

PASCHAL ENCYCLICAL
of His Eminence
Metropolitan Ephraim of Boston

My beloved Orthodox Christians,

Christ is Risen! Truly, He is Risen!

The holy Gospel of Saint John records how, on one occasion, when our Saviour went up to Jerusalem at the time of the Passover, He drove from the Temple the money-changers and those who were selling oxen, sheep and doves. Offended at His actions, the Jews said to Christ: "What sign do you show us, since you are doing these things?" In effect, they were asking, "By what authority are you doing this?" Our Saviour answered, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews, thinking that He was speaking about the temple built by Herod, were incredulous: "It took forty-six years to build this Temple, and you will raise it up in three days?"

But as the Gospel narrative observes, "Christ was speaking about the temple of His body." And the Gospel account continues, "When, therefore, He was risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them, and they believed the Scripture, and the word which Jesus had said" (John 2:13-22).

The sign that the Jews were requesting was indeed provided by our Saviour to many witnesses when, as He had predicted, He arose from the dead and

- 1) appeared to Mary Magdalene and the other Myrrh-bearing women (Matthew 28:9);
- 2) when He appeared to the eleven as they were eating (Mark 16:14);
- 3) when He appeared to two of the disciples on the way to Emmaus (Mark 16:12-13; Luke 24:13-35);
- 4) when He appeared to the disciples where they were gathered for fear of the Jews, and the Apostle Thomas was not present (Luke 24:36-53; John 20: 19-23);
- 5) when He appeared again eight days later to the disciples, and Thomas was present among them on this occasion (John 20:26-29);
- 6) when He appeared to the disciples "at the mountain where Jesus had appointed them" (Matthew 28:16);
- 7) when He appeared to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, where Peter and the others were fishing (John 21:1).

As the Acts of the Apostles records: "To them He showed Himself alive after His Passion by many infallible proofs, being seen by them for forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God, and being assembled together with them..." (Acts 1:3-11).

Furthermore, in his first epistle to the Corinthians, Saint Paul writes:

I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the scriptures; and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the Twelve. After that, He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain unto the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the Apostles.

(I Corinthians 15:3-7)

These hundreds were not the only witnesses to our Saviour's Passion, Crucifixion and Resurrection from the dead. There are the millions upon millions of holy martyrs throughout the centuries who bore witness to our Saviour's Resurrection; for the word "martyr" is derived from the Greek word *martys*, which means "witness".

For example, we have the holy martyrs who were slain by the Muslims on the Greek island of Mytilene in the middle of the 15th century. Though the innocent victims had been cruelly slain by their ruthless tormentors five hundred years before, they began appearing to many villagers in the 1960s, both while the latter were awake and also in their dreams. In many visions and apparitions, they revealed countless details concerning the torments and the deaths they had endured, as well as descriptions and visions of how the entire area had appeared five centuries before. They showed the villagers where to dig in order to find the skeletal remains of their own bodies. As Photios Kontoglou, who wrote the account about these new martyrs, observes: "Those who still await and fear death speak face to face with those who no longer fear it; and they speak about how they were tormented and slain as though they were talking about others, and not themselves."

In one remarkable revelation, the martyrs appeared to the villagers and told them, "If you dig here" (and they indicated the spot), "you will find the Light of the world." What could this enigmatic message possibly mean? The villagers were in doubt. Nonetheless, in obedience to the Saints who had appeared to them, the villagers hired workers to begin the excavation at the site indicated by the Saints. After the laborers had dug for a short time, they began to protest. The soil, they said, was as hard as baked brick; it had never been touched before, it was like rock, it was useless and a waste of time to break their backs searching hopelessly for only God knows what. On their part, the villagers insisted: "Look, we are paying you to do this. If there is nothing here, it will be our loss, not yours." With much grumbling, the laborers continued digging slowly into the rock-like soil. After much time, when they had managed to dig only a few feet into the ground, one of the workers threw a shovelful of hard clods out of the pit. One of the large clods broke as it struck the earth, and something in it glittered in the sunlight. Immediately, one of the

villagers ran and picked up the clod to examine it. As he cleaned away the earth that was encrusted on the shining object, he saw that it was a coin - an old Byzantine coin. In fact, it was a Byzantine coin from the 15th century - the very period when the martyrs who were appearing to them had lived. As he finished cleaning the earth away from the coin, he saw that it bore an image of Christ our Saviour, and in His hand our Saviour was holding an open Gospel. On the Gospel, in small but crystal-clear letters, were inscribed the words, "I am the Light of the world."

Behold, my beloved Orthodox Christians, this is why I wrote above that there are millions of witnesses and many "infallible proofs" that bear witness to the "sign" that the Jews asked of our Saviour, and which He provided to them and to all mankind down through the ages: In three days indeed, Christ, the Light of the world, appeared out of the depths of the earth when He raised up the temple of His body, thereby trampling down death and granting us the victory and life everlasting.

Christ is risen! Truly, He is risen!

Your fervent suppliant unto God,

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