PASCHAL EPISTLE OF ST. JOHN MAXIMOVITCH, 1940

St. John Maximovitch

Pascha, 1940, Shanghai. A large Russian diaspora, forced to leave behind their homeland; many had lost their dear ones, and everything they owned, and now lived in want, in a foreign land. But God gave them a saintly bishop to comfort them, and keep them in remembrance of the grace and strength of Holy Orthodoxy.

A member of St. John's Shanghai flock, Nicholas Feodorovich Tsepitov, of Revda, Russia, preserved this Pascal Epistle all his life, even after his return to the Soviet Union in 1947. It gave him comfort there also, where more trials awaited him. He gave this epistle for publication to the Fund for the Canonization of St. John Maximovitch in Russia, and we present it here, in English translation, as a comfort to all.

Christ is Risen!

Let us arise in the deep dawn,
And instead of myrrh offer a hymn to the Lord.

St. John Maximovitch

We forestall the rising of the sun, and hasten in the depth of night to meet the Sun of Righteousness.

The present night is not an ordinary night! Brighter than day, it fills our souls with light!

The rays of the Sun of the world illumine us and the whole universe, enlightening all who come to His light.

The warmth poured out through His rays penetrates all our members, filling our souls with deep peace, even healing our bodily illnesses.

This warmth melts away our sorrows, and our passions are burned away as by fire.

Enmity and hatred disappear from us, we forget our bitterness, and we do not feel our impoverishment.

The whole world becomes different in this holy and only night!

All nature is changed, and everything is filled with warmth and light.

Just as birds of prey hide at the rising of the sun, and wild beasts disappear into their dens, so does evil flee from every heart illumined today by the Light which radiates from the tomb.

Like the morning dew, now are our tears dried away!

As blossoms unfold at the onset of day, enlivened by the sun's rays, so do virtues return to us as the Sun rises upon us this morning.

Let us strive to be wholly illuminated by this wondrous light!

When spring comes, we open all the windows and doors of our homes, that the warmth may enter and dry the dankness within.

Now the Divine Light can also enter; but it cannot shine within souls that have closed themselves, and do not want to be illumined by that Light.

Let us open our souls and hearts! Let us hasten with the myrrh-bearers, *let us come bearing our lamps to Christ, Who has come forth from the tomb!*

Even if you are burdened by sins, do not turn away; for today even *those in the bonds of hell hasten to the Light with joyful feet.*

Even if you are poor and haven't the means to buy candles and myrrh, do not turn away. Let our hearts and souls burn in place of candles. There is no impoverishment in the world!

In these past days, we were all called to bring our material offerings and bodily ascetic labors as myrrh.

Now we all are called to partake of spiritual joy. *This is the day which the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it!*

Instead of myrrh and material offerings, *let us bring a hymn to the Lord.* Let us sing the praise of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, God!

Let us open now the doors and windows of our souls and hearts, that they might be warmed by the rays of the Sun of Righteousness!

From the outermost border of heaven is His going forth, and His goal is unto the outermost part of heaven, and there shall no man hide himself from His heat (Ps. 18:6). *Now all things are filled with light: heaven and earth and the nether regions* (Ode 3 of the Paschal Canon). Only we are impenetrable if we do not want Him!

If you do not feel this radiant joy today, seek the reason within yourself only.

It would be insane for a man to claim that the sun does not exist, only because he does not see it from within his tightly closed and shuttered dwelling. Pitiable is the blind man who keeps telling everyone that there is no such thing as light, only because he does not see it! It would look very foolish for a man to insist that spring has not come, only because no warmth has penetrated into his locked cellar!

We praise the gentle light, the holy glory of the immortal Heavenly Father—the Resurrected Lord, crying out to Him from the depth of our souls, MEET IT IS FOR THEE AT ALL TIMES TO BE HYMNED!

Then the light of Christ that enlightens all will enlighten even us, and we shall behold Christ the Sun of Righteousness, Who shines upon all life!

Christ is Risen!

The Bright Resurrection of Christ,

+ JOHN, Bishop of Shanghai,

1940, Shanghai
Translated by Nun Cornelia (Rees)
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