

“Post-Pascha Swoon” or “Revived by Joy”? *By Fr.*

Steven Kostoff

I began this morning with a question on my mind: Is there life after Pascha? This, in turn, led to a series of further related questions: Is there meaningful ecclesial/Church life following the Paschal celebration of only little more than a few days ago? Is it possible to retain any of the vibrancy and joy of commemorating, participating, and experiencing the Resurrection of Christ? Can we continue to maintain our ecclesial lives beyond the level of perfunctory attendance once we have passed through Great Lent, Holy Week and Pascha?

Humanly speaking, these may be unrealistic expectations for the following reasons:

- Most everyone is still overcoming a certain level of exhaustion, that is not merely physical. I think at times that Bright Week may have to be downgraded to Recovery Week!
- Clearly everyone is back to normal time and routines – work, school, etc. – that may have been temporarily interrupted during Holy Week and Pascha. “Life goes on,” according to a limp cliché, and we may still be catching up with some unfinished business.
- Does our surrounding culture influence us by treating Pascha as a “one and done” affair—meaning that when we wake up on Bright Monday, are we already “moving on?”

However, that does not mean that our parishes have to empty out and become tomb-like immediately after Pascha, apart from Sunday’s Liturgy. The inevitable “summer slowdown” need not begin before we have even completed Bright Week. The Resurrection of Christ is meant to be enlivening, not deadening! The “swoon theory” is a hopelessly absurd idea meant to explain away the Resurrection of Christ. Yet, how many of the faithful experience a “post-Paschal swoon” from which they need to awaken before the entire Season comes to a close. If such is the case, then what does this say of the over-all impact of the Paschal Season?

Perhaps we need to probe just what each and every one of us means by the term “Pascha.” It is the Greek form of the Hebrew word for Passover. Pascha, therefore, is

- the Christian Passover/passage from death to life in and through the Death and Resurrection of Christ.
- the commemoration and actualization of these saving events, realized through the Church’s liturgical services, and succinctly expressed as “Christ is Risen!”
- the transformation of suffering into joy, revealing the true meaning of the Cross as salvific. the supreme gift of the renewal of life and the restoration of communion with God.

- the “death of death.”
- the foretaste of our own resurrection from the dead into the eternal light of God’s Kingdom.
- the event that established the Church in the world until the end of time.
- the “Feast of Feasts” and focal point of our community’s shared life together.

The exuberance of our Paschal celebration during the “night brighter than the day” is the festal expression of the Church’s deepest truth. The light, color, music and movement are all manifestations of the Paschal joy that sweeps through the Church as we proclaim that Christ is Risen! Hopefully, it is also the expression of our own faith in the Risen Lord.

However, for some Pascha may be reduced to something other than what it truly is, or it takes on a life of its own, detached and independent from what was outlined above. This is probably true for once-a-year visitors to the church – “Easter” Orthodox Christians – but this can also tempt us. Such reductions may include

- approaching Pascha primarily in ethnic, cultural or social terms.
- over-emphasis on the externals—dress, Pascha basket, roasted lamb, family traditions, etc.
- nostalgic or sentimental evocation of one’s past.
- a “fun experience”—I have actually heard this before—thus using a term better suited to a trip to the amusement park than for the “Feast of Feasts.”

Perhaps we could say that the above is more a description of Pascha popularly understood, rather than Pascha as revealed in the Church. Again, when these approaches are detached from the deeper meaning of Pascha, then the inevitable occurs quite naturally—Pascha is reduced to a once-a-year special event that is over and done with the moment one’s exhausted head hits the pillow some time early in the morning. It is forgotten before all of the Easter eggs – real and chocolate – are consumed. And then the search for the next potentially exciting event begins.

The Risen Christ appeared to His disciples for forty days following His Resurrection. He did not depart from them into Heaven immediately. We can assume that the disciples remained “excited” (to use an inadequate word) for that entire period – and beyond. We have a forty-day Paschal Season in the Church for this reason. As the disciples rejoiced in the Lord’s presence, the same possibility is before us as we too rejoice in the Lord’s presence, since it is the Lord who promised to be with us “until the end of the world.” The Risen Lord is as present among us today as He was when He appeared to the eleven disciples behind “closed doors” for the first time and, then again, eight days later, as recounted by Saint John in his Gospel [20:19-29]. Everyone, beginning

Con’t on Page 10

with the clergy, probably suffers from the “post-Paschal blues” to some extent. We must rely on our faith and trust that our Lord Jesus Christ has been bodily raised from the dead, the “first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep” [1 Corinthians 15:20], in order to revive us to the joy of this unique season in which we continuously affirm that “If Christ has not been raised, [our] faith is futile and [we] are still in [our] sins .. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep” [1 Corinthians 15:17,20].

