**2017 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:

“Pascha is approaching - the defeat of sin and the end of death, Easter is coming, and with it a new life and rebirth. This is why St. Paul says: '...the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.  The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.' (Rom. 13: 11-12). May that light of Easter embrace our souls, not as a fleeting moment of happiness, but as rebirth and life granted by the power of God.”

(Confessor of Faith Patriarch Joseph)

Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We greet you all in the joy that is Easter, a joy that is so profound and existential, that it permeates our very being as Christians. For we, the community of children of God, through the mystery of Baptism have been indelibly signed by the death and resurrection of our Lord. And even though we live this life here on earth for as many days and years as is granted us by the grace of God, we are already reborn to eternal life through our Lord Jesus.

An awareness of living in time and space, but already being part of eternity, is what distinguishes the martyrs, confessors, venerables and saints of every category and walk of life: already being “there” even as we are here, tasting the Kingdom of God in this life, while at the same time awaiting its fulfillment. And so today as we proclaim: “Christ is risen! Indeed He is risen” we are also proclaiming that Jesus is alive and we are alive in Him.

In this spirit of paschal celebration it is providential that this year we are celebrating the 125th anniversary of the birth of our noble Confessor of Faith Patriarch Joseph Slipyj, a priest and scholar, educator and Rector, Bishop and Metropolitan, prisoner and exile, Patriarch and symbol for the Ukrainian people. Father Joseph Slipyj accepted the call of the Church to serve as bishop in particularly difficult and challenging times, as war was breaking out in 1939. In his Memoirs he described his doubts and hesitation: “it is not an honor or merit but first of all a hard burden.” (Spomyny-Memoirs, page 136). But Father Slipyj was reassured by another man of profound faith, Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky, who had great confidence in his choice for successor. Arrested by the Soviets in 1945 only six months after becoming the Metropolitan-Primate of our Church, he never lost faith in the Risen Lord nor did he falter as chief shepherd of the Crucified Church in the underground, never doubting that her moment of resurrection would come. And even when he was released after 18 years of imprisonment, and exiled to the West at the age of 71, he never forgot his responsibilities towards his wounded and persecuted flock behind the Iron Curtain, while at the same time bringing new life and energy to the Church in the diaspora, calling for the creation of a Synod of Bishops of our entire Church, united in one Patriarchate. His broad vision and tireless work certainly bore fruit in his lifetime. But he would not witness the greatest fruit of his labors, that is, the rebirth of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church in Ukraine, which would begin in earnest a mere five years after his death in Rome in 1984.

For the last 25 years our Church in Ukraine has been able to proclaim freely and openly “Christ is Risen!” and in the present situation of invasion and war our proclamation must resound even louder. If Patriarch Joseph’s life has taught us anything, it is that we reach the stars through hardship, which was the message of his episcopal motto (“Per aspera ad astra”). Here in Canada we too have hardships, possibly of a different nature, though no less challenging. We live in a society where godlessness seems to be the norm and where the sanctity of human life seems to be under an even greater threat than in Ukraine. His Beatitude Sviatoslav recently stated that he worries more about our priests and laity here, than about those on the front line. The challenges and hardships we may have faced during our Lenten journey pale in comparison to the challenges our faith faces each and every day, as we and our children are bombarded by values that run counter to the teaching of the Gospel. Now is the time to surrender these challenges and hardships to the Risen Lord. We need not forget or deny them, but with trusting hearts let every part of our being be risen, revived and brought to life in Christ.

This year also marks 150th anniversary of the Confederation of Canada. As Canadians we enjoy many blessings and freedoms not found elsewhere in the world, but as a society we seem to increasingly believe that we are the creators of our own good fortune. We continue to sing “God keep our land glorious and free,” but do we really mean it? The Feast of the Resurrection is a wonderful time for us as Canadians and Christians to remember that our Heavenly Father is the “source of every perfect gift coming down from above,” the greatest of which is our life in the Risen Christ, and that we are called to bear witness to this before our fellow citizens in word and action. As Patriarch Josyf reminded us in the words of Saint Paul, we must “put on the armour of light” which protects us from the works of darkness and evil. By our own lives through the power of Resurrection we can make a difference in our world. By every thought, word, and deed let us witness to the Resurrection in the 21st century. For this is the calling we received from Jesus, “let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16)

*“Christ is risen from the dead, trampling death by death, and to those in the tombs giving life!”* May Christ who dwells in our hearts, our families and in our vibrant parishes, give life to all. On this Feast of the Resurrection of Our Lord, we pray that God’s love fills your heart and, through you, the hearts of all.

Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!

Sincerely Yours in Christ,

+ Lawrence Huculak, OSBM, Metropolitan Archbishop of Winnipeg

+ Michael Wiwchar, CSsR, Bishop Emeritus of Saskatoon

+ Severian Yakymyshyn OSBM, Bishop Emeritus of New Westminster

+ David Motiuk, Eparchial Bishop of Edmonton

+ Stephen Chmilar, Eparchial Bishop of Toronto

+ Ken Nowakowski, Eparchial Bishop of New Westminster

+ Bryan Bayda, CSsR, Eparchial Bishop of Saskatoon