



Orthodox Church in America  
DIOCESE OF THE MIDWEST

**PASCHAL MESSAGE OF HIS GRACE, BISHOP PAUL**  
**April 8, 2018**

To all venerable clergy, monastics and laity of the Diocese of the Midwest,

During the time of the Great Fast, I hope for an “Aha!” moment where by the grace of God I might be allowed to catch a brief glimpse of what the Great Mystery of Pascha is all about. This year it came via these verses of Genesis read on the 6<sup>th</sup> Wednesday of Lent:

*Then Joseph could not restrain himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, “Make everyone go out from me!” So no one stood with him while Joseph made himself known to his brothers. And he wept aloud, and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard it. Then Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph; does my father still live?” But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed in his presence. And Joseph said to his brothers, “Please come near to me.” So they came near. Then he said: “I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. **But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. For these two years the famine has been in the land, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance.**” Genesis 45:1-7*

The whole story of Joseph is an indication of what is to come. Joseph is a type that points us to Christ. This encounter with Joseph and his brothers is a hint pointing us to the upper room where Christ institutes the New Covenant in the breaking of the bread; it points us to the upper room behind closed doors where the Crucified Risen Lord reveals Himself to the Disciples. Joseph in inviting his brothers to draw near to him is a hint of Christ inviting Thomas to draw near to Him to touch His side and marks on His hands; indicating God incarnate, Who was crucified, is risen from the dead. Finally Joseph’s words that God sent him to save their lives by a “great deliverance” is a hint at the “great deliverance” our Lord brought to us by His Death and Resurrection!

As a child I always enjoyed the connect-the-dots coloring books involving various animals, people, shapes and sizes. The outline describes a form to show what it should look like; but it is not the real thing. Just as the law of the Old Covenant outlines

a form of what it means to be human being in communion with God, so the New Covenant fulfills the form of the Old Covenant in the person of God incarnate, our Lord Jesus Christ. His death on the Cross is the fulfillment of what it means to love the Lord God with all that we have and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

But Jesus even takes a step further when He invites his followers to “*love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends*” (John 15:12-13). In Christ, God’s love for us is no longer an abstraction, but a living saving reality! That is why we call Pascha the Feasts of feasts. It is so because our Lord’s voluntary, self emptying, and life-creating death on the Cross is the pathway to follow that leads us from death to life, and to gain back what we once lost. This is beautifully expressed in words read from St. Paul on Holy Saturday:

*Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. 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. We know that our old self was crucified with Him so that the sinful body might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For he who has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him. Romans 6:3-8*

May we all come to find ourselves once again in this life-changing, life-saving Pascha of our Lord.

**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