Holy Resurrection Church, Palatine, IL to host Uganda Children’s Fund founders

Archpriest Alexander Kuchta and the faithful of Holy Resurrection Church invite Chicago-area faithful to attend a presentation by Peter and Sharon Georges of the Saint Nicholas Uganda Children’s Fund after the 10:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy on Sunday, May 22, 2016. The church is located at 1449 North Quentin, Palatine, IL.

“We hope that area faithful will join us as Peter and Sharon share their experiences from over 13 years serving in Uganda while providing a colorful and inspiring update on the Children’s Fund’s current work,” said Father Alexander. “The Fund sponsors ministry to AIDS orphans and other vulnerable children in the slums of Kampala, Uganda.”

Peter and Sharon, originally members of the Midwest Diocese’s Saint Nicholas Church, Mentor, OH, established the Saint Nicholas Uganda Children’s Fund in 2005.

“They began paying school fees for three orphans while they were working as Orthodox missionaries in 2003,” explains Father Alexander. “Within two years, the number of children they were assisting had grown to over 50.”

Now in its 12th year, the Children’s Fund supports over 250 children in school and provides additional assistance to needy families.

OCMC News - Laying a Foundation: 2016 OCMC Mission Team to Mexico

by Hannah Valentine (Posted 4/12/2016)

OCMC recently sent its fourth mission team of 2016 to San Esteban, Mexico, to support the faithful by offering simple catechism and the life-giving services of the Church. OCA Archpriest Antonio Perdomo of Pharr, TX, led the team of seven: Fr. David Moga (WI), Sbdn. Basil Almy (KS), Art Dossey (CA), Susie Almy (KS), Hannah Valentine (IA), and Fernando Arango (FL). This Pan-Orthodox group soon melded together in the warmth of shared vision and experience. I know without my team I would not have mastered the art of "shower in a bucket" or sleeping on wooden planks! It was made easy by the bright eyes and smiles of the children and their parents; never have I shaken so many hands nor met such polite, friendly people.

San Esteban lies tucked away in the green mountains of the state of Hidalgo, not exactly the first place one might look for the Orthodox Faith. Mexico is known for its history of Roman Catholicism, brought to its shores by the Spanish in the 1500's. Indeed, the influence Catholicism has had in the Mexican culture reveals itself through streetside shrines for the Virgin and small statues of Christ in public buses. When meeting with Archbishop Alejo of the OCA in Mexico City, I was amazed to hear that people in San Esteban had been under the OCA for over forty years. And yet, as His Grace continued the story, the need for our team’s work grew clear. Though these people would answer the question, “What kind of Christian are you?” with the response, “Orthodox,” they had little knowledge of the Church, her history, traditions, and creed. Remote as the town is, any priest wishing to visit the faithful faces a considerable challenge. Until recent years, a bridgeless river forced visiting priests to brave small boats in order to cross. And unless the priest had his own car, he would travel by foot or atop the swaying gait of a burro. The priest serving them, Fr. Serafim, now finds himself in this position. Not owning a car, he has traveled as he can to visit the faithful in San Esteban and nearby villages with Orthodox Christian communities. Well-loved by the people, Fr. Serafim awaits the completion of a permanent home for himself within the village. Our team’s goal was simple enough: to lay a foundation for the faithful so that when Fr. Serafim’s residence is finished, he has something upon which to build.

We reached San Esteban on Monday night of the trip, and remained through Friday morning. Our team offered activities for the children each morning related to the Cross, the Resurrection, and the Ascension. Working with varying abilities to speak the Spanish language, each member of our team embraced the children with the love of Christ in words as well as in action. The church’s walls rang with children’s voices as they colored their images of the Cross, and the

Con't Page 11

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courtyard just outside the church echoed with laughter as they learned how to throw frisbees. In the evenings, Fr. Antonio, Fr. David, and Fr. Serafim led the Service of Thanksgiving or Vespers. The pews filled with the smallest of babes and the grayest of grandmothers. I could see their love for God reflected in their eyes; at no moment was this more evident than when all lined up to receive the Eucharist on Thursday morning.

