2020/58
April 8, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Christ is Risen!

This year's Pascha will stay in our minds until the end of our lives. I know that it is very hard for you to be without the celebration of services on Pascha; it is very hard for me as well. The whole world is in shock over this coronavirus pandemic. The whole world is in quarantine and we are filled with sadness, helplessness, and fear. Back in January we did not pay attention to this coronavirus from Wuhan, China. We had plans for our summer vacations, we were preparing for family celebrations and then everything suddenly changed, literally overnight. There was nothing left of our plans.

Jesus' disciples had plans as well before His crucifixion. They did not believe that Jesus, after performing so many miracles and healing so many people, would voluntarily surrender himself to be crucified. Three times He predicted to them His suffering, death, and resurrection but they did not understand. Judas betrayed Him and in despair he hung himself. Peter denied Him as well, and John was the only one who remained with Him all the way to the cross. The others scattered away in fear and were hiding at home.

On the third day after His death, however, something unusual happened. The angel appeared to the women who were going to the tomb early in the morning to anoint Jesus' dead body and found the tomb empty, and the angel said to them: "Do not be amazed! You seek Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified. He has been raised; He is not here." (Mark 16:6) And it is also written: "On the evening of the first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent Me, so I send you.'" (John 20:19-21)

We too are like Jesus' disciples. The Risen Lord brings joy and peace to us who are all panicking and worrying about the rising numbers of the infected and dead people from this coronavirus. In the time of this crisis, He is removing the fear from within us. It is His gift which helps us to survive, to survive as human beings. Hopefully, after our experience with the outcome of this coronavirus, we will be able to look at life from a different perspective. Life is not in our hands.

Our Holy Father Francis, at the extraordinary blessing of *Urbi et Orbi* on March 27 in Rome, said: "We have realized that we are in the same boat, all of us fragile and disoriented, but at the same time important and needed, all of us called to row together, each of us in need of comforting the other."

Dear brothers and sisters, if we believe the joyful news this Pascha morning, that Christ died for us and is risen from the dead, we cannot remain behind the closed doors of our ego and in the clutches of fear and sadness anymore. He is telling us: "Do not be afraid" and also "Peace be to you". Christ's resurrection has the power to change our life and is calling us from death to life; it is calling us to love. This is the strength and the mystery of Christianity. Even though you cannot go to church and participate in the divine services at the moment, watch them online from the Cathedral or from your own churches. Do not be afraid and believe that one day we will be able to celebrate together. Rejoice that you can be together with your families. And you who are living by yourselves and feel alone, remember that you are not alone since you are all part of and belong to the Church as brothers and sisters and you are in my prayers. Have courage, do not lose hope. This pandemic will come to an end one day and we will always remember this Pascha in a special way. Rejoice and do not be afraid, this I write to you as your Bishop. I am with you and I pray for you.

Christ is Risen!

The Most Reverend Milan Lach, S.J.
Bishop of the Eparchy of Parma