



Easter 2020: commanding ourselves to God as we go into the future

Der Altar in der Lobby des Bischoff-Verlages

Zurich/Neu-Isenburg. "Through the Holy Spirit, we can feel the presence of the risen Son of God even behind closed doors at home!" This was just one of the Easter messages from Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider in this special year 2020.

"It is certainly a very special Easter that we celebrate together today."—It was with these words that Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider, the spiritual leader of the international New Apostolic Church, greeted the large virtual congregation. Since believers are unable to gather together for their usual divine services at the moment, his Easter sermon was streamed on YouTube and elsewhere on the internet as a live divine service.

Allowing ourselves to fall into the hand of God

The Church leader began by expressing his concern: there is so much suffering and need in the world. Over two million people have already been infected by the corona virus, and well over a hundred thousand have died. And it is not only a matter of health and life, as the economic fallout of the pandemic has yet to be assessed. This makes people afraid and creates a great deal of uncertainty. "But as Christians we have learned to commend ourselves into the hand of God," stated the Chief Apostle. "We are aware that there are many things we do not know, and so we trust in God." His recommendation was simply to let ourselves fall completely into the hand of God.

At the same time he emphatically countered the notion that the corona pandemic was a punishment from God, or a sign announcing the end of the world: "Such a statement does not come from the Holy Spirit!" The Holy Spirit only speaks of God as the God of love!

The resurrection of Jesus heralds our own resurrection

"The Bible is quite understated when it relates of the encounter between the Risen One and His disciples," said Chief Apostle Schneider, as he remarked on the events of that first Easter. "However, the congregation at the time would have tangibly felt a unique kind of joy and a deep peace. The disciples were filled with joy that their Master was back in their midst. He who had been with them, who had hung on the cross, and who had been buried, was now with them again—and He was alive! This must have been a tremendous comfort to them. It was only in hindsight that they then understood: God was indeed with Jesus Christ. And even more: Jesus Christ *is* God!" It was Thomas who brought this to expression with the words, "My Lord and my God!"

"May the celebration of Easter also bring peace and joy to us today! His resurrection heralds our own resurrection! Jesus Christ lives—He is God! He is love. He is close to us human beings. He is on the side of the weak, and He grants grace. He is concerned over His own and does not allow anyone to fall! He has died for His friends. And He has also died for you! Just think about that!" In order to reinforce this, Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider read the Bible text for this Easter service from Revelation 1: 17b-18: "**Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.**

The First and the Last

"The Bible relates that Jesus Christ is the first human being to bear the resurrection body—which is, so to speak, the first phase of the new creation," concluded the Church leader. "Jesus Christ was the first human being permitted to enter the kingdom of God with a resurrection body. And God has also begun this process with us through our baptism with water and the Holy Spirit. He has given us life of His life." So it is that Christians today also have the opportunity to receive a resurrection body. Today, it is still necessary to believe in the resurrection of Jesus—as well as in our own resurrection—but Holy Scripture clearly states that those who follow Christ can already taste the joy of the resurrection today.

Power over earth and heaven

The passage from Revelation also states that Christ has the keys of Hades and of Death. "This biblical statement is a comfort for us," explained Chief Apostle Schneider. "Physical death cannot be an obstacle for redemption through Jesus Christ. It is also a certainty that God will likewise take care of the dead and work on their salvation. "Hades," said the Chief Apostle, "is an image for remoteness from God. Jesus even holds the key to this realm, since He leads human beings into the proximity of God. "No one is eternally damned. It is the Risen One—not just any human being—who holds the key. Thus it is not a matter of knowledge, success, or ability. It is not about social standing. It is simply a matter of faith in Jesus Christ and

of following Him,” assured the Chief Apostle. Every human being who believes in Jesus Christ and follows Him can find salvation: “The Risen One has the key. He has power over earth and heaven.”

The longing to partake in the Lord’s Supper

As the divine service progressed, the international Church leader made a special point of addressing the absence of Holy Communion: “Normally we would commemorate the resurrection of the Lord with the celebration of Holy Communion. This will not work today! Although it would be our collective desire to celebrate the Lord’s Supper, we must be aware that Holy Communion is a sacrament which Jesus Christ Himself instituted. He Himself is present in the consecrated wafer. He defines how we are to celebrate Holy Communion worthily.” The Apostles are to administer this sacrament, but they cannot simply do as they please with it, or simply adapt it to suit their passing needs. Jesus instituted Holy Communion as a meal of fellowship—and this condition cannot be met at the moment. That is how it is described in our Creed, “and we are not to change this.”

Rather, God is reminding the congregation that Holy Communion is a gift of His grace. We do not have any right to it. For as long as it is God’s will that no Holy Communion can be celebrated, He will give us what we need.

Anticipation of the great supper

And then he became very personal: “Let us make use of this extraordinary time in order to prepare ourselves for the first Communion that we will once again be permitted to celebrate together.” We could do this, for example, by asking ourselves the question: “How will I celebrate the first Holy Communion? What do I intend to do?” In so doing, the congregation also prepares for the great supper with Jesus Christ in the coming kingdom of God. The Chief Apostle then made reference to Luke 22: 28–30: “But you are those who have continued with Me in My trials. And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel!” Christ will bestow this upon us! The promise that we will partake in the great marriage supper of the Lord is not just some vague promise from a Church leader: “These are the true sayings of God!”

To conclude, the Church leader bade farewell to the global virtual congregation with the words: “I promise you: as soon as it is possible to celebrate Holy Communion again, we will do so! I long for this too!”

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