GREAT AND HOLY PASCHA (EASTER)
May 5

THE GOSPEL READING
John 1:1-17
[The Word is God]

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came for testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light.

The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not. He came to his own home, and his own people received him not. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father. (John bore witness to him, and cried, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, for he was before me.’”) And from his fullness have we all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.
THE SERMON

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, and everything was created through His Son — all things were made through Him, and nothing ever came to existence apart from Him. All things in heaven and on earth, whether visible and invisible, were created through the Son and for Him (Colossians 1:16). And He is before everything, and all things exist in Him (Colossians 1:17).

As the Lord created all things, He recreates everything by His Resurrection. God said, “Let there be light,” at the beginning of creation, and those words were spoken through His Son, Who is the Word. God, Who commanded the Light to shine forth from darkness, now expresses His glory in our hearts by the Resurrection of Christ. We can now come and receive the never-setting sun of divine Light — the eternal Day — as we glorify Christ, Who is Risen from the dead.

We chant today, “Arise and shine!” “Arise and shine, O new Jerusalem, for the glory of the Lord has risen upon you” (Isaiah 60:1). “Christ Is Risen from the dead, by death trampling down upon death, and to those in the tombs, He has granted life!” “O pure Mother of God, rejoice, celebrating the Resurrection of Christ your Son!” All of the Church’s hymns express the beauty and the joy of the New Creation, the new horizon that opens up for the world and our lives through the Resurrection of our Savior. There is always hope, and there is always joy since death and sorrow no longer exist in Christ. In whatever life circumstances we find ourselves, there can be a new beginning because “Christ is Risen!” and we belong to the Risen Christ.

Jesus was crucified and died and was buried on Friday, before the setting of the sun, which was the first of the three days in the grave. During the silent rest in the tomb on Saturday, the Sabbath of the Lord, Christ descended into the valley of the shadow of death. Not as One bound to it, but on the contrary, as the Triumphant One who conquers death and provides the way back from man’s expulsion from Paradise. Jesus Christ conquered and still conquers because He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Christ’s victory is famously conveyed by the Greek Christogram ICXC NIKA, which literally means “Jesus Christ Conquers.”

It was still dark in the early morning on Sunday, the third day. Jesus strips Hades of its power and resurrects humanity by His Resurrection. In the Church’s hymns for today, we proclaim, “Today a sacred Pascha has been revealed to us . . . Pascha of delight . . . With joy, let us embrace one another. Pascha, the ransom from sorrow! Today from the sepulcher, Christ emerged resplendently as from a bridal chamber.”

The Resurrection of our Lord is fundamental for Christians and makes our faith a living reality. The power that raised Christ from the dead is given to us with the ability to transform our hearts and lives and the world around us. It is not an ideology or a mere ethical and moral system. Our faith produces eternal life and establishes communion
between all believers and the living God. It is the path to Paradise, the entrance of the Kingdom, and the dawning of the Day that never ends.

Today, we come together with the joyous and triumphant declaration that the tomb is empty, and Christ is Risen! This is the foundation of our lives. This is the essence of our faith, hope, and love. His victory over sin and death is at the core of our life as Christians. Christ is unique – He is risen! No one else has ever risen from the dead by their own power and authority, never to die again. Only the Son of God, Who was born of the Virgin. His Resurrection confirms everything He taught — He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Nobody comes to the Father but through Him. He is God the Son. He is the Risen Son of God.

The Lord Jesus Christ took our human nature upon Himself to heal it, transfigure it, and deify it. Therefore, His life, death, and Resurrection affect us directly and personally. In His Incarnation, He took our flesh. He took our human nature and united it with His divine nature. In His life and death, our day-to-day lives and suffering are transformed and given eternal value.

His Resurrection is our Resurrection. The divine Light permeates our darkness and gives us the sure hope of a new life — the eternal life. The Day that never ends offers true guidance to each and every one of us. The Apostle Paul tells us that “we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so, we also should walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4).” Through the Resurrection, we become children of God.

Christ is called the “last Adam” (1 Corinthians 15:45). The “first Adam” turned from God and fell, thus bringing the consequences of sin to humankind. Jesus took upon Himself the sin of humanity on the Cross. He overcame the consequences of sin – man’s spiritual death – through His physical death. Through the Resurrection, Christ resurrected the first Adam and all those who put their faith in Him.

Humanity’s greatest plague was death. After the Fall, death was inescapable. Like Adam, we often miss the mark. Through repentance, however, Christ forgives our sins, and death no longer has power over us. We now live in grace and truth. His anguished cry on the Cross, “It is finished,” is our assurance that death is defeated because Christ is Risen, and Truly He is Risen.

Pascha is a new start for all of us, as the Lord renews all things. He says, “Behold, I make all things new (Revelation 21:5).” Therefore, we start the Liturgy on the eve of Pascha with the reading from St. John’s Gospel: “In the beginning.” Christ is the beginning and the new beginning of this world, as He is the Creator and the fulfillment of all God’s promises to save the world and reunite all of creation with Him.

In the Paschal sermon, Saint John Chrysostom cries out: “O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory? Christ is risen, and you are overthrown. Christ is risen, and the demons have fallen. Christ is risen, and angels rejoice. Christ is risen, and life rules. Christ is risen, and not one dead remains in the grave.” Sisters and brothers, let us open our hearts to God’s grace, to the freedom and love only He can provide. His Resurrection gives purpose to our lives, not just today, but every day. Each suffering and
every sorrow is an opportunity for resurrection and joy if we unite ourselves in faith to Christ. The Resurrected Lord is here with us, now and forever, and to the ages of ages. Amen.