



Orthodox Church in America
DIOCESE OF THE MIDWEST

PASCHAL MESSAGE OF HIS GRACE, BISHOP PAUL

Devout and God-loving people, enjoy this kind and bright festival. Wise people come and share joy with your Lord. You who have labored in fasting, receive your deserved reward. You who have labored from the first hour, come to the festival now! You who came at the third hour, rejoice! You who lingered until the sixth hour, celebrate! You who came at the ninth hour, do not be sad! You who managed to come only at the eleventh hour, do not be dismayed by your lateness. No one will be deprived of heavenly joy. For our Lord is generous. He welcomes those who come last in the same way as those who come first...

First and last, receive the reward! Wealthy and poor, rejoice with one another! Diligent and lazy, celebrate the festival! Those who have fasted and those who have not, be glad together...

Paschal Homily of St. John Chrysostom

Beloved Clergy, Laity, and Monastics of the Diocese of the Midwest;

These wonderful words of St. John have much to say about how we are to understand one another and ourselves in the Church as a parish, as a diocese, and beyond the diocese. As we celebrate the Pascha of our Lord, let us reflect upon them further in our daily lives as Orthodox Christians.

There are three things I would ask you to pray and reflect upon in the above text from Father John.

First, I remember something Fr. Paul Lazor used to say at St. Vladimir's Seminary during the Great Fast when I was a student there. "We set our table for our weaker brother." That meant there were some items put on the table to eat for people who couldn't keep the strict nature of the fast for various reasons. We were told to watch what we do and not others. What this taught me was our life in the Church is not to be one where we function as policemen who enforce the law and penalize others for breaking it. We hear the maximal teachings and commandments of our Lord and respond with a spirit of humility and repentance the best we can. We trust in the Lord's mercy to fulfill what is lacking in us. Most of us have grown up in this country, which has been formed and shaped by a reformed Christian tradition. Thus without realizing it we sometimes end up trying to recreate the Church in our own image and apply that man-made standard to the Church as it is. Thus we may end up trying

to reform the Church, which is not possible because it is the Church that saves us! So let us celebrate the Paschal season in our parishes with kindness and mercy, bearing one another's burdens, and to encourage one another in our pilgrimage to the "now and not yet" of his Kingdom.

Secondly, let us not become self-enclosed and isolated in our parish life. In our diocese there are a diversity of practices and ideas of how life should be conducted in the Midwest. Do you pray in "Thee" or "You", do we do Vespertal Liturgies, or Full Vigil/Great Vespers, and Liturgy on the day of the feast, do we have an open iconostasis with no curtain, or one that is walled with a curtain. Etc. There has been a long history of these practices in the diocese and we have to be careful not to dogmatize them. We need to take care not to minimize our relationships with our sister parishes in the Midwest and local parishes from other "jurisdictions" because they don't do things the way we do them in our parish. When we turn inward and isolate ourselves from others we run the risk of becoming prideful and delusional in our views. One small thing we can do would be to close our parish the day a nearby parish is celebrating their patronal feast and to attend there (of course this doesn't work on a Sunday). Support one another's parish activities and events.

The third thing for us to reflect upon is how as a local parish can we manifest an attitude of "peace and God's good will towards all men?" The whole focus of the gospel is the Good News of how our Lord Jesus Christ was crucified for our sins and rose from the dead so that there would be "no longer Jew or Greek, male or female." Christ is the new Adam risen from the dead so that by Grace we can experience and know the life of the New Adam in us. Thus we once again manifest the "very goodness" of Creation as was intended when God created the heavens and the earth. It is this Paschal message of God's peace and good will towards men that has changed the world and is still doing so. Let us then celebrate this Paschal season first and foremost by letting the Feast of all Feasts change us!

Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!

With love in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Paul". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Paul
Bishop of Chicago and the Midwest

To be circulated among the faithful of the Diocese.