

## **Easter Epistle of the Serbian Orthodox Church**

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### **SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH TO ITS SPIRITUAL CHILDREN ON EASTER 2026 OF THE YEAR**

#### **PORPHYRIJA**

Orthodox Archbishop of Peć, Metropolitan of Belgrade-Karlovci and Patriarch of Serbia, with all the hierarchs of the Serbian Orthodox Church - to the clergy, monasticism and all the sons and daughters of our holy Church: grace, mercy and peace from God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, with the joyful Easter greeting:

#### **CHRIST IS RISEN!**

The Word of God, the Gospel of Christ, the spiritual treasury of the Church of God, from which the seeds of eternal life are sown in our hearts by the right hand of the Lord, is full of the truths hidden in God. These are not abstract ideas but words that are fulfilled in our lives. Among them are the words with which the Lord warns us of the times in which peace will be taken from the earth (Rev. 6:3-4), when we will hear of wars and rumors of wars, for nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom (Matt. 24:6-7 and Luke 21:9-10).

These words, which sounded to many generations of our ancestors as a warning of future times and their announcement, are today the reality in which we live. We see unrest among nations, we hear rumors of wars and we are witnesses of wars, suffering and uncertainty in the world. While the sky is torn apart by the trails of death missiles, and the sounds of sirens announcing destruction and suffering echo in the ears of anxious humanity, from the depths of Christ's empty tomb, the voice of an angel, a witness to the Resurrection, is heard, who tells the myrrh-bearing women, and through them to all of us, as well as every human being: "Do not be afraid!" (Matt. 28:5). Fear is not driven away from us by the angel alone, but, before and more than him, by the One who abolished the fear of death, which is the essential reason for all fear. Having conquered death by death, the Risen God-man Christ also addresses us with the words: "Do not be afraid!" (Matt. 28:10). Thus encouraged, we know that the terrifying events of our days are not the last word of history, but a call to vigilance and fortitude in God.

What do today's signs of the times tell us? Although the empty tomb of Christ defeated the power of every tomb and showed that no tomb has the last word, in history and in our

reality there still exist living tombs filled with hatred, selfishness, passions and self-love. We recognize them in the dark hearts of people, in unlimited selfishness, in the media that spread untruth, in wars, in all our passions and sins against the love of God. These tombs, despite the Resurrection of Christ, constantly pervert and desecrate life itself as a priceless gift of God's love.

One of the most poignant examples of such a reality is the fact that the consequences of today's world crisis are unfortunately measured by cold economic indicators, the standards of the merchants of the earth (cf. Rev. 18:3), — by financial losses, disruptions and falls on the stock exchanges and markets, — while in the deep shadow of these calculations remain human tragedies: the death of innocents, the suffering of children and the misery of millions of people. It is precisely such a perspective, in which material gain is placed before human life, that has not only led to wars and injustices — it is also strengthened by them. This is a great defeat for us humans.

The world we live in is increasingly unstable, and man is increasingly fearful. Value systems are being systematically and forcibly changed, in the direction of anti-values. Promises and agreements that were solemnly signed are being brutally trampled on. The knowledge of such betrayals causes violence and ever-greater divisions among nations, while the political and cultural gap deepens. Spiritual uncertainty and loss of meaning flourish on the ruins of dying civilizations.

Why is the Risen Lord not recognized and seen in this general darkness? The answer to this question is already given in the Gospel itself. The Risen God-Man Christ could not be immediately recognized even by His disciples and immediate followers. Mary Magdalene saw Him by the empty Tomb, not knowing that it was the Lord Jesus Christ (John 20:14). She recognized Him after He addressed her by name: “Mary!” (John 20:16). Likewise, the apostles Luke and Cleopas did not recognize the Lord (Luke 24:16) on the road to Emmaus, but “in the breaking of bread” (Luke 24:35), when the Lord gave them communion.

The apostles did not recognize the risen Lord either while He was watching their unsuccessful fishing from the shore of the Sea of Tiberias (John 21:4). They recognized Him only after, obeying His command, they cast the net on the right side of the boat and caught a great many fish (John 21:6-7). They recognized Him in the miracle as a spiritual space in which the power of God and human faith meet and kiss.

