Christ is Risen! This central statement of our faith brings with it an indescribable sense of joy and freedom as we are immersed in the True Light of God’s Love and Power that has dawned from the tomb. The celebration of Pascha reveals the mystery of the Eighth day; as the day after the seventh day (when God rested from His six days of creation - Genesis 2:2).

Christ took His Sabbath rest in the tomb. The doxastikon chanted on Holy Saturday morning states: “The great Moses prefigured this day mystically, saying, ‘And God blessed the seventh day.’ For this is truly the blessed Sabbath; this is truly the day of rest, when the only-begotten Son of God ‘rested from all his work which He had done,’ through the dispensation of death resting in the body. Returning to it through the resurrection, He granted us eternal life as the only good and loving God.”

As the day of Christ’s Resurrection, Sunday came to be understood, in a mystical way among Christians, as the “Eighth Day.” Saint Maximos the Confessor describes it as the day “beyond nature and time,” and the Epistle of Barnabas describes it as “the beginning of another world.” “Whether you call it day, or whether you call it eternity, you express the same idea,” Saint Basil the Great wrote.

Fittingly, during the week after Pascha (Easter) which is called Bright or Renewal Week, the Church celebrates Pascha for eight days, almost as though it were one continuous day. It is a way to experience the new creation of the world and a taste of the new and unending day of the Kingdom of God.

In the Gospel of John 20:19-23 we read: “Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, 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. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. So Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

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As I reflected on this passage, which highlights the first verses of the Gospel proclaimed on Pascha during the Agape Vespers and on the second Sunday of Pascha (Thomas Sunday) I could not help but be reminded of the situation in which we presently find ourselves. Currently, we feel separated from the world and each other; behind locked doors, which we cautiously open in fear of the invisible enemy that is the coronavirus - COVID-19. While it may be imperceivable to our own eyes, we are fully aware of the threat, as we see and hear of the manner in which the global pandemic is infecting and affecting humanity.

John 20:19 reminds us how Christ first appears to the Apostles after His resurrection from the dead; hiding behind shut doors and afraid. But now, the Risen Lord stands in their presence. Not in a ghost type manner; but in the flesh with the wounds on His hands, feet and side still present and visible. The disciple’s eyes witnessing something that their minds, perhaps, struggled to comprehend. Yet there stood Christ; their fear evaporated – and they rejoiced! Christ then commissions the disciples to continue His mission on earth, granting them the Holy Spirit and the authority to forgive the sins of others.

Thomas, however, was not with the other disciples when Jesus came. When told of His appearance, Thomas states the familiar: “Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe” John 20:25.

Eight days later, while the disciples (including Thomas) were together, behind shut doors (κεκλεισμένων) Jesus came and stood in their midst, and said: “Peace to you!” He said to Thomas, “Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach out your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing” John 20:26-27.

This ‘doubt’ of Thomas is so often misunderstood as a statement of faithlessness. However, the doubt of Thomas is described in the hymns of the Church as being “blessed,” for it was not a doubt of resistance to truth, but one that desperately desired a truthful answer – a doubt which gave birth to faith, when the answer was revealed.

In the hymns of the Church, Christ says to Thomas, “Your doubt will teach My Passion and Resurrection to all,” and we affirm that his doubt ‘brought the hearts of believers to knowledge.’ The conversion of Thomas’ doubt into faith led him to the clearest confession of Christ’s divinity, addressing Jesus as, “My Lord and My God!” John 20:28.

If then, we too are tempted with doubt, feeling the desire to ‘see with our own eyes’ and ‘touch with our own hands’ let us stretch our hands with those of Thomas. Let our hearts, not be troubled; rather let them be blessed, as we become enlightened with the Truth of Christ’s resurrection from the dead.

Let us revel in the absence of fear! Let us rejoice in

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1 The Services of Holy Week and Easter, Narthex Press, pages 508-509.
2 Orthodox Study Bible, page 219.
3 Orthodox Study Bible, page 1465.
4 Orthodox Study Bible, page 1465.
the knowledge that death has been conquered! Let us celebrate the reopening of the Gates of Paradise! Let us delight in the Love of God! Even though we are in isolation, we are never apart from God.

