

Christ is Risen!

Truly He is Risen!

Gospel: John 1:1-17 AV. *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me. And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.*

"And the light shineth in darkness;
and the darkness comprehended it not"

When we hear the Gospel Passage for the feast of Pascha, we often ask ourselves where is the mention or the meaning of Pascha in this passage?

All the hymns, however, tells us about the joy of some new event that occurred, and a new dawn and a new beginning that has shone on us. So "Come let us drink a beverage new..." The week following Pascha is called the Bright week, because it has something new that the Christians ought to acquire and experience. What is this newness being talked about? What is the meaning of this feast?

The Gospel passage unveils a secret: " The light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not" (John 1:5). This is the greatness of light in the Gospel of St. John. The light is reality, true existence, but the darkness is nonexistence, nothingness, because it is the absence of light. The glory of light then disperses the darkness and overcomes it.

The passage reminds us of the battle of darkness and the victory of the light. This light in the language of John is life, "And the life was the light of men" (John 1:4). The passage here reminds us of the victory of death over life, the annihilation of death and the overflowing of life, and the trampling down of death by the death and Resurrection of Christ.

One of the hymns says: "Early in the morning let us arise and bring to the Master a hymn instead of myrrh, beholding Christ who is the Sun of righteousness granting life for all." This then is the Gospel of the victory of life, that is the Gospel of the Resurrection. Christianity is not just a religion but rather an overflowing of life. In other words, it is the religion of

life. Our God is the God of the living and not of the dead. What life are we taking about here? If someone asks us about the meaning of life, we would have discovered that several of us have different opinions about this matter.

For some life came by coincidence, an accidental phenomenon, or a some kind of an unknown cosmic blind force. For some, the life of mankind does not mean more than staying healthy or living longer.

For other people, life is dynamism and motion, and everything that has renewal. Renewal is the stamp of life. Everything is renewed, but its essence remains. For them Man stays alive through his progeny and by all the inventions that he leaves behind... He leaves his works and his name... As if life is what one leaves behind, and not what he takes with him?!!

Others still, facing the painful and shameful reality of death, consider themselves existentialists. They repeat the words of the Epicureans, in a modern way, saying, "Eat, drink, and, be merry for tomorrow we die." For them, life is fulfilled by self-indulgence unto the satiation of the desires. In the best cases, they may think of life as romantic, that is the love of money, literature and the arts.

The reality of death, however, makes bitter all these conceptions, making them appear as solutions that do not save man, but rather anaesthetize him, as if man has at the end to just surrender to annihilation and death.

According to the resurrection of Christ, Christianity alone has revealed to us the truthfulness of the eternal life. The death and Resurrection of Christ has shown that life extends even after the death of the body.

Among Christians themselves however, there are three lines of thought. The first emphasizes the beauty of eternity. When this line of thought compares this present life with eternity, it shows how painful, vain and absurd the present is, and how glorious eternity is. Very often we read Christian articles and books that talks about how low and temporal the present is. It says that this present life ends but the future life will last forever, and mankind pays the value of this future life during his present earthly life. Our present life then is understood as the atonement of our sins and to pay for our entrance to the Kingdom. That's why the Christian needs to rush to humanitarian works and charitable and social organizations for all these are works of atonement, or "certificates of absolution."

The second line of thought is not very different from the first one regarding its view of the present life compared to the future eternity. The only difference is that the people in that line of thought believe that the entrance to the Kingdom is a free gift, and it is by faith alone and not works that we gain the eternal life. Just believe and you will be saved. For the present life 's aim is to spread the faith in Jesus Christ and to preach by word.

All these are conceptions of life, but ours is different.

All these explanations are pictures of life, sometimes right and sometimes wrong, but in any case they are not the life that we read in the HolyScriptures, especially in the Gospel of St. John.

An existentialist philosopher once said that faith in a future life is the biggest deception and crime in life

itself. We agree with his reaction, which can be justified for he ignores the life that he defends.

Life as defined by the Gospel is the light that came into the world. It is the Word that became flesh and this Word is God. Put simply, life is the acceptance of this light. The passage is clear in saying that light overcomes darkness, and the light was rejected by His own. Light is stronger than darkness,, but the light does not impose Himself on the human will. Life is stronger than death, but it is in the freedom of mankind. To draw from the light our life, to participate in the light, and even to live in and for the light is LIFE. To have a personal experience with Jesus is LIFE. If one does not have this personal experience with Christ, then all the institutions and charitable organizations, all the faith and progeny, all the healthy living will not help. To proclaim with the Apostle Paul " nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal.2:20), "The Lord is my life, my light, and my salvation."

Life then does not start after death. Life starts from the time we accept in us the Light. Eternal life starts from Baptism, and not from Burial.

"The future life" becomes the present. If we do not experience the divine longing and its consuming fire, we will not be in fellowship with Christ in this present life, and will not know Him in the future life either! It is "life" to experience the warmth of the divine presence every day of our lives. St. Seraphim of Sarov defines the life in Christ as the acquisition fo the Holy Spirit. St. Silouan the Athonite prayed fervently to God, saying, "Make everyone know Thee O Lord," that is to make everyone live in you.

Therefore, if Christ did not rise, our faith is futile. If Christ did not rise, what light will make me burn? How will I be able to experience life? In this way we understand the words of Saint Seraphim:

"My joy, Christ is Risen!
Truly He is Risen!"