The apostles did not recognize Him even in the Sunday meetings behind closed doors: once, frightened, they thought they saw a spirit (Luke 24:37), and another time, on the basis

of the wounds from the nails and spears, they believed in the reality of the Resurrection and His presence (John 20:27). The resurrected God-man Christ was among them, but they were unable to immediately recognize Him in the common human ways known to them until then. The mystery of non-recognition did not remain just an event from the distant past, related to the first days after the Savior's Resurrection; it is a reality that continues to this day.

In order for us to see and recognize the Risen Lord, ordinary human sight is not enough. A new, spiritual perception is necessary — a gift from above, a spiritual experience. In other words, it is necessary for us to enter into a relationship with Him so that He may grant us knowledge of Himself. Thus, the Lord finally opened the eyes of His disciples Luke and Cleopas and granted them spiritual sight so that they might know Him (Luke 24:31), and He opened the minds of the apostles gathered behind closed doors so that they might understand the prophecies of the Holy Scriptures (Luke 24:45) and what was to happen to the Lord.

The fact that the Risen Christ was not immediately recognized does not mean that He hid from people, but that He respected their freedom. In this way, He once again showed and confirmed what was given to man from the beginning: the freedom to choose God and to believe in and serve Him from that freedom. Christ did not impose the truth of the Resurrection on the human race, but placed it in the space of faith. What would have happened if the Risen Christ had appeared to Pilate, stood before the Sanhedrin, or appeared in the squares of Jerusalem? Then the good news of the Resurrection would have become a demonstration of power and might, and the truth itself would have been, in a certain way, imposed. Instead, the Lord appears to those who love Him and thereby establishes new ways of recognizing and accepting true life.

What are these ways and how can modern man experience this reality? Modern man experiences this reality primarily as a personal encounter with God, in which the Risen One addresses him by name, as He revealed Himself to Mary Magdalene. Without a personal prayerful and ascetic relationship, it is impossible to know or recognize God. He then experiences it as communion, communion, in the Eucharistic assembly, partaking of the body and blood of Christ at the Holy Liturgy. Man, like Luke and Cleopas, receives from the very hands of Christ — through the hands of the clergy — the Bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. And finally, he experiences it as obedience to the word of God and as an experience of miracles, like the apostles who understood at the Sea of Tiberias that everything in the Risen God-man is miraculous and salvific.

Miracles are not just unusual events or just great acts of God in history. The parting of the Red Sea was indeed a miracle. But it is also a miracle when we forgive and break the cycle of hatred. This is not just a moral demand or an abstract principle. It is a manifestation of the Resurrection and participation in its power and glory. Revenge is a crucifixion without resurrection, and unforgiveness and hatred are death and a forever sealed tomb. Therefore, the Resurrection is not just an event that belongs to the past, but a reality that we enter into every time we forgive, when we do not return blow for blow, and when we recognize our brother in the enemy. Then we choose life instead of death. Then the stone is also moved from our inner tomb.

We recognize the Lord in every human suffering, which, unfortunately, has an abundance, as well as in every poor, rejected, and despised person, encountering Him in them through active love. For the Risen Lord Jesus Christ said: "As you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me" (Matt. 25:40). This is precisely what shows that faith in the Resurrection is not just an inner conviction, but a force that shapes our relationship with our neighbors, with every person as an image of God.

Today, with special attention and care, we pray for our brothers and sisters in Kosovo and Metohija, the centuries-old historical source and spiritual center of the Serbian people, directly sharing with them all the trials and challenges they constantly face and strengthening them to persevere in their witness and to remain faithful to their Church, faith and themselves. At the same time, we remind everyone and everyone among us that it is not enough to love Kosovo and Metohija, just in words. That love must be translated into deeds, into concrete care for our neighbors, into brotherly acts of mercy, into care for children and all who need help. We must not allow the Serbs from Kosovo and Metohija to be presented in the consciousness of our people as an obstacle or hindrance to some future, supposedly better life. Without them, without our Serbs of Kosovo and Metohija, without the Serbs of Old Serbia, there is no better life for any of us. We are all one people and one Body in Christ, connected by the same faith and the same suffering, but also the same hope and the same glorification.

