

THE HOLY ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF BOSTON
His Eminence, Metropolitan Ephraim of Boston

PASCHAL ENCYCLICAL
of His Eminence
Metropolitan Ephraim of Boston

My Beloved Orthodox Christians,

Christ is risen!

One of the most powerful hymns in the Church year evokes the image of our Saviour as a mighty warrior. This hymn is the Heirmos of the Ninth Ode of the Canon that is chanted on the eve of Lazarus Saturday — the day when the faithful celebrate the resurrection of the Lord's friend, Lazarus, who lived in Bethany. The text of the hymn is as follows:

God of Israel hath wrought might with His arm;
He hath put down the mighty from their seat and exalted them of
low degree.

Yea, the Dayspring from on high hath visited us in these times and
hath guided us in the way of peace.

In our monastery in Boston, when the two choirs unite their voices, and together, chant this anthem in its ancient, melismatic mode, the effect is quite overwhelming.

It is, simultaneously, a declaration of war and a proclamation of triumph. It is, at one and the same time, a message of destruction and a bestowal of an armistice.

We see before us, the invincible and implacable Lord God of Israel, the Dayspring from on high, proceeding inexorably against the dominion of Hades, and its ruler, Satan, the Prince of this world, dark Lucifer, the ruler of the domain of death, crumbling in defeat before the Almighty.

Truly, as the holy Prophet-King David proclaims in the Psalms:

What God is as great as our God?

Thou art God Who workest wonders.

(Ps. 76:13)

The Holy Scriptures and the hymnology of the Church are replete with images of God as a man of war Who is, at the same time, the Prince of Peace, the Vanquisher of death, the Liberator.

One passage of the Holy Scriptures that was a favorite of the late Archbishop Auxentius describes our Saviour as resembling a paratrooper!

For while all things were in quiet silence, and that night was in the
midst of her swift course, Thine Almighty Word leaped from
Heaven out of Thy royal throne, As a fierce man of war into the
midst of a land of destruction, And brought Thine unfeigned
commandment as a sharp sword.

(Wisdom of Solomon 18:14-16)

St. Ephraim the Syrian also takes up this theme in order to demonstrate the strategy that our Saviour used in overcoming our ancient enemy:

Death slew Christ by means of the body which He assumed.
But that same body proved to be the weapon whereby He conquered death.
Concealed beneath the cloak of His manhood, His Godhead engaged death in combat,
But in slaying Our Lord, death itself was slain.
Death was able to kill natural human life,
But was itself killed by the Life that is above the nature of man.
Death could not devour Our Lord unless He possessed a body,
Neither could Hades swallow Him up unless He bore our flesh.
And so the Son came in search of a chariot in which to ride to the underworld.
This chariot was the body which He received from the Virgin.
In it He invaded death's fortress,
Broke open its strong-room and scattered all its treasures.

(On Our Lord's Resurrection)

These are the victorious works of our Saviour and Lord; these are the deeds that have been wrought by the right hand of the Most High.

It is thanks to this victory in war that we cry out in triumph and gratitude:

Christ is risen! Truly He is risen!

To Him be glory and dominion unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Your fervent suppliant unto God,

✠Ephraim, metropolitan

Pascha, 2006
Protocol Number 2511