



Albanian Orthodox Archdiocese in America

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Brothers and Sisters,

Christ comes to us. Prepared or not, He is here. And this is the great mystery of our faith, that though He beckons and encourages us towards growth and toward leading lives of greater holiness, He never fails to meet us where we are. In His own earthly ministry, this was a constant source of friction, for who can believe in someone holy who seems so often to keep company with the disreputable? Not just outcasts, but the very untouchable of His age were His closest familiars. He is marked by them, tainted even in the eyes of His apostles as unsavory company.

At Pashka, we celebrate Christ's lowest descent. Judged, tortured, marked as worthless by empire, village, and church, the poverty of His death finds even His tomb borrowed, on loan from a friend of markedly more distinguished status. His funeral rites are rushed because tomorrow and its needs keep tumbling forward. But it is there in the grave of disgrace, where He is Lord. Dusty and tired and rejected, He owns those things we fear, and He rises from them.

What the tomb could not contain, we celebrate today. Marked in our own minds by things we have done or left undone and all the hurts we have failed to solve so far in our lives, it is tempting to think we must leave them behind to meet Him, more tempting to think our faith tells us to. But ours is not a religion of purity, certainly not one of self-improvement. Christ rises from the grave because we need company there; we need assurance that there is hope for those who have not yet gotten things right.

Where we are is where Christ insists on being. The anaphora of St. Basil we have repeated each Sunday of Lent makes this clear:

Descending through the Cross into hell—that He might fill all things with Himself—He loosed the pangs of death. He arose on the third day, having made for all flesh a path to the resurrection from the dead, since it was not possible for the Author of Life to be a victim of corruption. So He became the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep, the first-born of the dead, that He might be Himself truly the first in all things.

As we kindle shared fire this Saturday night, walking forward to Sunday morning, we recall Him as with us, fearlessly willing to stoop down where we are and guiding us to arise.

Christ is risen! Krishti u ngjall!