Saint John Chrysostom in his Paschal Homily states it beautifully: “Death, where is your sting? Hades, where is your victory? Christ is risen and you are overthrown. Christ is risen and demons have fallen. Christ is risen and angels rejoice. Christ is risen and life rules. Christ is risen and not one dead remains in the tomb. For Christ, having risen from the dead, has become the first fruits of those that slept. To Him be the glory and the dominion, forever. Amen.”

May the Paschal Proclamation of “Christ is Risen!” affirm our belief in Him, especially at this crucial time, as we face this pandemic plague together. May our faith be stronger than our perceived fear. May we find strength in the Risen Lord unto eternity.

Faithfully,

Father Peter

Stay Connected With The Church

If you haven’t already done so, please sign-up to receive our parish e-mails. It is the easiest and quickest way for us to communicate with all of our parishioners so that we all can stay informed with the latest news.

Sign-up at the following link:
www.saintbarbara.org/news-and-events/email

Saint Barbara Scholarship Program 2020

Through the generosity of our parishioners the Saint Barbara Scholarship Program is one of the most diverse and generous parish scholarship programs in the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. Since 1990 the community of Saint Barbara has awarded over $750,000 in Scholarships to students of our parish assisting them in their scholastic pursuits.

The Saint Barbara Scholarship Online Application is now available on the parish website:
www.saintbarbara.org/our_parish/scholarships

Scholarship Deadline is May 30, 2020

Please note that the deadline has been extended

A complete listing of the available scholarships can be found on the parish’s website

Χριστὸς Ἀνέστη! Ἀληθῶς Ἀνέστη!
Christ is Risen! Truly He is Risen!

The Paschal Greetings Project is posted on the Saint Barbara Church YouTube Channel. We invite you to view it today!

Use the following link:
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χριστὸς ἀνέστη! Christ is Risen!

January 16, 2020 marked the twenty-year anniversary of my joining the Greek Orthodox Church. It was the culmination of weeks, perhaps months of religious study, instruction by Father Peter, prayer, and soul-searching. Interestingly, I did not have to ‘unlearn’ any of what I had learned about my faith as a Protestant, but there was a lot to learn about the history of the Orthodox Church and aspects of its practice that were new to me.

Most different and new to me was a deep understanding and appreciation of Great and Holy Lent. I felt challenged by the period of preparation that we Orthodox are called to undergo to prepare ourselves for Holy Week and Pascha. Fasting was new to me. Each Sunday in Great Lent, the Church offered me support and encouragement to complete the fast and remain focused on Christ. Holy Week provided so many beautiful opportunities to gather with the faithful and be united in prayer and lifted by gospel readings. The Church provided Sacraments from Holy Confession to Holy Unction to enable us to make the most of these special days.

Holy Friday holds a special place in my heart. There is something about seeing my beloved church family in action that makes me feel at home in all the activity. Out on the exo-narthex, the Parish Council distributes candles. Young men line up to carry the kouvouklion. A team of parishioners create luminaria to line the procession that encircles the church with a warm glow. I have been honored to carry the cross at the head of this procession, a high point in my sixty years.

And of course, the Anastasi service is the highlight of the church calendar. The beautiful living drama of a totally dark sanctuary being lit, starting with a single candle, the light spreading to all, is a spectacle never to be forgotten. Christ’s glorious Resurrection is made known to us and the joy that cannot be extinguished fills our beloved church. I have been moved to the point of tears when I have felt that joy.

I love my Greek Orthodox faith with all my heart, body, and soul. It has changed me beyond anything I could have foreseen twenty years ago.

