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A Pastoral Letter for Easter, Holy & Glorious Pascha, 2026.

*“If he were not flesh, then in whose hands and side did Thomas touch the marks of the nails?
And if he were not God, to whom did Thomas cry out ‘My Lord and my God’?”*

(St Ephraim the Syrian, 4th century)

Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Risen Lord,

Peace be with you.

If we were to propose ten individual sentences that have determined the course of human history, surely one would be from St Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, “If Christ be not risen from the dead, our preaching is useless and your faith worse than useless.” (1Cor 15:14)

Between AD 52 and AD 54, Paul was in Ephesus of Asia Minor; westward some 290 miles across the Aegean Sea, lay Corinth, the port city of central Greece. It was to the nascent Church at Corinth that Paul dispatched three letters, two of which have survived.

We do not know how or when Paul heard that doubts were being expressed and taught “by some (of you)” concerning the Resurrection (1Cor 15:12). However, in the first century, there was a proverb, already old, “Bad news travels fast and far.”

Undoubtedly there were significant factors that may have influenced some Corinthian Christians to move away from a literal understanding of the Resurrection of Jesus. Corinth was a Greek city, and Greek philosophers had no time for the resurrection of anyone; and Paul had already encountered the contempt of the educated Athenians. (See Acts 17:16-33)

Amongst the Jewish inhabitants of the City, there may well have been those inclined to the opinion of the Sadducees, no conscious afterlife and no general resurrection. In his second letter to Timothy, Paul mentions two individuals, probably Gnostics, Hymenaeus and Philetus who were teaching that the resurrection was actually the post-baptismal state all Christians experienced, hence, there would be no need for a resurrection at the Last Day. Paul compares this particular doctrinal aberration to “gangrene - γάγγραινα”! (2Tim 2:17) And we must also not forget that the Corinthians lived in the midst of a society that was inclined to an unstructured scepticism.

Moreover, running through the major movements of the times, there is a certain unease with the Resurrection. It is not even a hostility founded primarily in philosophy or theology; it is more an unease with the Risen Jesus Christ. After all, a Jesus of Nazareth, dead and buried, is no threat and certainly has no claim on anyone. However, a “pretend” Risen Jesus can be used to manipulate the crowd, hence the seals placed on the tomb and the guards watching it. The Greek sceptics preferred a dead Jesus permanently in the tomb; the Temple Jews wanted a “manageable Messiah”, buried and forgotten.

For the philosophers and the influencers of the first century a convenient Jesus was one who made no demands on individuals or on society. The pagan Greco-Romans, fascinated by the oriental mystery cults, would have tolerated Christianity, however, Jesus made demands on their hearts and minds that the old gods did not.

As I have noted elsewhere, the Greco-Roman world of the first century was not all that much different to our world; and I would suggest that one similarity is an unwillingness to accept the Risen Jesus Christ. The problem is not Jesus, the wandering rabbi or the philanthropist, but the Risen Jesus.

Although in free fall, the contemporary Judeo-Christian population is still sufficient to maintain a “cultural religion”. Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny have slowly but surely usurped the scriptural narratives of the Nativity and Paschaltide; so much so that some local shopping centres have been known to call Easter Sunday, Egg Hunt Sunday!

However, the slow but relentless morphing of Holy and Glorious Pascha into the Christless Easter did not occur *in vacuo*. We have allowed ourselves to become enchanted by Beatrix Potter rabbits and mesmerised by foil-wrapped chocolate eggs. We have all been complicit, we have not resisted the slow creep of the new godless “religion”. In Australia last year, some 700 million dollars were spent on Easter chocolate treats!

Research presently available indicates that some 47% of Australian Catholics believe in the Resurrection of Jesus, which means that some 53% do not believe or are uncertain what they believe or just don’t know what to believe! This means that significant portions of the Catholic Community in Australia are of the same ilk as the Corinthians to whom Paul wrote, “If Christ be not risen from the dead, our preaching is useless and your faith worse than useless.”

Given the weakness of our fallen humanity, it is almost as if we find the crucified Jesus a cause of some anxiety; for undergoing this unspeakably horrendous death, perhaps he will ask something of us; and that “something” is a change of heart. For many the Jesus who calls us to the partake of the Last and Mystical Supper is easier to follow than the Lord who puts cross-carrying on us as a condition of discipleship. (Mt 16:24-25)

Today, it seems that many Christians, and not just the unchurched, are content with, or even prefer, a lamb-cuddling Jesus, but are not comfortable with the Risen and Glorified Christ of the Apocalypse, “I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! I hold the keys of death and Hades.” (Rev 1:18)

The zeitgeist, the spirit of our times, favours a levelling of religious differences. A Jesus who is acceptable to the worshippers of everything and of nothing is not the Jesus Christ of the Gospels, “Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters”. (Mt 12:30)

On Holy Cross Sunday, the third Sunday of Lent, the Church reminds us that we cannot have the golden and bejewelled Cross without also accepting the rough wooden Cross of suffering. On Easter Sunday morning, with the first witnesses, we are confronted with an empty tomb; we encounter the only One ever risen-not-to-die-again; and at last we understand why the death of Jesus is called “Life-Giving”.

This Easter, as we consider the many blessings we enjoy in these Southern Lands, fraternal charity rightly demands of us both prayer and financial assistance for the Household of the Faith which is in great need and much danger in the Middle East.

This Glorious Pascha, this Blessed Paschaltide, let us resolve to put aside all that is easy and alluring that comes between us and the “faith once delivered to the Saints” (Jude 1:3). Let us commit ourselves unequivocally to the authentic Lord Jesus Christ, who was Crucified, who died and who was buried, but who is also the One Risen in Glory, “the Beginning and the First Born from amongst the Dead”. (Col 1:18)

Dear Brothers and Sisters may this Holy and Glorious Pascha, the Feast of Feasts, be for each of you, your families and all those dear to you, a time of peace and joy, certainty and unfailing hope.

Christ is Risen! قام المسيح ! Χριστός ἀνέστη!

With my paternal blessing and with prayers assured,

✠ Robert Rabbat, DD
From our Eparchy at Greenacre, New South Wales
Holy and Glorious Pascha, 2026.