



**Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy of Toronto and Eastern Canada
Українська Католицька Єпархія Торонта й Східної Канади**

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**2020 PASTORAL LETTER
OF THE UKRAINIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF CANADA
ON THE OCCASION
OF THE FEAST OF THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD**

To the Very Reverend Clergy, Monastics and Religious Sisters and Brothers, Seminarians and Laity of the Ukrainian Catholic Church in Canada:

Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Lord – ***Christ is Risen! Христос Воскрес!***

How difficult it is during the darkness of the COVID 19 pandemic, with closed churches and empty streets, to respond with enthusiasm to this greeting of joy – ***Indeed, He is Risen! Воістину Воскрес!*** Rather, we might feel urged to chant the words from the psalm the Church sings on the Sundays preceding Great Lent: ***“By the rivers of Babylon there we sat and wept, remembering Zion. ... How could we sing the song of the Lord on alien soil?” [Ps. 136:1, 4]***

This period of turmoil, however, is not new to the followers of Jesus Christ. Throughout its history the Church has known times of natural disasters, severe restrictions and persecutions. Many members of our Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church today still recall the years of underground existence during the Soviet period in Ukraine. Especially during the years from 1945 through to 1989 churches were locked and the faithful were forbidden to practice their faith and sing: ***Christ is Risen!***

For many in Ukraine during those years the main source of spiritual life came from the Vatican Radio broadcasts where the Divine Liturgy was celebrated every Sunday and religious programs were transmitted daily from Rome. In homes throughout Ukraine a radio was placed on the kitchen table and the family gathered around to pray and sing quietly, united with those in the free world. Many of the clergy, religious sisters and seminarians living in Rome during those years took part in these broadcasts, doing what they could to uphold the faith of the people throughout Ukraine, including as well those in far off Siberia.

One of the central prayers of the Resurrection Matins celebrated on Easter Sunday is entitled: ***Plottiu*** – literally, “In the flesh”. The solemn melody begins low and slowly rises. It accompanies the following words: ***“You have fallen asleep in the flesh as a mortal man, O King and Lord, but on the third day You arose again.”*** The melody continues to rise with the words: ***“You have raised Adam from his corruption and made Death powerless.”*** Then the melody reaches its culmination with high notes proclaiming: ***“You are the Pasch of incorruption. You are the salvation of the world.”***

This troparion has been sung for centuries every year at Easter: during times of persecution, during times of natural disasters, and during times of peace and harmony. Our brothers and sisters in Ukraine sang it over and over again during the years of underground church life. And we too can sing this hymn during this time of pandemic, even when our spirits may be weak and fragile.

The hymn *Plottiu* speaks to us of the human nature of Jesus Christ, by which he was subject to death - his tragic death on the cross. He was buried and some mourned his passing. In solidarity with humanity Jesus took upon himself the human body to share the hardships and trials that we must endure, even to the point of death.

The narrative of Jesus would be a sad story indeed, if it were not for the power of the Father's love for him, raising Jesus from the depths of the kingdom of Death. This is the truth of the Resurrection. This is the true joy of Easter. This is what we are called upon to celebrate in whatever way we can during this time of darkness and gloom. COVID-19 is a material evil of this finite world. Its time will pass. It is no match to the power of the love of our eternal God, revealed in the Resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ!

Dear Beloved!

Whether we pray in glorious churches or in our humble homes – **Christ is Risen!** Whether we hear beautiful choirs or a voice crying in the wilderness – **Christ is Risen!** Whether we partake of a sumptuous Easter basket overflowing with food, or a simple sandwich and a glass of water – **Christ is Risen!**

We share the Good News of spiritual hope and joy that the Resurrection of the Lord offers to all humanity: with the lonely and the shut-ins, with the discouraged and depressed, with those without employment and with those having inadequate housing. We share the Good News of spiritual hope and joy in the Resurrection especially with all those affected by the COVID-19 pandemic: with those afflicted by the virus, with the health care workers who endanger their lives helping others, with those providing essential community services, with those who have passed on to eternal life and with all those who mourn their passing.

May you find hope and support in the Resurrection of the Lord, and the spiritual strength to proclaim: **Christ is Risen! Indeed, He is Risen! Христос Воскрес! Воістину Воскрес!**

Sincerely Yours in the Risen Lord!

+ Lawrence Huculak, OSBM, Metropolitan Archbishop of Winnipeg
+ David Motiuk, Eparchial Bishop of Edmonton, Administrator of New Westminster
+ Bryan Bayda, CSsR, Eparchial Bishop of Saskatoon, Administrator of Toronto
+ Michael Wiwchar, CSsR, Bishop Emeritus of Saskatoon
+ Severian Yakymyshyn, OSBM, Bishop Emeritus of New Westminster
+ Stephen Chmilar, Bishop Emeritus of Toronto