From such faith and such unity, dear spiritual children, let us enter into the joy of the Resurrection and say: "Having seen the Resurrection of Christ, let us worship the holy Lord Jesus, the only Sinless One," and with the Holy Apostle Paul let us exclaim: "O death, where is your sting? O hell, where is your victory?" (I Cor. 15:55). Comforted by the power and grace of this great and solemn Feast of Feasts, the new and holy Easter, the great and immaculate Easter, the mysterious Easter, the Easter that opened the doors of heaven to us, let us embrace one another and say even to those who hate us: Brothers! At the end,

which is also the beginning, let us sing in unison: Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death and granting life to those in the tombs.

We greet you all with an all-victorious and all-joyful greeting:

## **CHRIST IS RISEN!**

Given at the Serbian Patriarchate in Belgrade, on Easter 2026.

Your prayer books before the Risen Christ:

Archbishop of Peć, Metropolitan of Belgrade and Karlovac and Patriarch of Serbia  
PORPHYRIJE Archbishop of  
Sarajevo and Srebrenica and Metropolitan of Dabrowa Bosnia CHRISTOM Archbishop of  
Cetinje and Metropolitan  
of Montenegro and the Littoral JOANIKIJE Archbishop of Sirmium and Metropolitan of Srem  
VASILIJJE Archbishop and Metropolitan of Banja Luka EPHREM Archbishop and  
Metropolitan of Buda LUKIAN Archbishop of Vrsac and Metropolitan of Banat  
NIKANOR Archbishop of Novo Gračanica and Chicago and Metropolitan of the Midwest  
America LONGIN Archbishop of Toronto and Metropolitan of Canada  
MITROPHAN Archbishop of Novi Sad and Metropolitan of Bačka IRINEJ Archbishop of  
Stockholm and Metropolitan of Scandinavia DOSITEJ Archbishop and Metropolitan  
JUSTIN Archbishop and Metropolitan of Vranje PAHOMIJE Archbishop of Kragujevac and  
Metropolitan of Šumadija JOVAN Archbishop of Požarevac and Metropolitan of Braničevo  
IGNATIJE Archbishop and Metropolitan of Zvornik-Tuzla PHOTIJE Archbishop and  
Metropolitan of Milesevo ATHANASIJE Archbishop of Düsseldorf-Berlin and Metropolitan of  
Germany GRIGORIJE Archbishop and Metropolitan of Raska-Prizren  
THEODOSIJE Archbishop and Metropolitan of Kruševac DAVID Archbishop of Romuliana-  
Zaječar and Metropolitan of Timička HILARION Archbishop and Metropolitan of Niš  
ARSENIJE Archbishop of Sydney-Wellington and Metropolitan of Australia-New Zealand  
SILWAN Archbishop of Zadar-Šibenik and Metropolitan of Dalmatia NIKODIM Archbishop  
and Metropolitan of Budimlje-Nikšić METHODIJE Archbishop of Mostar-Trebinj and  
Metropolitan of Zahumlje-Herzegovina and Ston-Primorje DIMITRIJE Archbishop of Los  
Angeles and Western America MAXIM Archbishop of Gornja Karlovac GERASIJE Bishop of  
Washington-New York and Eastern America IRINEJE Bishop of Pakrac and Slavonia  
JOVAN Bishop of Switzerland ANDREJE Bishop of Bihać-Petrovica SERGIE Bishop of

Buenos Aires and South-Central America KIRILO Bishop of Osijek-Poland and Baranja  
CHERUVIJE Bishop of Valjevo HYSIKHIJE Bishop of Šabac HEROTEIJE Bishop of Paris and  
Western Europe JUSTIN Bishop of London and Great Britain-Ireland NEKTARIJE Bishop  
retired Zvornik-Tuzla VASILIJJE Bishop Emeritus of Canada GEORGIJE Bishop Emeritus of  
Central Europe KONSTANTIN Bishop Emeritus of Slavonia SAVA Bishop Emeritus of  
Milesevo FILARET Bishop Emeritus of Niš JOVAN Vicar Bishop of Remezia Stefan Vicar  
Bishop of Mohacs DAMASKIN