Then came 2020. Each of us gradually came to the realization of the gravity of the coronavirus epidemic. As our institutions began to shut down for the good of public health and safety, we Orthodox Christians took comfort in our faith, in our churches, and in our brothers and sisters in faith who prayed with us.
And then, the unthinkable happened. Even our church would close its doors to protect its people from the deadly menace. It almost felt, for a moment, as though all hope might be lost. How can a faithful people survive a global pandemic without the strength, support, and life that the Church provides?

We needn't have worried. God will never desert His people. His grace, love, and power preserve His creation forever. He will always show us the way. And so, without missing a beat, we found ourselves back in church, being led in worship by our beloved priest, hearing the beautiful hymns and prayers of our Church, and following along with the Epistle and Gospel readings. True, we were in church ‘virtually’ via the technology of the internet. We cannot embrace our brothers and sisters and exchange the kiss of peace. We cannot smell the incense. But we can feel the Holy Spirit uniting us, notwithstanding the miles between us. We can feel the presence not only of God in these online services, but we feel the presence of our Saint Barbara family of faith.

But it is different. Watching online, the empty pews remind us of our current situation. The squadron of altar boys that we are blessed with week in and week out, are absent. The ethereal sound of our wonderful choir is missing, albeit replaced beautifully by a single voice. As comforted as we are by the constancy of the Divine Liturgy, when the Holy Communion is prepared and offered to the absent faithful, I find myself crying again.

I am sad that I cannot receive the Sacrament of Sacraments. I am reminded of the Sundays I worshiped at Saint Barbara before I joined the Orthodox Church. I watched the long line of the faithful process to the solea and receive what I could not. The hunger to be united with Christ burned within me then and it burns within me now.

But as I watch our online Living Liturgy, my tears are not tears of sadness for myself, but tears of joy for us all. I know that the day is coming when I, along with my Saint Barbara family of faith will receive Holy Communion together in our Sanctuary. I am strengthened and comforted that our Church has continued to offer us each and every service, every prayer, every blessing that it can. I am thankful for the technology that allows us to experience so much of it.

Challenges and change are nothing new. It’s tempting to enjoy the status quo and to think or hope that things will stay the same. But we know that change is constant. The Orthodox Church, as well as the Saint Barbara parish have weathered the storms, survived the controversies, and overcome disasters, both natural and man-made.

We will survive this epidemic through prayer, through belief in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and our holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, and by loving and helping each other as Christ, our Risen Lord, commanded.

Ἄληθῶς Ἀνέστη! Truly He is Risen!

Prayer of Protection from the Coronavirus

O God Almighty, Lord of heaven and earth, and of all creation visible and invisible, in Your ineffable goodness, look down upon Your people gathered in Your name. Be our helper and defender in this day of affliction. You know our weakness. You hear our cry in repentance and contrition of heart.

O Lord who loves humanity, deliver us from the impending threat of the corona virus. Send Your Angel to watch over us and protect us. Grant health and recovery to those suffering from this virus. Guide the hands of physicians, and preserve those who are healthy that we may continue to serve You in peace and glorify Your most honorable and majestic Name, of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.
In preparation for the great opportunities that lie ahead in the life of this community, the Stewardship Committee is asking everyone to continue that trend and pitch in by increasing your pledge from last year at least 10% or $50, whichever is greater. As always, we are grateful for your love and support of our parish.

Thank you for your continued support.
We are currently following precautions and guidelines that prohibit us from safely entering the church building at this time, due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Many parishioners have been expressing a desire to have candles lit inside the Church for them, or for their family, friends or prayers for the world.

To facilitate this process, please fill out the form located on the home page of our web site and then make a donation though either Venmo @st-Barbara (https://venmo.com/St-Barbara) or on our website (https://bit.ly/STBDonations).

Fr. Peter Orfanakos will then offer prayers and light the candles on your behalf.

If you prefer to mail a check, instead of making an online donation or Venmo, please make check payable to:

Saint Barbara Greek Orthodox Church and mail to
480 Racebrook Road, Orange, CT 06477.

Your donation will continue to support the ministry of the Saint Barbara Greek Orthodox Church of Orange, Connecticut. Thank you.