

Prot. N. 17/455 ENG

**CHRISTMAS PASTORAL LETTER
OF HIS BEATITUDE SVIATOSLAV**

**Most Reverend Archbishops and Metropolitans, God-loving Bishops,
Very Reverend Clergy, Venerable Monastics, Dearly Beloved Brothers and Sisters,
in Ukraine and throughout the world**

*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich,
yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.*
2 Cor. 8:9

Christ is born! Glorify Him!

Beloved in Christ!

Today once again we share the unspeakable joy of the Holy Nativity, which fills the heart of each believer. The Son of God became one of us, having taken as His mother a Virgin from Nazareth. The Son of the Pre-eternal and Almighty God, the Creator of all that is visible and invisible, was born in a poor stable cave and personally experienced all human misery. This is not merely some historical event from long ago, this is our reality as well. In this event that took place in Bethlehem more than two thousand years ago we recognize God's infinite love for the human race, for all time: "For God so loved the world, that he gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16).

Gazing upon the newborn Saviour, lying in a simple stable cave, on hay in a manger, we sense how Divine wisdom exceeds human wisdom. In the light of the Christmas star, human power, glory, and wealth seem empty, fleeting, and insignificant. Christ, the Son of God, became poor and helpless for us. He abandoned heavenly glory in order to be born among humans – deprived, having no place to lay His head, as we sing in our traditional carol: "not in a royal palace, but among cattle..." For us He becomes poor, having been rich, so that we might become rich in his poverty (see 2 Cor 8:9). Taking human misery and frailty upon Himself, the Son of God raises us poor humans to our Lord's grandeur. Indeed, the poor shepherds of the Bethlehem and its surroundings are the first to receive this good news of salvation, proclaimed to us today by the Angel of the Lord: "'And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.' And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased!'" (Lk 2:12-14). Christmas, it would seem, brings about an exchange of gifts: God descends from heaven to earth, so that mankind might ascend into heaven; the Son of God becomes poor, so that we might all be enriched.

Today we live in a world where, in the words of the Holy Father, Pope Francis, the pursuit of material enrichment frequently grows into a “new idolatry of money,” and “the economy lays bare... a lack of real concern for human beings; man being reduced to one of his needs alone: consumption” (*Evangelii gaudium*, 55). And yet, the angel of the Nativity directs his message to the poor and calls upon them, and us as well, to praise God, in Whom we find hidden the true and eternal wealth of humankind. In being united with Christ, “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:3). Christians appear before the world “as poor, yet making many rich, as having nothing, yet possessing everything” (2 Cor 6:10)! And thus, in the Nativity, this wealth—a life with God and in God—comes to us and becomes a source of our joy and hope, which we exchange with one another..

In the midst of the misery and challenges of the present day, we should recognize that there are many forms of poverty—spiritual, cultural, educational, civilizational, and only then—material. The poverty of the present world is frequently not material, but spiritual. Thus, in a certain sense, today’s “new rich” in Ukraine may, in fact, be spiritually and culturally poorer than beggars. On the other hand, this spiritual poverty, that is, this distance of the powerful of this world from God, frequently creates social injustice, disastrous abuse of authority, corruption and misuse of resources, given for the common good.

In this situation it is not enough for the rich to share a portion of the crumbs from their table as a form of help for the poor. What is needed is a change of the human heart, an opening which will allow Divine light and grace to enter. For the one who claims to be a saviour of the poor, but does not have God in his or her heart—such a person carries empty ideologies which only exploit human suffering for political gain, but in reality, are unable to end it. In such circumstances the poor become poorer while the rich continue to prosper. Only those who have become rich in God can transform their own lives and contribute to the creation of a just society, having the human being at its centre rather than profit, the common good rather than egotistical interests of particular groups or clans.

In His Nativity Christ makes us all rich, fills us and raises us out of all forms of poverty, for Christ is born in Bethlehem in order to make every person His brother, His sister—a child of God and sharer of eternal divine blessings. That is why Christmas is the feast of solidarity for all humankind, even for those who cannot bear the gifts of gold of this world, for it enriches all with “a gift more precious than myrrh: the faith of the heart and sincere love,” as we sing in our Ukrainian carol.

Beloved in Christ! In order that we may worthily celebrate Christmas, with those who suffer from all forms of poverty let us share of the riches that are ours—our spiritual gifts above all, and then material gifts. May our ancient carol-koliada, which greets the king in a poor stable cave, be a Divine covenant for us, to approach the poor and share with them the riches of our holy faith. Let us lean down before Christ, present in our impoverished brothers and sisters, allowing them to experience the closeness of God, Who embraces all with His endless mercy and unconditional love. Let us greet with carols our soldiers, wherever they may be—in their homes, having fulfilled their sacred duty to defend their country, in their military units, at the front.

Let us visit those who were wounded in battle, let us receive into our hearts the pain of the poor and the needy, for in doing so we will receive Christ with the Most Holy Family, enriching our own homes, our families, and the society we live in with endless divine treasures, “where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal” (Mt 6:20). This is what the Holy Church encourages us to do in singing: “Let us meet Him with pure hearts and with good works. Let us prepare ourselves now through the Holy Spirit to greet Him who is coming to His own people as He himself had willed. He is being born in Bethlehem, so that through His compassion He might bring back all of those who were exiled from life in Paradise” (Sunday before the Nativity, Stikhera from Vespers).

Dear Brothers and Sisters, with a sincere heart I wish each of you, from the youngest to the oldest, from the richest in Divine gifts to the poorest, in Ukraine and abroad – the true joy of children of God, a tasty kutia, a Christmas full of cheer, and a happy, peaceful, and blessed New Year!

Christ is born! Glorify Him!

† SVIATOSLAV

*Given in Kyiv
at the Patriarchal Cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ,
on the day of the Venerable Martyr Stephen the Younger and the Holy Martyr Irenarchus,
the 11th of December (28th of November) in the 2017th Year of our Lord*