



Orthodox Church in America
DIOCESE OF THE MIDWEST

Thursday, 2 May 2024
Great and Holy Thursday
№. 80

ARCHPASTORAL GREETINGS OF
THE MOST REVEREND DANIEL
ARCHBISHOP OF CHICAGO AND THE MIDWEST

ON THE BRIGHT AND JOYOUS FEAST OF PASCHA - 5 MAY 2024

**Beloved Clergy, Monastics, and Faithful of the God-protected
Diocese of Chicago and the Midwest:**

CHRIST IS RISEN!

In the darkness of the night between Holy Saturday and Pascha, our diocesan communities, joined by family, friends, and guests, will perform an ancient ritual as we process around our temples in imitation of the faithful Myrrhbearing Women. In the darkness of night, they made their way to the Lord's tomb. They had just witnessed the horrible events of the past week in which their Lord and Master had been betrayed, unjustly accused, brutally beaten and crucified, and whose sacred body was then placed in a borrowed tomb.

As they began their journey to the tomb, the morning was yet to dawn and the darkness of the night still covered them, as if to accentuate the darkness of their profound grief and sorrow. Indeed, their tears of the past days still flow freely; they were filled with grief, overwhelmed by everything that they had witnessed. Their grief is intensified by their fear and worry. What will they encounter when they come to the tomb? Will the soldiers standing guard harass or arrest them? Will the religious authorities be there to mock and deride them? They are also concerned about how they will roll the massive stone away from the tomb so that they may enter in order to give their Lord a proper burial. Their steps are made slower by the heavy sacks of spices and the jars of myrrh and oil that they carry with them. And they say among themselves, "Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?" (Mark 16:3).

As these ever-faithful women disciples walked the path to the tomb, their hearts were grieved and their minds troubled by the additional challenge of the heavy tombstone. In that moment, the stone was, for them, the symbol and the reality of the end of Jesus' life and mission. He was buried, locked in darkness behind a huge stone—and so were their hopes. The One who came into the world to save sinners and had proclaimed mercy and love for all peoples, had met with no mercy. He who relieved sinners of the burden of their sin and condemnation, had been condemned to bear the weight of the cross. Their Lord and Master, who had freed the woman caught in adultery from the horrific death by stoning, now lay behind that great stone, His body

constrained in a shroud. The weight of that stone, an overwhelming obstacle, weighed heavily upon the hearts of these faithful women. Not only did it block access to the body of their Master, it also represented the end of their dreams and hopes, the future life promised them by their Master. However, their grief and their worries were lifted from them as they completed their journey of mercy and service and arrived at the tomb, for “...they looked up, and they saw that the stone had been rolled away, for it was very large” (Mark 16:4).

My dear Daughters and Sons, sometimes we find ourselves heavily burdened and feel the same weight upon our hearts that was felt by the Holy Women Disciples. Sometimes, the weight of life’s burdens stifles our lives and extinguishes our hope. Sometimes, we are weighed down by fears and regrets, as well as our own pridefulness and stubbornness. All of us encounter the weight and burden of the tombstones which rob us of enthusiasm and energy and the fullness of life. We experience this in the loss of our loved ones and friends, in the daily fears and failures that hold us back from accomplishing the good we hope to do, from our own sense of inability or unworthiness. We encounter this burden in the weight of self-absorption that deadens our desire to express genuine hope and love. When we experience these and so many other types of difficulty and challenge in life, like the women at the tomb, we ask ourselves “who will roll the stone away from the tomb?”

In those early morning hours, the Holy Myrrhbearers, carrying that heavy weight in their hearts in the darkest moment of their lives, taught us an amazing lesson, for when they saw that the stone had been moved away, they entered the tomb. “And entering the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him. But go, tell His disciples—and Peter—that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you” (Mark 16:5-7).

In that moment, they realized that the darkness which had enshrouded them had now turned into light. They learned that death had destroyed death and restored life. Just as they had during the Lord’s public ministry, they now witnessed the revelation of God’s mighty power, the triumph of light over darkness and of life over death. They had wondered Who will roll the stone away? And they learned that it is the Lord God who rolled away that stone forever. Even now, as we gather to celebrate the Lord’s victory over sin and death, He lifts the stones that burden our hearts so that hope may be born within us once again. Therefore, like the holy women, let us also “look up” to Him.

Beloved Ones, Our Lord Jesus Christ is our Passover, our Pascha. He is the One who transforms the darkness of the world into light and raises us up from the darkness of sin and death and lifts us with Himself into the radiance of His kingdom. As we celebrate this Pascha let us raise our eyes, “looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2). Let us fix our eyes on the Risen Lord, the One who brings us from darkness into light, from death to life. Let us set our gaze upon the God of Life- then no weight will burden us, no stone will hold back the joy of life in Christ, no tomb will enclose us within the arms of despair. Let us lift our eyes to the Risen Savior and ask that the power of His victorious resurrection may roll away any of the stones that hold us down or keep us back. Let us

lift our eyes to Him, the Lord and Giver of Life, and let us press forward with the assurance that the eternal life which He won for us is already present among us.

Beloved Brothers and Sisters, I extend my loving and heartfelt greetings on this bright and glorious feast. May all of us, unburdened by sin and sorrow, rejoice in the Light and Life which has been given to us by the Crucified and Risen Savior. Be assured of my prayers for you and all your loved ones as we celebrate the joy of this great Day of Victory as well as throughout the coming Forty Days.

With love in the Risen Lord,

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

DANIEL
Archbishop of Chicago and the Midwest