

PASCHAL ENCYCLICAL

of

His Eminence, Metropolitan Ephraim of Boston

My beloved Orthodox Christians,

Christ Is Risen!

It has always been my custom—as you can all verify from my past encyclicals and sermons—to present to you not my own personal thoughts or opinions, but the inspired words of the Saints of our Church, the Lives of the Saints, and the divine hymnology. That way, should anyone disagree with what I am writing or saying, I am in a position to tell them: “Your argument is not with me; your argument is with the Saints. I am only the messenger.”

Such is the case also in this encyclical. I will have the Saints present us with their own words, because what they have to tell us is, as always, edifying and enlightening to us all. And, as the years go by, I am always astonished at how much the Saints have to teach us.

What, then, do the Saints say to us on this radiant Paschal feast day, when our Saviour has triumphed over death?

They tell us that, in His ministry of preaching about life everlasting, our Saviour had many assistants. We know from the holy Gospels that the preaching of St. John the Baptist preceded and, for a time, overlapped that of our Saviour’s ministry. Then, after the Baptist’s death at the hands of Herod, our Saviour continued His own work of spreading the Gospel. Further, we know that our Saviour commissioned and sent forth the Apostles, both the Twelve and the Seventy, to continue the work of spreading the Word of God far and wide.

This much we all know from the sacred history given to us by the Four Evangelists.

What many of us may be unaware of is that this holy assembly of sacred heralds continued their work for an indefinite period.

For example, this is what the holy Hieromartyr Hippolytus (c. 235–239), who was a disciple of St. Irenaeus of Lyons (✠202), tells us about the work of St. John the Baptist.

After this, at the Jordan [River], seeing the Saviour with his own eyes, [St. John] points Him out and says, “Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world!” [The Baptist] also first preached to those in Hades, becoming a forerunner there when he was put to death by Herod, that there too he might intimate that the Saviour would descend to ransom the souls of the saints from the hand of death.

(*On Christ and the Antichrist*, chap. 45)

This particular teaching is well known, because we hear the same sentiments in the holy services for August 29th, the Beheading of the Forerunner.

Concerning our Saviour’s Resurrection and Descent into Hades, St. Irenaeus of Lyons, a disciple of St. Polycarp of Smyrna (✠163), who was, in turn, a pupil of St. John the Evangelist, tells us in his work *Against Heresies*:

It was not merely for those who believed in Him in the time of Tiberius Caesar that Christ came, nor did [God the] Father exercise His providence for the men only who are now alive [in the third century after Christ], but for all men altogether, who from the beginning, according to their capacity, in their generation have both feared and loved God, and practiced justice and piety towards their neighbors, and have earnestly desired to see Christ, and to hear His voice. Wherefore He shall, at His Second Coming, first rouse from their sleep all persons of this description, and shall raise them up, as well as the rest who shall be judged, and give them a place in His Kingdom.

(Bk. IV, chap. 22, para. 2)

There is yet another valuable text on the Resurrection that has reached us from Christianity’s earliest days. It is entitled, *The Shepherd of Hermas* (c. 160). After the Holy Scriptures, it was one of the most popular books among the Christians of the second, third, and fourth centuries. Indeed, Eusebius the Church Historian tells

us that it was read publicly in the Churches. It was a work well-known to St. Irenaeus of Lyons, who considered it divinely-inspired.

In the *Shepherd of Hermas*, we are told that, “After falling asleep in the power and faith of the Son of God, the Apostles preached the Name of the Son of God to those that had died.” That is to say, the Apostles “quickenened” these souls and provided that they also should “know the Name of the Son of God” (Bk. III, Similitude 9, chap. 16).

Although the holy Apostles were initially terrified by the crucifixion and death of their Master, yet, after they saw Him risen from the dead, they became fearless in the presence of death. Hence, they went forth throughout the whole known world and became courageous heralds of the Resurrection. This ministry of the Apostles, the *Shepherd of Hermas* tells us, like the preaching of the holy Forerunner, continued even after the Disciples of Christ reposed.

Consequently, our Saviour, both before and after His Resurrection, was assisted in His ministry of teaching by a whole assembly and cohort of these heralds of God’s promise of life everlasting.

From this, my beloved, we see how profitable it is to study the writings of these ancient and sacred texts. “Search the Scriptures, for in them ye have life everlasting” indeed.

On this radiant day of our Saviour’s triumph over Hades, let us hold these teachings to our hearts and, exult in the fact that we bear the Name of the risen Son of God, as “the Shepherd” instructs us. May God have mercy, and in the Resurrection find us worthy of that Name!

Christ is risen! Truly He is risen!

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Your fervent supplicant to God,
✠ Ephraim, Metropolitan