

EASTER PASTORAL LETTER OF THE HIERARCHY OF THE UKRAINIAN GREEK-CATHOLIC CHURCH IN CENTRAL AND WESTERN EUROPE 2025

Reverend Clergy, Venerable Monastics, Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ – Faithful of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in Central and Western Europe

Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!

We are all looking for good news these days. What would that good news be for you? We are sure that for almost all of us the news would be that the war in Ukraine is over, the fighting has ended with victory for the Ukrainian nation over the Russian aggressor, and there is peace with justice. That is indeed our hope and prayer, the good news that we seek in our everyday lives.

For us, as Christians, the heart of our faith is to proclaim the Good News in Jesus Christ. This year, Catholics all over the world are participating in the Jubilee year, proclaimed by Pope Francis. It is a special time of blessing, commemorated every 25 years, that helps us to reflect on the VERY GOOD NEWS that salvation is given to us through our Saviour's incarnation, earthly ministry, death and resurrection. Through His sacrifice our sins are forgiven and we are invited to take our place in Heaven. The Holy Father invites us to participate in this Holy Year as "pilgrims of hope".

Along with St Peter's Basilica in Rome each of our cathedrals and other special churches or shrines have been designated as Jubilee churches. During this Jubilee year we are invited to make a good confession, receive Holy Communion and if possible make a pilgrimage to at least one of the Jubilee churches. When we enter a Jubilee church it is as if we are entering the manger in Bethlehem, the place of our Lord's Incarnation. But at the same time we are also entering the Tomb of Christ Our Lord! The Tomb of the Good News about the Resurrection! The Tomb that brings hope to all. The place from which we are born into eternal life.

As we read in the Gospel of St. John (chapter 20) early that first Sunday morning after the crucifixion, Mary Magdalene went to weep at the tomb where they had just two days earlier laid the lifeless body of Jesus to rest. To her shock and surprise the huge stone that had been placed at the entrance had been moved away, and she immediately assumed that the tomb was empty, not knowing anything about the Resurrection. So she ran to tell Peter and the other apostles. Peter and the apostle "whom Jesus loved" went running to the tomb. Peter entered the tomb and confirmed that the body was no longer there. Then the other disciple entered as well "and he believed!" (John 20:8). When Peter and the other disciple went away, Mary Magdalene remained in her sorrow and grief weeping uncontrollably. When she stooped to look into the tomb, there she saw two angels in white. They asked her: "Woman, why are you weeping?" She explained that someone had taken the body of her Lord. Then she turned around and saw a person who also asked: "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" She assumed that he was a gardener. But it was only when Jesus called her by name "Mary!" was she able to recognize him, and after receiving instructions she went to the disciples and proclaimed the GOOD NEWS: "I have seen the Lord!"

Dear Sisters and Brothers, we are called to enter the Tomb of Our Lord to see that it is empty, during this Easter time we are called to open our hearts, so to hear the voice of Our Risen Lord, who calls us by our name, so that, like Mary Magdalene, we can run to others and proclaim the Good News about the Risen Lord! If you have not already done so, embrace this blessed time of the Jubilee year as treasured time to personally encounter the Risen Christ. Let us enter a Jubilee church, make a good confession, receive the Holy Eucharist and go to others and tell them about this Paschal joy and hope! Share with them the hope that the Resurrection of Christ brings to all.

His Beatitude Patriarch Sviatoslav in his messages to us regarding the situation in Ukraine always reminds us that Ukraine is “standing, fighting and praying”. We need to stand strong in our faith, fight with the confidence of Christ in our midst, always praying to the God of mercy and love, to the God who left the Tomb and rose from the dead for our salvation. He is the Good News we are seeking. He is the Way, the Truth and the Light that fills us with hope and calls us into eternal life as children of our Heavenly Father. In him is our spiritual and earthly victory over the enemy that denies our existence and seeks to claim our land as his own.

We are indeed in a dark time and we are trying to see the light at the end of this long tunnel of war. We know that the defenders of Ukraine who have fallen or who have been wounded have not done so in vain. The light of their sacrifice enlightens our way to liberty as the light of their dedication and love of the volunteers, medics and chaplains, like the light of support and solidarity of all who help us carry our challenges towards the light of the Resurrection. The light is the Risen Lord, who shines from the Tomb. We must, therefore, look beyond the empty tomb and the linen cloths lying there, and recognize that we can only see Him standing in front of us when we are ready to emerge from the tomb. From the tomb of fear, disbelief and despair. And so, confident in the hope that is given us, let us bear witness to the triumph of life over death, of good over evil, of truth over falsehood. Let us proclaim to one and all: Christ is Risen! Truly He is Risen!

As we celebrate this Feast of all Feasts, we are united in the Pascha of our Lord with our sisters and brothers in Ukraine and throughout the world. Together we share the *hope* of the Good News proclaimed today, the *joy* of knowing that our Lord is with us always, and the *love* that we share for one another as children of the light and children of the day.

May the blessings of the Risen Lord be upon you and your loved ones as we embrace one another and proclaim: Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!

Given in London, Munich, Rome, Paris and Kyiv,
on the Akathist Saturday of the Great Fast, 5 April 2025

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