

**Metropolitan NICHOLAS of Eastern America and New York:
"We Have No Other Way But the Way of the Cross!"**

(Paschal interview with the First Hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia from the newspaper "Russian Life")

1. *Your Eminence, this year we have a "late" Pascha of Christ, as they say. What are its other peculiarities for the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia and for you personally?*

A peculiarity of this Easter is the coincidence of Bright Monday and the memory of the Great Martyr George and the Queen-Martyr Alexandra. God willing, I hope to spend the touching and reverently sorrowful divine services of Holy Week, Great Saturday--the day of the first glimpse of Paschal joy--and Pascha itself, when every believer feels with undoubted confidence the presence of the Risen Christ in the church and the joy of the whole Church in Him, in the Cathedral of Our Lady "of the Sign" in the Synodal Residence in New York, as we say, in the House of the Kursk-Root Icon of the Mother of God, Hodegetria of the Russian Diaspora.

And on the second day of "this good and radiant celebration," in the words of Chrysostom, I will lead the festal divine services and the children's procession of the cross at St Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in New Jersey. The very next day after that, I will serve in the neighboring St George Church, which is attached to this cathedral, to honor its altar.

Great Lent is a conciliar effort of the entire Church. Each of us, preparing for the Pascha of Christ, tries to fast to the best of our ability and possibility. During this Lent, visiting the parishes of the Eastern American Diocese, leading the retreats of the clergy of its Northern and Southern Deaneries, and performing the rite of general unction, I somehow felt in a special way how this *podvig* unites people.

I felt this abundantly at the funeral of the recently deceased Protodeacon Joseph Jarostchuk, who served the Church reverently and piously for almost 55 years.

I approach the coming Pascha with great hope that the Lord will lead the world out of the hellish darkness of military conflicts and all kinds of tribulations into the wondrous light of His Kingdom and His peace, of which, on the eve of His sufferings, the Savior said to the Apostles: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27). In our churches, prayer for the peace of the world, for the peace of the whole world, and for times of peace, is carried to the Throne of God with special power, and I very much hope that the peace of Christ will be established in the hearts of all believers. In these days, leading us to Pascha, we cannot help but recall the words of Archbishop Innokenty of Kherson and Taurida, a well-known preacher and spiritual writer:

"You, therefore, who in your thoughts strive to embrace the fate of all mankind and would like to find a means of delivering it from evil, rejoice and be glad! This remedy was found in heaven by God Himself. The Savior has risen, Who will wipe away all tears from their eyes' (Revelation 21:4), of every sufferer. After that, all we have to do is follow His plans, spread His Light, spread His life."

Therefore, as we approach Holy Week and Holy Pascha, it is my prayer that we, the archpastors, clergy, monastics and flock of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, may be able to become the presence of the Risen Christ on this earth.

2. The Russian Church has been celebrating the main Orthodox feast, the Resurrection of Christ, on American soil for more than 200 years. Suffice it to say that the first Orthodox church built in Alaska, on Kodiak Island, in 1796, was named in honor of the Resurrection of Christ. And which of the Easter feasts is especially memorable for you personally during the years of pastoral service or, perhaps, in your years of youth or childhood?

It's hard to say, because every Easter is special. Thinking about this, I think of growing up in a small parish in New Jersey, where my parents and their friends, parishioners of the Church of the Dormition in the state capital, prepared for Holy Week and the celebration of Pascha by holding rehearsals, doing spring cleaning, and decorating the church. Everyone was in a terrible rush, but this fuss did not disturb the inner composure of the parishioners.

On the contrary, all this external preparation contributed to their inner preparation and was dedicated to Him Who suffered, died, and shone the light of His Resurrection from the dead. When people complain about the pre-holiday bustle, I try to advise them to do all their deeds as if for God and to dedicate them to the sacred event for which we are preparing, remembering that we are also working to bring the joy of the feast to our neighbors. In this way, we will not disturb our spiritual peace.

I can't help but think of Holy Trinity Monastery in Jordanville, New York, where, as a seminarian, I had the grace of God to spend Great Lent and Pascha for several years in a row. The beautiful, ascetic faces of the monks who underwent the Lenten *podvig*, and the radiance of Christ the Giver of Life in their eyes on the salvific night of Holy Pascha – this always touched and strengthened my spirit.

I remember that in 1999, while accompanying Archbishop Laurus, the future First Hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, to the Holy Land, I attended the descent of the Holy Fire on Great Saturday. That year, Vladyka Laurus served in our community in Bethany on Lazarus Saturday, and prayed in Nazareth on the Annunciation of the Most Holy Theotokos, which was celebrated during Holy Week.

The following divine services of Holy Week and Bright Pascha he alternately celebrated in our convents on the Mount of Olives and in Russian Gethsemane. On the very day of Pascha, His Eminence attended the Great Paschal Vespers celebrated by His Beatitude the Patriarch of Jerusalem in the Church of the Resurrection of Christ in Jerusalem.

