

# PASCHAL ENCYCLICAL 2017

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THEODOROS II

BY THE GRACE OF GOD POPE AND PATRIARCH OF ALEXANDRIA AND ALL AFRICA

TO THE PLENITUDE OF OUR APOSTOLIC AND PATRIARCHAL THRONE

GRACE AND MERCY FROM OUR RISEN LORD AND GOD AND SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST

*“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”* (Matthew 28:20)

My dear brothers and sisters,

With these words, with this hopeful promise, the Son of God completed His salvific mission on earth. He who left heavens and came to earth to offer us salvation. He who became poor for us. He who ascended the Cross and suffered for us. He who was buried for us. He who was resurrected for us, and the death, which He endured, became the harbinger of deathlessness.

However, this conclusion was not only verbal, nor was it simply historic. On the contrary this conclusion was dynamic and timeless. The Church became the agent of this timeless dynamic of His Resurrection. Not as an entrenched religion, but as the Body of Christ, as an open community of sinful people seeking salvation; people who accept the call of Christ: *“Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest”* (Matthew 11:28).

The Church eventually came to be the living proof of how much the Risen Lord loves us. Because one can have doubts about anything, but not about God’s love. But what is it that keeps us away from the House of the Father? What is it that does not allow us to return to the Father who loves us and is waiting for us? Is it perhaps our excessive confidence in our own strengths? Or is it perhaps the impression that our errors are so great that they exceed God’s love?

Whatever the answer is, the distance that separates us from God, reveals lack of faith. This is due to the fact that hope and love bring us in communion with God, only when based on true faith. Hope and love illumine the path of return to God, only when we are ready to confess, as Peter did: *“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”* (Matthew 16:16). Only when faith is not simply a source of boasting, but becomes an inexhaustible source of good practice.

Nowadays, unfortunately, we may have reached the heights of knowledge, but we have ended up illiterate in faith. We may have excelled technologically, but we have ended up theologically ignorant. We have set aside the revealed word of God and have believed new gospels, from the fields of science, philosophy or politics. We have denied God and have believed that we do not need Him, in order to define our existence. We have forgotten the true faith and have surrendered to the heresy of our times: the exaltation of our ego, of power and of wealth.

And now that we regretfully find that our world is dominated by the irrationality of our strongest fellow people, we are seeking to find a way to salvation. And now that we have become illiterate in God’s love, we are looking to find the strength to say: *“I will arise and go to my father”*(Luke 15:18). However, our personal resurrection is impossible without the renewal of our faith. Our evangelical illiteracy can only be healed through our experiential learning of the word of God.

My dear brothers and sisters,

21 centuries after the Resurrection of the God-Man and the spreading of the Gospel to the nations, mankind has yet again become hopelessly distanced from God's will. The only safe compass for return to our paternal home, is our re-evangelization to faith. To faith, not only as a matter of the mind, but essentially, as an experience of the heart. To faith, not as confessing an idea, but as confessing the person of Christ, who is the Way, the Truth, the Life. To faith, as mission, as a duty of conveying Christ's Gospel to the ends of the earth.

This is what we are doing in Africa, because, as John Chrysostom said, there is nothing more cold-hearted than a Christian who does not care for the salvation of others (P.G. 60,162). This mission may be huge and the workers may be few, but our hearts are warmed by the hopeful promise of the Lord that "*the gates of hell shall not prevail against*" the Church (Matthew 16:18). This hopeful promise of the Lord is what transforms missionary work into a mission of love that transcends death. Exactly as our Lord overcame death with His Resurrection.

Christ is Risen!

† THEODOROS II

**Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa**

In the Great City

of Alexandria

Holy Pascha 2017