

EASTER HOMILY
STS. V & O CATHEDRAL, WINNIPEG

1 MAY 2016

Metropolitan Lawrence

Christ is Risen!

Dearly Beloved in Christ!

Thirty years ago, in Denver Colorado, a Ukrainian man received a letter from his family in Ukraine. The letter gave him the shocking news that his brother had died. No reason for the death was given. But the letter said he was buried in a place where he will lie for eternity.

It was only later that the man understood that his brother had been killed in the nuclear explosion that occurred in Chornobyl. Having died from major exposure to radiation, he was quickly buried on the site under huge amounts of cement, never to see daylight again. The authorities wanted by whatever means possible to hide the results of human incompetence. Although it was true that the deceased would never see earthly light again, the effects of Chornobyl could never be buried from sight. Now, thirty years later, the tragedy of Chornobyl is known throughout the world, and likely will be to the end of time.

Today we repeat with joy the announcement of Christ's followers: Christ is Risen from the dead. He has overcome death by his own death. He now gives life to all those buried in their graves. The icon that expresses this truth so well is called the Descent into Hades. It shows Jesus, alive, pulling up Adam and Eve from the darkness of the kingdom of death called Hades, and with them all those who had died and awaited his resurrection.

We find reference to this scene in various prayers of our Resurrection Matins. Here is one such prayer: ***When those bound by chains in the realm of Death saw your boundless mercy, O Christ, they hastened to the light with joy, praising the eternal Pasch.*** [Ode 5]

In recent times humankind has made much progress in the knowledge of our world and even beyond into the universe. We understand better how life is created in the womb and we constantly discover more about

sickness and death. And as humanity grows in worldly knowledge, it lessens its appreciation for the role of Almighty God, the one and only creator and origin of life. But even as human beings take on more and more control over life and death, the one thing they cannot do is create life from nothing and provide life for eternity.

Today we celebrate the One who does just that. Easter is the celebration of true and eternal life that only a merciful and loving God can give. It was only by the power of God's love for his Son Jesus, that He was able to give life back to Jesus in the grave. No human love, no matter how great it may be, can ever give life back to those lying in the grave. We work together with God to create new life in the womb, and we are called to cooperate with God when He calls back to himself life from this earth. But we can never think to replace God by rejecting human life through abortion, or by ending human life through euthanasia and suicide.

The tragedy of Chornobyl is the tragedy of human pride. It leads only to failed human plans and eternity in the grave. We celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus not only every year, but also every day, as a reminder for us of God's great mercy and love, which He offers to each one of us. To live is not easy and to die is not easy. But to love is also not easy. However, when we know of God's great and all-powerful love for us, we can accept the hardships on this earthly journey.

In the joy of the resurrection and the divine promise of true and everlasting life I greet you this Easter morning.

I greet our brothers and sisters in Ukraine, especially those suffering the hardships of war and deprivation. I greet those suffering the physical and mental effects of the Chornobyl disaster. I greet those in this country and this province and this city who are sick and alone, who suffer poverty and prejudice, and who are confused by the direction of our courts and government in guiding our way of life.

To you all I repeat the words of hope given in our Resurrection Matins: ***It is the day of resurrection, O people, let us be enlightened by it. The Passover is the Lord's Passover, since Christ, our God, has brought us from death to life and from earth to heaven. Therefore, we sing the hymn of victory!*** [Ode 1]