of Christ amid incredible suffering associated with the horrors of open warfare. Over the past year, there has been so much pain and trauma, so many deported and wounded, captured and missing in action, so many broken lives in every corner of Ukraine and in various countries where our people have settled! So many of our dead—our fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters—have sowed our land, the black-earth of Ukraine, with their bodies, as if with life-giving seeds! Sometimes we simply cry out to the Lord in pain: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?” (Ps 22:1). Our Saviour, crucified on the cross, also prayed with these words! But today, on this bright and joyful feast of Resurrection and life, the great mystery of victory opens up before us—of joy over sadness, truth over falsehood, glory over insult and mockery, light over darkness, good over evil, life over death. The crucified Lord lives! The Good Shepherd, tortured to death, reigns forever! Christ is risen – eternal joy!

Having kept its seals intact, You rose from the grave, O Christ...

It's difficult to seek healing when deep wounds afflict our body and soul. It is not easy to speak of the joy of resurrection when we see suffering and death everywhere. But let us note that the risen body of Jesus, whom we encounter today in our communities, still bears

all the wounds of the crucifixion. After He appeared to His disciples for the first time on the day of Resurrection, the Apostle Thomas, who was absent on that occasion, did not want to believe: "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe" (Jn 20:25). However, Christ tells Thomas when he finally meets him: "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe" (Jn 20:27). He who was crucified and died is the same Lord who rose from the dead. As the Risen One, the conqueror of death, He allows Himself to be recognized by disciples of all nations and generations precisely by His wounds!

At the same time, the body of the risen Saviour is no longer subject to the usual laws of nature: it passes through the stone with which the entrance to the tomb was blocked, without breaking its seals. It passes through the locked door to the upper room, where the disciples hid for fear of the Jews (see Jn 20:19). The risen Christ bears the traces of a terrible death on his glorified body, but death no longer has power over him! Only in order to reveal the emptiness of Christ's tomb, the angel descends, moves away the stone, breaks the seals and says to the myrrh-bearers: "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him" (Mk 16:6).

Faith in the Resurrection of Christ is the basis for our belief in the resurrection of every person. What our resurrected bodies will be like in God's glory is hard to even imagine. However, celebrating the Lord's Pascha, we can be sure that it will be a glorification of the abused, a restoration of the broken and destroyed, a healing of the wounded. Today, the Risen Christ extends His life-giving and wounded right hand to a wounded Ukraine. His glorified wounds touch our wounds, which still bleed and hurt. The Crucified and Risen One makes our wounds His—and in the resurrection of Ukraine they become the glorified wounds of the victors!

To celebrate Easter for us today means to feel the healing touch of Christ's life-giving hand, which is pierced by His glorified wounds. This touch to our wounds infuses into us the strength of the wounds of the Risen One, the breath of the One who overcame death and gave life to those in the graves. On this great day, let's remember the words of the Apostle of the nations: "For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his" (Rom 6:5). The wounds of those who were wounded with Christ will inevitably turn into the wounds of the glorified Lord: because Christ is risen!

... Who preserved the Virgin's keys in Your birth, and opened for us the doors of Paradise.

In our tradition, we do not reproduce the Resurrection event itself in iconography. For us, the image of "The Descent into Hades" is the icon for the feast. One notes that in this icon at the bottom there are keys—a symbol of Christ's victory over death and the power of hell. For God everything is open: a virgin's womb, a tombstone, a locked door, human hearts... The Lord sees our affliction—we can be sure of His closeness in times of trouble. With His Passover, He has already opened the doors of paradise for us, but in order for us to enter, He needs our cooperation and our trust. So, let us firmly believe: just as neither the