



April 1, 2020

Therefore Jesus also suffered outside the city gate in order to sanctify the people by his own blood. 13 Let us then go to him outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured. For here we have no lasting city, but we are looking for the city that is to come. Through him, then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. (Hebrews 13:10ff)
Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart. You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God. For "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord endures forever." That word is the good news that was announced to you. (! Peter 1:22ff)

Dear Rev Frs. Esteemed members of our parish councils and faithful,

Christ is in our midst! I pray each of you are well and are maintaining proper protocols to keep yourselves, your loved ones, the vulnerable and those around you safe. Our Lenten Journey this year has presented us real challenges. The pressures and crisis we face is an opportunity for us to draw closer to the Lord. Let us each ask the Lord, "Lord, what is it that you want me to learn from this?" As Great Lent presents us with the opportunity to examine our priorities, the pandemic of the Coronavirus, in many ways challenges us to realize our mortality and the fragility of this fleeting life. As Christians, we must remember the words from the Book of Hebrews, 'For here we have no lasting city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.' Unfortunately, we get so nailed down to this earth with our many blessings, that we forget the Giver of the Gifts and that we are strangers and sojourners in this world. I am reminded of the words we sing every Sunday, 'Put not your trust in princes and in the sons of men, in whom there is no salvation. When his breath departs, he returns to the earth and on that very day his plans perish.

Realizing the fragility of life, as Christians we do not fear death. Nevertheless, we have a responsibility to not endanger others. The Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church in America met via Video Conference on Monday, March 30th to deliberate and discuss the pandemic, directives from the Center for Disease Control as well as restrictions placed upon all citizens by the civil authorities. We have a responsibility to act in a manner to protect our neighbors, our healthcare workers, first responders, our faithful, the vulnerable, our clergy and their families. Therefore I would direct your attention to the "**Synodal Directives for Clergy and Parish & Mission Communities of the Orthodox Church in America.**" In compliance with these directives from the Holy Synod and in my Archpastoral role as your Hierarch, I will state unequivocally, we will follow the Directives of the Holy Synod. Therefore, we will continue to observe social distancing and provide limited Liturgical services (but with tightened guidelines). As an accommodation to this unprecedented situation, clergy are allowed to hear confessions via telephone or Zoom. As we approach Holy Week, I will re-evaluate the situation, but I expect very minimal change from our current restrictions.

Please make an effort to call five people a day. Pray for your priest and his family. Remember to support your parish. Pray for our civil authorities and all affected by this pandemic. Forgive me a sinner and keep me in your God-pleasing prayers.

Your unworthy father in Christ,

+ Mark

+MARK, Archbishop of Philadelphia and the Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania



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"Thou hast made us for Thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in Thee." Augustine