As the Bishop of Manhattan, he celebrated Holy Pascha at the Cathedral of Our Lady "of the Sign" in New York City, concelebrating with the late Metropolitan Hilarion or leading festal services when he celebrated the Bright Resurrection of Christ with his flock of Australia and New Zealand. I especially remember the Annunciation, which in 2018 coincided with Great Saturday, when the late Metropolitan Hilarion read the festal canon in a very heartfelt way, standing before the Holy Shroud.

In general, the celebration of Pascha in the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Sign is always very solemn, crowded and with great spiritual loftiness. This is facilitated by the clergy and singers of the Synodal Choir, who infect the faithful with their Paschal joy.

3. In May, the school year ends in parish Orthodox schools. Speaking recently in Washington, Protodeacon Andrei Psarev, professor of theology at Holy Trinity Seminary in Jordanville, called parish schools "the real treasure" of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia. But do we always use this wealth wisely? Do we have the opportunity to multiply it?

I am inclined to agree with Fr Andrei. Many parishes have Russian church schools, which have instilled in several generations a love for the Church, our history and culture, and the Russian language. In this way, the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia has been able to preserve many things, including a reverent attitude toward the Church Slavonic language used in divine services. And I, too, had the good fortune to study at such a school at St Alexander Nevsky Parish in New Jersey. I remember with gratitude the sacrifice of the clergy and teachers, who wholeheartedly devoted themselves to the cause of education and upbringing of children. With what love they taught! How much work they put into us!

Thank God, in addition to schools, many parishes continue to have church circles for children and youth, scout and other social organizations working closely with the Church, choral work with young men and women, youth conferences and other events are organized. But the most important thing is the good example of parents.

If the church way of life and of love for the national culture are preserved in the home, if parents set a good example, pray, fast and celebrate with their children, regularly take them to church and participate with them in church life, if we feel the need for synergy between the Church, school, public organizations and parents in matters of education and upbringing of children and begin to actively implement it in practice, then our common work in working with children and young people, with God's help, will bring abundant fruits to the Church.

4. This year is rich in church anniversaries. Tell us about some of them that you are going to participate in personally.

The celebration of jubilees or anniversaries in the life of monasteries, parishes, and their leaders is an opportunity to once again take an interest in the unique history of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia and its heritage, to remember its ascetics with gratitude, and to reflect on the present day of church life.

In addition, the preparation for the celebration of anniversaries and memorable dates through prayer, retreats, lectures and conversations about our common history, not to mention the celebration itself, all this provides an opportunity to renew our strength and outline ways to create the future.

At present, we are anxiously preparing for the significant date of the 30th anniversary of the glorification of St John (Maximovich), Archbishop of Shanghai and San Francisco the Wonderworker, by the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia.

In this regard, the Cathedral of the Mother of God "Joy of All Who Sorrow" in San Francisco will host celebrations on June 28-29 of this year. I especially appeal to St John this year, hoping that as we take the opportunity to remember his legacy and ponder his earthly life, with which through his personal spiritual feats and service, touched the hearts of all around him, not only of the multitude of Russian emigres but also the native residence where he lived and worked, bringing them to Holy Orthodoxy.

This year, the 75th jubilees of salvific service is celebrated by Novo-Diveevo Convent of the Dormition, St John the Baptist in Washington, DC, and Holy Trinity Cathedral in Toronto. In addition, the rectors of these cathedrals are celebrating the 50th anniversary of their own pastoral service.

The Dormition Convent, a place of spiritual consolation, final rest and prayer for many emigrants, was founded in 1949 by Protopresbyter Adrian Rymarenko, who went through a difficult path of confession

during the time of persecution. In 1930 he was arrested. During World War II, he ministered to the Intercession Convent in Kiev. Fr Adrian personally knew the Optina Elders Anatoly the Younger and Nektarios, and it was under his epitrachelion that Elder Nektarios reposed in the Lord in 1928.

The teachings of the elders and spiritual fathers of Kiev supported Fr Adrian in his trials. Widowed in the first half of the 1960s, Fr Adrian became a monk with the name Andrew, after which he was consecrated bishop. Vladyka Andrei died in the monastery he founded on the feast day of the Apostles Peter and Paul in 1978. I highly recommend everyone to read the collection of his sermons, because he had a living connection with pre-revolutionary saints and martyrs for the faith.

At Novo-Diveyevo Monastery there is the largest Russian Orthodox cemetery in North America, the Dormition Church and the Cathedral Church in honor of St Seraphim of Sarov. The main relics of this holy monastery are the image of the Vladimir Mother of God from Optina Hermitage, the Cross from the Ipatiev House in Ekaterinburg, and the lifetime portrait of St Seraphim of Sarov, which ended up in Kiev after the destruction of the Diveevo Monastery, and then was taken abroad by Father Adrian.

It is known that during the days of the glorification of St Seraphim in 1903, the Royal Family fervently prayed before this icon. Recently, after restoration, the icon was temporarily placed in the Cathedral of the Synodal Residence, whence it will soon be returned to Novo-Diveevo.

The Cathedral of St John the Baptist in Washington, D.C., was founded by St John on September 11, 1949, the day of the Beheading of John the Forerunner, when this great wonderworker of the Russian diaspora, revered by all Orthodox Christians, celebrated the first Divine Liturgy here. The first rector was Archpriest Manuel Essensky, who later became a bishop.

