



Orthodox Church in America
DIOCESE OF THE MIDWEST

PASCHAL MESSAGE OF HIS GRACE, BISHOP PAUL
May 1, 2016

Beloved Clergy, Laity, and Monastics of the Diocese of the Midwest,

Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!

Something strange is happening—there is a great silence on earth today, a great silence and stillness. The whole earth keeps silence because the King is asleep. The earth trembled and is still because God has fallen asleep in the flesh and He has raised up all who have slept ever since the world began. God has died in the flesh and Hell trembles with fear. He has gone to search for our first parent, as for a lost sheep. Greatly desiring to visit those who live in darkness and in the shadow of death, He has gone to free from sorrow the captives Adam and Eve, He Who is both God and the Son of Eve. The Lord approached them bearing the Cross, the weapon that had won Him the victory.

St. Epiphanius of Cyprus

These wonderful words from St. Epiphanius on the Death and Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ make mention of a “great silence and stillness.” Because “God has fallen asleep in the flesh.” As we celebrate the Pascha of our Lord this year, it would be good to reflect on the mystery of silence, and how it leads us to salvation, and how it can lead us down the wrong path. When God the Word is silent in having fallen asleep He is still mystically freeing those held captive by the power of death. He does so by approaching them with the Cross, “the weapon that had won Him the victory.

How important it is to encounter this Divine Silence. But how can we encounter it when the idea of being still and silent ourselves scares us to the point that we need to stay busy to avoid the inner noise of our lives? We avoid because as long as we do, we never have to encounter the restlessness and anxieties in life that plague us. This stops us from hearing God’s silence. We will never enter into real communion with God by prayer unless we first hear this silence. The silence will lead us on a pathway of crying out to Him all the more and will mold the virtue of perseverance in us. We should not be afraid of this Divine Silence, because it was the Silence of the Tomb that liberated all held captive by death, which was a consequence of sin in our life.

Yet there is another kind of silence that leads to condemnation, and that can be best termed as the silence of inaction towards others. During the course of Holy Week, at Tuesday’s Presanctified Liturgy, we heard this in the Gospel of Matthew:

*“Then He will say to those at his left hand, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave Me no food, I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome Me, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.’ Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see Thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to Thee?’ Then He will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to Me.’” **Matthew 25:41-45***

Those mentioned in this gospel are not condemned because of the common sins we may hear about in life. They are condemned for their failure to act, the silence of inaction. They failed to see Christ suffering in the needs of the people God daily brought into their lives, whether they were family, friend, neighbor, stranger, or enemy. We were reminded of the following at Bridegroom Matins of Holy Tuesday:

You have heard the condemnation, O soul, of the man who hid his talent. Do not hide the Word of God! Proclaim His wonders, that, increasing the gift of grace, you may enter into the joy of your Lord!

Now that the Divine Silence of the Tomb has raised us from death, let us no longer be paralyzed by the silence of our inaction. We have been baptized into Christ and put on Christ, the celebration of our Pascha on this day as well. As Basil the Great states in his Liturgy, “Thou hast given us all things!” Let us be empowered to share this gift with others in word and in deed; grounded in the love of Christ that calls upon us to love one another as He has loved us. Let us not hide the talent God has given us. Let us use that talent that we may glorify our Father in Heaven through His Only-Begotten Son Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Christ is Risen!

With love in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Paul". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Paul
Bishop of Chicago and the Midwest

To be circulated among the faithful of the Diocese.