

THE HOLY ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF BOSTON
His Eminence, Metropolitan Ephraim of Boston

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

My beloved Orthodox Christians:

Christ is risen!

In one hymn that is chanted every Sunday Matins before the Fiftieth Psalm, we hear the words, "For, behold, through the Cross, joy hath come to the whole world." This is a very odd expression, indeed, especially when one considers that the English word "excruciating" — which means "extreme torture, intense pain, unbearable anguish" — comes from two Latin words: *ex*, meaning "from", and *crucem*, meaning "the cross".

The cross was a means of execution devised by the ancient Romans that assured that the unfortunate person who was put to death by this means had an unbearably painful, very prolonged, disgraceful and public death.

And yet, the above-mentioned Church hymn tells us: "Behold, through the Cross, joy hath come to the whole world"!

Indeed, there would have been no joy whatsoever if everything had ended with the crucifixion. If we were concerned about the end of our earthly existence only, death by the cross would have been a very tragic and pointless end.

I remember an incident that took place several years ago at our monastery in Brookline. A young Greek mother belonging to the new calendar jurisdiction came to purchase some icons. As she was preparing to leave, she asked me some questions about the Christian life, and among other things, she asked, "Isn't the purpose of our life here to be happy?" I answered, "The purpose of our life here is to be saved. Whether or not we're happy in this life is something that is often out of our control. It is not entirely within our control if we lose our eyesight, or have a stroke or a heart attack, or become ill with some sort of cancer. And it is certainly entirely out of our control if we are born with a defect, or that we age and grow feeble and forgetful! Or even that we die in a tragic accident while we are in the full bloom of youth."

In his sermon on the Holy Innocents who were slain by Herod at the time of the birth of Christ, Saint John Chrysostom asks: For what purpose were these infants born? Only to be slaughtered unjustly in their infancy? Is this why God created them? And, in any case, what was their crime? What evil had they committed that they should be killed so soon after their birth? From this we should learn, says Saint John, and we should have it engraved indelibly on our hearts so that we might remember it in all such incidents as these: *There is no evil in this world, save sin*. Neither sickness, nor poverty, nor loss of wealth or position, nor death itself. For a Christian, all these things can be turned to our spiritual advantage, just as Christ conquered death by death and gave us the Resurrection.

Only sin can separate us from God eternally, and thus bring us unhappiness. If we understand this, then we have gained eternal life and blessedness. All the afflictions or injustices that we suffered in life will be forgotten.

If we have united our hearts, souls and bodies to Christ through our baptism, through our life and words, through Holy Confession and the Holy Communion of the Body and Blood of the incarnate God, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, my beloved, then we can have good hopes that we will be saved, and, by extension, we will also be happy unto eternity. United with Christ, we will have trampled upon death itself by His death, and will share in His resurrection.

In the seventh ode of the Paschal Canon, we chant:

The only blest and most glorious God of our Fathers...is become man, and as a mortal doth suffer, and through suffering doth clothe mortality with the grace of incorruption.

This is how joy has come to the world through the Cross. This is how, through afflictions and sickness and grief, we gain salvation, and the ultimate happiness of eternal life in Christ. This is how, like the Holy Innocents, through suffering injustice and by the avoidance of sin, we conquer death by death, and rise again in blessedness.

All this has been brought to pass by our Saviour's joyous and triumphant Resurrection. This is how joy came to the whole world through the Cross of our Saviour. My beloved Orthodox Christians: Christ is risen! Truly He is risen!

Your fervent supplicant unto God,

✠Ephraim, Metropolitan of Boston

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