He was replaced for a short time by Archpriest Boris Kritsky, the well-known custodian of the Kursk-Root Icon of the Mother of God "of the Sign," and in 1953 Archimandrite Nicholas (Pecatoros) became rector. The latter served in our metropolitan parish for almost thirty years, until 1981. Since then, the rector of this magnificent cathedral has been Archpriest Victor Potapov.

The celebration of the anniversary of the cathedral parish in the U.S. capital, as well as the 50th anniversary of the priestly ordination of its rector, will take place on Sunday, September 8, the day of the Meeting of the Vladimir Icon of the Mother of God.

In 1949, an initiative group of believers in Toronto appealed to Metropolitan Anastassy (Gribanovsky) with a request for assistance in establishing a Russian Orthodox parish in that city.

His Beatitude Vladyka Anastassy sent them to Archbishop Ioasaf (Skorodumov), who at that time headed the Canadian Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia. In the autumn of the same year, Bishop Ioasaf appointed Archpriest Matthew Andrushchenko, who had arrived from Belgium, as rector of the newly formed community, named in honor of the Holy Trinity. It is interesting to note that in the beginning, Fr Matthew served completely free of charge, he was supported by his wife Anastasia Alekseevna, who worked as a seamstress in the city.

Meanwhile, in church she worked as a choir director-psalmist. When the parish rose to its feet and was supplemented with more people, a second priest was appointed to help Fr Matthew, Archpriest Serge Shchukin, a man of high culture and deep intellect, who worked hard with children and youth, founding a parish school and a Vladimir Circle for young men and women.

By 1966, the parish had acquired its own building, which housed a spacious church, a hall and a school. In 1969, the great consecration of the church took place, which was performed by Archbishop Vitaly (Ustinov) of Montreal and Canada and Bishop Pavel (Pavlov) of Stuttgart. In 1975, to help the aging Fr Matthew, a young priest named Fr Vladimir Malchenko was appointed here, who became rector of the parish in 1986, when its founder died.

Thank God, Fr Vladimir is still fruitfully working in this, the largest parish of the Russian Diaspora. God willing, we will celebrate the 75th anniversary of the parish and the 50th anniversary of Fr Vladimir's ministry this autumn

It is impossible not to mention Archpriest Nikolai Tkachev, rector of the Church of the Presentation of the Mother of God in Syracuse, New York, who at the end of last year celebrated the 60th anniversary of his pastoral ministry. I hope to congratulate him personally on the feast day of the Holy Myrrh-bearing Women.

From the bottom of my heart, I congratulate the anniversaries and recommend that the editors of *Russkaya Zhizn* record an interview with them, so that your readers can get acquainted with their rich experience of service and preserve the memory of the people who left a deep mark in their hearts. May the celebration of anniversaries at Holy Dormition Convent and cathedral parishes in Toronto and Washington bring joy, renewal, and blessing to all participants!

4. *Your Eminence, alas, there is another, perhaps not entirely festive, question. Today, we live in a society that is increasingly post-Christian. In various parts of the world, we are witnessing that not only are old armed conflicts not subsiding, but new ones are also flaring up, often inter-religious. Unfortunately, it is difficult to talk about Orthodox unity today... What can you say about this, first of all, to the laity, to people who now often experience doubts in faith or even discouragement?*

Indeed, in recent years, the world has become very dark, and people, it seems to me, are languishing under the weight of this darkness.

Observing the events in the world, one feels incredible sorrow for a person who suffers from the sin and evil that surrounds him. However, this is nothing new, as Ecclesiastes testifies: "there is no new thing under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 1:9). And the Lord says: "In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer: I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). In another place the Savior says: "Believe in the light, that ye may be children of light" (John 12:36).

In other words, we must hold fast to Christ! He is always there! We must humbly accept the present difficult times as a cross entrusted to us by the Lord, and in the conditions of this cross follow Him, i.e. to be and remain a Christian, striving with all our might to fulfill the Gospel covenants in our lives. It is incredibly difficult, but we have no other way but the way of the Cross. It is only through Golgotha that we are vouchsafed the never-ending light and the peace of Christ.

After all, we sing at Easter: "Behold, joy will come to the whole world through the cross," and Fyodor Dostoevsky reminds us: "Where the Cross is, there is the Resurrection."

Let us remember the faith, faithfulness and feats of the New Martyrs and Confessors of the 20th century. Let us regularly attend church and live, to the best of our ability, the life of the Church, communicate with one another, supporting our neighbors in this bearing of the cross.

And then we will feel that we are not alone. God is with us, His Church, the saints and our neighbors. I strongly advise you to resort daily to the prayer of the last Optina Elders, which reminds us that everything, both good and terrible, is sent down by God, being His gift that leads us to happiness.

In difficult moments of my life, I am always strengthened by reading the work of Righteous John of Kronstadt, *My Life in Christ*, which teaches us the mystical life in the Risen Christ, personal relationship with Him, hope in and reliance on Him.

May our aspirations for life in Christ lead us to the restoration of love, harmony, friendship and unity among the Orthodox and to peace in the whole world.

Amen.