



**THE EASTER MESSAGE OF HIS EMINENCE ARCHBISHOP GABRIEL OF COMANE,
EXARCH OF THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Christ is Risen!

“If you knew the gift of God ...” Jn. IV:10

It is with great joy that I join you all on this morning that knows no evening, on this feast that has no end, in this new time that enters the old world, in this blessed moment of eternity, where, as we contemplate the icon of the Descent into Hell, in which Christ drags Adam and Eve from the grave and with them raises us in the sweet and divine light of His Resurrection!

Indeed, what the icon of the Descent into Hell reveals is wonderful! What do we see? The Lord humbling Himself in His search for Adam, for the lost sheep. And this quest comforts us, soothes us, gives us strength, for it is us whom He addresses, it is us whom He seeks. In paradise God sought Adam who was hiding after the fall: “Where art thou, Adam?” But now, He does more than call out to him. The incarnate God, crucified and risen now descends into the depths of man’s misery, our misery, to say to each of us: “Give me your hand, that I may raise you up!” This offer is made to every person, regardless of the depth of his poverty.

And what else do we see in this Icon of the Resurrection? We contemplate the luminous descent of Christ into our own hearts.. It is there that He awaits us, it is there that He offers us His mercy. The Lord knows well our distress, where we hide in the misery of our weaknesses, where sometimes we pretend not to be, refusing to recognise the abyss we are in because of our sins. Yes, my brothers and sisters, it is there that Christ comes: He offers himself for us, He bends down to us, He draws us to Himself, He wants us to be “possessed” by His infinite love for us. But to make this possible, - since we are free - we must be prepared to reach out to Him, as He Himself does to us. Our entire being must reach out towards him! But take care, our entire being is lost in weakness and poverty, wounded by sin. And so, we cry out: “I am a lost sheep, call me, O Saviour, and save me!” (Office of the dead).

During the days before Easter, we relived the Passion of Christ, and today we contemplate Christ who is “passionate” about us. Dear brothers and sisters, this is not a mere play of words, we are facing the very reality of our salvation: insofar as we are not seized by the passion of Christ for each one of us, insofar as we do not know that we are desired, sought by him, loved beyond what is thinkable, we are beings without light ... Rather, let us be creatures of fire, as the Psalmist says: “You make your servants flames of fire” (Ps 103.4). . Let us be led by the wonderful light of the Resurrection and enter with zeal and confidence in our desire for God!

“Peace be with you all, ” said the Lord to his apostles on the evening of Easter (John 20:19). Let us receive this peace, which comes from God’s boundless love for each of us and, in turn, let us become builders of peace: let us step out on the right path, let us be seized by desire for Christ, let us be filled by His compassion, let us be freed from our graves!

The Lord is life, and He says to us again today: "I am *your* life"! If at certain moments we are in despair, He says to us: "I am *your* hope"! He gives us Joy again. Allow Him to enter our broken hearts, allow Him to trample and crush the doors of our own hell. Yes, truly "by death He has vanquished death, to those in the tombs he has given Life " (Troparion of Easter).

Beloved brothers and sisters, by all the love I have for you, I ask you to keep "all these things" in your hearts and to live by them in sharing with all people on earth! May the blessings of the Risen Lord be upon you all!

Christ is Risen!
He is risen indeed!

Paris, 11/24 April 2011

Cathedral of St. Alexander Nevsky, Paris