

The Easter Message 2011
Of His Beatitude Bechara Peter RAI
Patriarch of Antioch and the Whole East

**“But now Christ has been raised from the dead,
the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep”**
(1Cor. 15: 20)

1. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from among the dead opened, in the history of humanity, a new page that will never be turned over. For, it has changed the face of Man and the face of the World. Christ, the Son of God, who redeemed the whole humanity by his death on the cross, rose from the dead so that we obtain the fruits of redemption, which is the pardon of sins and the new life in the Holy Spirit. His resurrection has become a state of resurrection which he opened before every believer in the mystery of his death and resurrection. This made the Apostle Paul assure that “Christ has in fact been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of all who have fallen asleep” (1Cor.15: 20).

2. I am glad, at the start of my patriarchal service to address the first Easter message to the Bishops of our Maronite Church, its priests, monks, nuns and all its sons and daughters living in Lebanon, the countries of the East and throughout the world. I include in it the greeting of love, my apostolic blessing, communion with all of them and best wishes for the glorious Easter. I also present these greetings to our beloved brothers of the various churches, to our dear Moslem co-citizens and all others throughout all countries. I wish to all to enjoy the peace descending from God and carrying all the graces of Heaven and its spiritual and worldly blessings.

3. “Christ has in fact been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of all who have fallen asleep”. The resurrection of Christ is not a past event which can be overlooked, be indifferent towards it or ignore it with all its dimensions and meanings. The resurrection of the Lord is a guaranty of the human nature of the human being for, he recovers the beauty of his human nature which is created to God’s image and adorned by innocence. The blood of Christ, which has been shed on the cross, has cleaned Man from sins and offenses by forgiveness and blew in him a new life through the Holy Spirit, by the force of his resurrection. Here is the Lord, raised from the dead, continuing, through the sacerdotal service in the Church, what he had done the day of his resurrection, when he entered the closed place where his disciples, priests of the New Testament, were meeting that Sunday evening. He showed them his hands with on them the traces of crucifixion and his side with the trace of the spearhead. All these show the source of the forgiveness flowing from his wounds throughout the times. He said to them “ Peace be with you ... as the Father has sent me, so I send you ” he breathed on them and said to them: “receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them and whose sins are retained are retained” (Jn 20: 19 – 23). It’s an act of a new creation. On the creation of the first Man, God blew in him life from his spirit, Man was created to God’s image and was in a state of innocence. After having distorted this picture and lost innocence by his sins and evil doings, God created him anew blowing into him the Holy Spirit, thanks to the blood of redemption which incarnate God shed on the cross of salvation. Thus, Christ, risen from the dead with the brightness of human nature, is the first-fruits of those who rise to a new Man.

4. The manifestations of the resurrection show in human life in many ways: in the sinners who renew themselves by repentance and reconciliation, the grieved who find solace in God’s mercy, the suffering, oppressed and prisoners who become open to Divine hope, the sick, handicapped and neglected who see in their suffering as extension of Christ’s redemptive sufferings. All these obtain by their merits God’s graces, his contentment and his peace to the whole world.

Among the manifestations of the resurrection are reconciliations which take place among people, the fraternal encounters, understanding and dialogue, the initiatives of social love and self denial in giving, to

alleviate pain, deliver from need, relieve from despair, sow joy in hearts, develop the human person and raise society.

From among the manifestations of the resurrection, are also the saints the Church raised upon the altars as witnesses of the resurrection which has embellished them by the resurrection of hearts in their historic life, adorned them with the heroism of divine, human and ethical virtues which raised them, following their death, to the glory of Heaven around the throne of the Lamb. There they are shining like the sun in the kingdom of the Father and the heaven of the Church. We mention among them in our present time, successively the martyrs, blessed Masabki brothers, the saints Sharbel, Neemtallah and Rafka, the blessed Father Yacoub Haddad the Capucin, Mother Mary Alphonsine and Brother Stephan Neemeh, the two honored Patriarch Stephan Doueihy and Father Bechara Abou Mrad. Besides, the Universal Church is preparing to celebrate, in a week's time, the beatification of the great Pope John Paul II.

5. We look forward to the manifestations of resurrection in our national life, hoping that Lebanon rises, thanks to the good will, from the crisis of forming the government, the worsening situation which the citizens have to bear its economic, social and living difficulties, and from the bleeding of emigration and the despair of our rising generations to have a better future. We also wish that the dawn of the resurrection of peace, stability and understanding break forth in the Holy Land and the Arab countries which are suffering from troubles.

O Christ, the risen from among the dead, You who are the first-fruits of those who died, raise us with you for a new life. Raise our minds to the light of faith! Raise our will to the way of good in hope! Raise our hearts to communion and love! Make us among the first-fruits of those who rose from the dead.

Christ rose from the dead, he indeed did!

Bkerkeh, 22 April 2011.

+ BECHARA BUTROUS RAI
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