Only so much can be done in three days. And yet, God is not limited by time as we are, so the effects of our humble work go beyond what we saw. Through the generous support of friends and family, each team member had the opportunity to spend a week of this Great Lent in a special kind of self-denial and servitude. Now I ask for your continued prayers for our brothers and sisters in Christ who live in Mexico, that together one day we might all stand in the Light of our resurrected Lord in Paradise.

**Volunteer on an IOCC
"Orthodox Action Team in Columbia, SC"**

Since the devastating hurricanes in 2005, International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) has provided over 1000 volunteers and thousands of man-hours to help families rebuild their lives by building new homes. In 2016 a team of Orthodox volunteers will be coming to the Columbia area for week-long builds in cooperation with Disaster Recovery Support Initiative.

As Orthodox members within driving distance to Columbia, we would like you to join the team! You do not need to be skilled — just energetic!

Volunteers must be **18 years of age or older**, but 16 and 17 year olds are accepted if they are accompanied by their parent, legal guardian or an adult with a power-of-attorney to act on their behalf for the duration of the deployment.

We have the following opportunity available for an IOCC Action Team near you:

June 12 – June 18* Columbia, SC
July 10 – July 16* Columbia, SC

Space is limited, ACT TODAY! Cost is \$450 and includes room & board and local transportation.

To volunteer go to iocc.org/actionteams and choose Columbia, SC. For other information please contact Becca Tumm at IOCC at 612-454-9452 or rtumm@iocc.org.

Cont' middle p 12

The day of Resurrection; let us be radiant for the festival, and let us embrace one another. Let us say, brethren, even to those that hate us, 'Let us forgive all things on the Resurrection', and so let us cry, 'Christ has risen from the dead: by death he has trampled on death, and to those in the graves given life' (Paschal Sticheron).

Pascha 2016

To the Reverend Priests and Deacons, the Monks and Nuns, the Presidents and Members of Parish Councils, the Day, Afternoon, and Church Schools, the Members of Philanthropic Organizations, the Youth and Youth Workers, and the entire Orthodox Christian Family in the United States of America

Beloved and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ,

For more than forty days, we have walked upon the most blessed path of Great and Holy Lent. During this time, we have engaged in a spiritual struggle to grow closer to Christ; we have increased our fasting; we have intensified our prayers; we have expanded our charitable love for our neighbor; we have cried, confessed, and repented. Perhaps more significant than any of our individual achievements is the fact that we have embarked upon this journey as brothers and sisters, joined to one another as members of the Body of Christ. In this way, our common spiritual labors do not lead in isolation but in communion; together we can offer the common proclamation: Christ is Risen! Truly He is Risen!

This salvific message is proclaimed by each of us in our daily lives. However, it is also a message that is proclaimed by the Church, that is, by all men and women, ordained and lay, young and old. In this way, each time we proclaim the Resurrection of Christ, we convey to the world a message of communion and solidarity with God and with the least of our brethren. Our calling to charity, service, and love is even more pronounced during this period of joy. After all, how can we ever proclaim the resurrection of Jesus Christ, Who so loved the world that He humbled himself to the point of death (Phil 2: 8), if we don't first express our love for our brothers and sisters? (cf. 1 John 4: 21).

For forty days following Holy Pascha, as we greet each other with the Paschal message, Christ is Risen, we must remain vigilant and search for bold new ways to share the nwaning Light of Pascha with those whose lives have been overwhelmed by darkness and despair. Let us remember in thought and prayer—and in word and action—the countless men, women, and children who face unspeakable hardships and persecutions in all corners of the world. May we bear witness

