



Orthodox Church in America  
DIOCESE OF THE MIDWEST

**2021 PASCHAL MESSAGE FROM HIS EMINENCE ARCHBISHOP PAUL**

*The women, bearing spices, ran in tears to the tomb, while the soldiers kept their watch over You, the King of all. They said to each other: Who will roll away the stone for us? The Angel of Great Counsel is risen, trampling down death. Glory to You, Almighty Lord. (Octoechos Sessional Hymn at Resurrection Matins Tone 7)*

The goal of the Great Fast is to get us to the point where the stone in our hearts is rolled away so we are able to behold the Empty Tomb and receive the Good News that Christ is risen! Our weeping over His death and burial is transformed into tears of joy and victory!

Yet there is so much that has happened in the last year that has led many of us to experience distress, anger, despair, and for some, a loss of faith. Yet on this day of the Lord's Pascha, these stones of distress, anger, despair, and loss of faith are rolled away. These stones that have prevented us from beholding the Empty Tomb have been defeated.

What is the message of the Empty Tomb? Bear with me as I seek to answer this question. In the 1980s there was a big deal made about a sealed vault of the mobster Al Capone that was said to have valuable items in it. Geraldo Rivera, the journalist, was actively campaigning to have this vault opened. There was a two-hour special scheduled to actually open the vault. There was a lot of hype and publicity about it. There was great excitement about it. Many of us bought into this. We looked forward to watching this event on TV. The whole thing was a bust. When the supposed vault was opened, there was nothing in there. This vault of the fallen world, when opened, offered no good news.

Yet, for us Orthodox Christians, the worldly proof of the Resurrection lies in our witness to the Empty Tomb. Why is this not a disappointment for us, but points to His victory over death? Contrary to the Capone vault, we know a crucified, dead body was placed in a tomb with soldiers set over it to guard the tomb. Yet He was not there when the stone was rolled away. What does this mean?

To answer this we need to understand the significance of the Lord's appearances to his followers after the Resurrection. There was something mystical about them. Mary didn't recognize Him at the Tomb when he spoke to her; she thought Him to be gardener. But when He called her "Mary," she recognized Him and called him "Teacher." When He revealed Himself to His Disciples, they were meeting behind closed doors. He suddenly appeared to them while the doors remained shut. It wasn't an apparition or ghost they saw, as they were able to handle and touch Him. Thomas specifically did this and proclaimed Him as "My Lord, and my God!"

*Paschal Message of His Eminence, Archbishop Paul*

*May 2, 2021*

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Finally, in the wonderful account in Luke 24 on the road to Emmaus we witness another appearance of our Lord to two of His Disciples. He walked with them for several hours, yet they did not recognize Him. They engaged in a conversation about the events of our Lord's death and the Empty Tomb. They then persuaded this unknown person to stay with them longer. When he ate with them, He broke the bread, and "their eyes were opened and they recognized Him; and He vanished out of their sight" (Luke 24:31). They later remarked to others, "He was known to them in the breaking of the bread" (Luke 24:35).

The Empty Tomb is important because it is proof that we come to know the Crucified Risen Lord in another reality, in the sacramental life of the Church. It is at every Liturgy that we, just as the disciples, meet behind closed doors, and the Crucified Risen Lord reveals Himself to us in the breaking of the bread.

May we ever more come to grow in the understanding that the stones of the disappointment we have encountered in the last year—stones which we may think have robbed of us of our faith, brought us despair, and anger—are deceptions. Those deceptions are not there. Let us proclaim with the angels, "He is not here, He is risen!" The stone has been rolled away!

With love in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Paul".

**+PAUL**

Archbishop of Chicago and the Midwest

**CHRIST IS RISEN! INDEED HE IS RISEN!**

*To be circulated or read in parishes.*