



Orthodox Church in America
DIOCESE OF THE MIDWEST

2019 PASCHAL MESSAGE OF HIS GRACE, BISHOP PAUL

Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I am laying in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation: 'He who believes will not be in haste.'" (Isaiah 28:16)

Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the scriptures: 'The very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?'" (Matthew 21:42)

As we celebrate the three-day Pascha our Lord, these words from Isaiah and Matthew have been on my mind during Lent. The following words of St. Cyril of Alexandria have further helped me to clarify some words I wish to share with you.

For the Savior, although He was a chosen stone, was rejected by those who whose duty it was to build up the synagogue of the Jews in everything that was edifying; and yet He became the head of the corner. Now the sacred Scripture compares to a corner the gathering together, or joining of two people, Israel I mean, and the Gentiles, in sameness of sentiment and faith. For the Savior has built the two people into one new man, by making peace and reconciling the two in one body to the Father (Ephesians 2:15). And the so doing resembles a corner, which unites two walls, and, so to speak, binds them together. And this very corner, or gathering together of the two people into one and the same, the blessed David wondered at and said... This—that is the corner—was the Lord's doing, it is marvelous in our eyes (Psalm 118:22). (St. Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke).

The precious cornerstone is the Cross of our Lord. Our Lord Jesus Christ unites in Himself two people into one, creating a new man. He is that new Man Himself, the new Adam risen from the dead; "the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Corinthians 15:20).

How important it is for us to understand that this cornerstone is the way to uniting ourselves in the bond of love and joining together the dualities that exist even in our Orthodox parishes today. There seems to be an increasing tension among our parishes over issues on sexual morality, sanctify of life issues, fears for safety (and how are we to address it) issues of how to deal with immigrants and refugees. But as a bishop once said, "if we start with issues and not Christ, we won't get anywhere."

Let us encourage one another to enter into this relationship with the “new Man” Who has united two people into one. Let the Newly-Risen Lord be our guide to navigating the challenging waters of life in this world we live in. Who is the God-Man? What does He tell us about ourselves and who we are? What can He tell us about what it means to be male and female? What can He tell us about what it means to be stewards over the world we live in? What can He tell us about what it means to be in the world but not of the world? What can He tell us about how to live in the world, especially when we find ourselves at odds with that same world we live in? What is to be our witness?

Let us not attempt to address any of the above “issues” in isolation from this cornerstone; once we do, we will only become a “party” or a “faction” and we will be no good to anyone. Let us remember that we are called to be the “salt of the earth” in Christ. If we lose that, we will have nothing to offer this world. Let us seek to promote a spirit of good will and mutual understanding in our parishes. Let us not be so quick to judge. We have Good News to share: Christ is risen from the dead!

I wish you all a glorious, joyful celebration of our Lord’s Pascha. May we come to more deeply know the Eternal Well-Spring of Life, leaving us forever quenched in our thirst for Him. May we come to realize that “He has given all things to us” and that we need nothing else.

Christ is Risen! Truly He is Risen!



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To be circulated or read among all parishes in the Diocese.