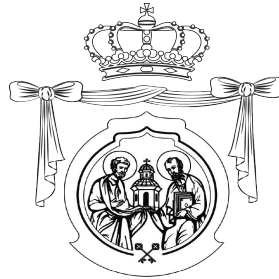


His Eminence
The Most Reverend
Metropolitan JOSEPH

The Right Reverend
Bishop THOMAS



Archbishop of New York and
Metropolitan of
All North America

Diocese of Oakland, Charleston,
and the Mid-Atlantic

ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ARCHDIOCESE OF NORTH AMERICA

Entry of the Lord into Jerusalem (Palm Sunday), Holy Week, and Pascha - 2021

Beloved brother Hierarchs, Reverend Clergy, God-fearing Monastics, and all my Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ our True God:

“Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind (nous), that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. (Romans 12:2)

Saint Paul’s exhortation to the Romans would not be possible if it were not for Holy Week – the events that overturned the tragedy in the Garden of Eden and destroyed the eternal power of death once and for all. Those who witnessed his miraculous healings and wonder working exclaimed, “He hath done all things well.” (Mark 7:37)

From His entrance into Jerusalem – “Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.” (Matthew 21:5) He enters the sacred city of Jerusalem in humility and meekness, the same qualities with which He washes His disciples’ feet at the Mystical Supper. The theanthropic activity of the Son of God during this week is and remains salvific. His activities of this week – from His entrance into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday through His Resurrection make possible the words of Saint Paul. The Saint is able to order us to “be not conformed to this world” precisely because of Christ’s restorative actions during this Great Week.

Hieromonk, now Abbot Damascene gave a talk to the Parish Life Conference of the Antiochian Orthodox Diocese of Wichita and Mid-America, Sioux City, Iowa, June 9, 2005. Here is an excerpt of his talk on this very topic:

“In Orthodoxy, on the other hand, salvation is viewed in maximal rather than minimal terms. In his book Orthodox Spiritual Life according to St. Silouan the Athonite, Harry Boosalis of St. Tikhon's Seminary writes: ‘For the Orthodox Church, salvation is more than the pardon of sins and transgressions. It is more than being justified or acquitted for offenses committed against God. According to Orthodox teaching, salvation certainly includes forgiveness and justification, but is by no means limited to them. For the Fathers of the Church, salvation is the acquisition of the Grace of the Holy Spirit. To be saved is to be sanctified and to participate in the life of God—indeed to become partakers of the Divine Nature’ (2 Peter 1:4).

“The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch” (Acts 11: 26)

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In Orthodoxy, salvation means not simply changing God's attitude, but changing ourselves and being changed by God. Salvation ultimately means deification; and deification, as we have seen, entails transformation. It is being united with God ever more fully through His Grace, His Uncreated Energy, in which He is fully present. As we participate ever more fully in God's life through His Grace, we become ever more deified, ever more in the likeness of Christ. Then, at the time of our departure from this life, we can dwell forever with Christ in His Kingdom because we 'look like Him' spiritually, because we are shining with the Grace of God."

This is the beauty and splendor of our faith which gives us hope in the midst of the most difficult circumstances of life on earth.

In the fiery and resplendent glow of the Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ, no worldly event can dim the brightness of the Lord's Pascha, our Pascha! May the joy and victory of Pascha carry us all from this passing world to the world of Christ's radiant resurrection where we will be forever with Him. May God bless you and grant you all many years of health and happiness in our new life in Christ Jesus. Unworthily, I ask for your holy prayers during this holy season.

Yours in the Risen Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bishop Thomas". The signature is written in black ink and is preceded by a small cross symbol.

Rt. Rev. Bishop THOMAS (Joseph)
Auxiliary Bishop, Diocese of Oakland, Charleston, and the Mid-Atlantic

"The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (Acts 11: 26)

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