Con't Page 12

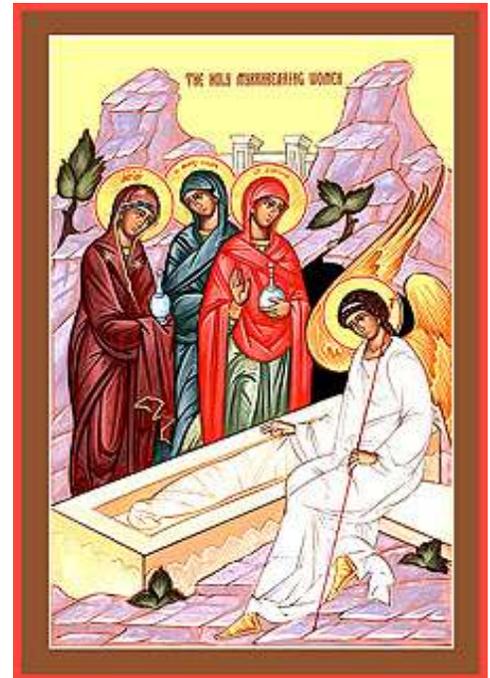
Sunday of the Holy Myrrhbearing Women with the Noble Joseph

Commemorated on *May 15*

Today we commemorate the Holy Myrrh-bearing women Sts Mary Magdalene (July 22), Mary the wife of Clopas, Joanna (June 27), Salome, mother of the sons of Zebedee (August 3), Martha and Mary, sisters of Lazarus (June 4).

Also St Joseph of Arimathea (July 31), and Nicodemus.

The holy right-believing Queen Tamara of Georgia is commemorated twice during the year: on May 1, the day of her repose, and also on the Sunday of the Myrrh-Bearing Women.



IOCC Cont

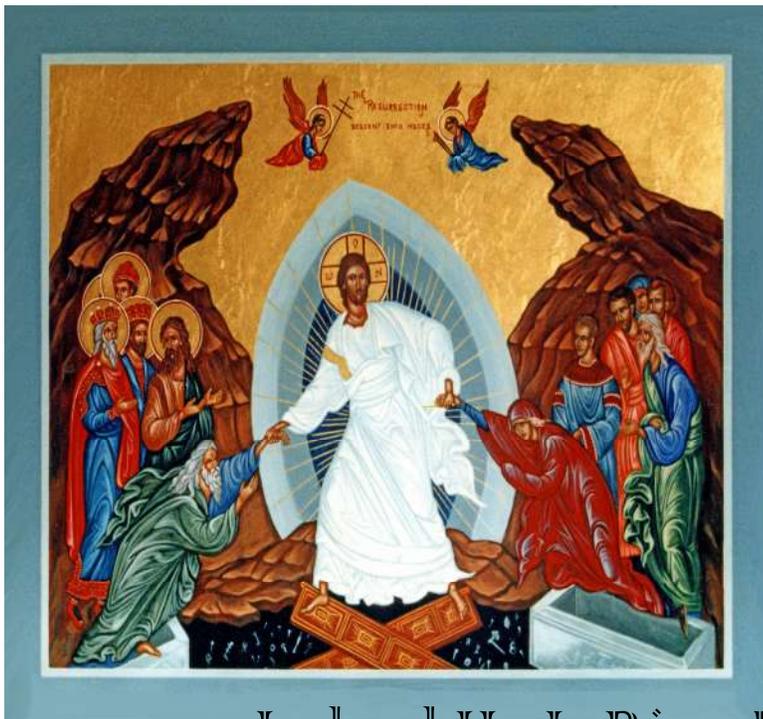
If you are interested in volunteering on an IOCC Orthodox Action Team in another city please visit: iocc.org/actionteams.

* Each Columbia work week is Monday – Friday from 8:00 am until 4:00 pm

"I did New Orleans a few years ago and had to do another build. This year's Houston build was great! I can't wait for the 2013 build schedule to come out so I can volunteer for another action team next summer!"

— 2012 Houston Action Team Participant

Christ Is Risen!



Indeed He Is Risen!

Canonical Bishops Con't

to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and in so doing, may we not only become recipients of God's abundant grace (Acts 4:33), but also be transformed into merciful hands that offer to our spiritually-thirsty world the eternal waters of the Resurrection.

All of us, the Hierarchs of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States, with profound love extend to you our fervent prayers that you and your loved ones continue to walk in the newness of life of the Holy Resurrection (Romans 6:4). Together, we join you in declaring, with one voice and one mind,

Christ is Risen! Truly He is Risen!

+Archbishop Demetrios of America
Chairman