



WESTERN AMERICAN DIOCESE
RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH OUTSIDE OF RUSSIA

DECREE № 5E/2020

To the Pious Clergy and Faithful of the Western American Diocese:

At the present time, we are witnessing the spread of the Corona virus both in various parts of the world and also this land. We are also observing the closure of schools and many other institutions in order to limit exposure to the virus. While the medical knowledge about the etiology of the virus is not yet complete, stricter practices as to personal hygiene and hand-washing, and the sanitary wiping of commonly touched surfaces, are being encouraged in order to minimize the potential for transmission. There are increasing limitations being imposed on travel, and the mandates from the civil authorities regarding quarantines and border closings on the national and state levels are likely to increase. Today, President Trump has declared a National Emergency.

In light of the foregoing, I am cancelling the Diocesan Assembly/Pastoral Conference scheduled for March 17-18, 2020 and postponing it to a future date next year, God permitting.

With regard to Church life our Diocese, I am giving the following instructions:

(1)

Zapivka (post-Communion wine). This is to be served to the communicants from individual paper cups until the Corona virus ends. There is to be placed a paper bag next to the zapivka table for the disposal of these cups.

(2)

If you or one of your family members have respiratory symptoms -- coughing, sneezing, fever, a sore throat, or runny nose -- it is best to remain at home and not expose others to a communicable sickness. If you or someone in your family becomes seriously ill, ask one of the clergy to visit you to administer Holy Communion.

(3)

With regard to the veneration of Holy Icons and Relics, we believe that Icons, which we call Holy, are not merely earthly images but are in fact “windows into Heaven”: some are demonstrably wonder-working but all are potentially wonder-working. We venerate Holy Icons and Relics with faith precisely because they are vessels of Divine Grace. Their veneration is salutary for both soul and body and may certainly continue as is customary. Nevertheless, if someone nevertheless wishes to refrain from venerating Icons, they may freely choose to do so.

(4)

Concerning the reception of Holy Communion, the Holy Mysteries shall continue to be administered according to our standard ecclesiastical practice. All thoughts that illness can be transmitted through the Holy Mysteries must be decisively rejected. In the prayers before Holy Communion, we say: “Behold, I approach Divine fire.” All those who approach worthily and with faith receive healing and strength, and are made no less than “partakers of the Divine nature.” (2 Peter 1:4) One of the Communion Hymns proclaims: “Receive the Body of Christ: taste ye of the Fountain of Immortality.”

(5)

I am instructing that, during the Augmented Litany at each Divine Liturgy, and at each Liturgy of the Presanctified gifts, the following petitions from the “Molieben Sung in Time of Devastating Epidemic and Death-bearing Pestilence” be recited:

“More than all others we have sinned against Thee and we have transgressed, O Master, and if we have not acquired repentance instead of repentance accept our offering. And having set Thyself to mercy, as Thou art almighty, free Thy servants from death bearing sickness and grievous afflictions, groaning in pain we pray Thee, quickly hearken and have mercy.”

“We have sinned and we have transgressed, and therefore Thy righteous anger has visited us, O Lord, our God; and the darkness of death has encompassed us and we have drawn nigh unto the gates of Hades. But, with compunction, we cry out unto Thee, our God, in our infirmities: Spare, O spare Thy people, and destroy us not utterly, humbly we pray Thee, hearken and have mercy.”

“O Lord, Who rules by life and by death: do Thou not enclose the souls of Thy servants in death, but turn aside from wrath and forsake anger, for our days vanish like smoke, and our

strength has wasted away, and we are perishing utterly because of our sins. Be Thou merciful unto Thy servants who are repenting with tears, we pray Thee, hearken and have mercy.”

(6)

The “Molieben Sung in Time of Devastating Epidemic and Death-bearing Pestilence” is to be served in each parish after the Divine Liturgy every Sunday until the passing of this epidemic. The text of this service is found in the Trebnik.

(7)

The members of the Faithful are encouraged to increase their prayers by daily reciting an Akathist to the Lord, or the Theotokos, or to our beloved St. John of Shanghai & San Francisco, or to the Saint of their choice, praying for the cessation of this pestilence. To increase the sanctification of our souls and bodies, we are all encouraged to frequently partake of Holy Communion, and also of Holy Water and Prospora; to daily anoint ourselves with Holy Oil from the Saints; and to confess our sins and pray fervently. Our arms against this epidemic, although spiritual, will be nonetheless powerful.

Already reports are coming in that the Archangel Michael has appeared to many people promising them his powerful help. Also, the newly-glorified Saint Nikephoros the Leper has appeared in Greece to a pious Orthodox serviceman and assured him that he will intercede for all who ask his prayers to be protected and healed from the Corona virus.

Troparion, Tone 1:

“All the angels were awestruck by the courage and fortitude of Saint Nikephoros the Leper, in ascetic deeds and contests, for like another Job he suffered pain, with patience, ever-glorifying God, who has crowned him now with glory, granting him grace to work great, wondrous miracles. Rejoice, O guide of monastic and their aid, Rejoice O shining beacon of light, Rejoice for thy relics now exude a fragrance bringing joy to all.”

Kontakion, Tone 8:

“The valiant athlete of endurance and fortitude, the steadfast diamond of great patience and long-suffering, was tried by the affliction and pains of illness, and who in this way did glorify the Most High God, let us praise and laud the leper Nikephoros, saying unto him: Rejoice, true namesake of victory.”

Let us use this time to draw closer to the Lord in repentance, as once did the citizens of Ninevah. Much of mankind has fallen so very far away from God: the modern spiritual pandemic has led many of our contemporaries even to fundamentally deny the very nature with which God has imbued us. We must ask the Saints for intercessions on our behalf and all those around us who are sick. Let us also remember that it is only through earnest repentance and prayer, and not through worry and fretting, that we can influence our circumstances for the better. With the vast spiritual resources given to us, we must entreat the Lord, who has exhorted us: "Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." (Is. 41:10) Let us "seek first the Kingdom of God and its righteousness," and all things that we need to get through this crisis will doubtless be provided to us. (Matt. 6:33)



+ Archbishop Cyril

29 February/13 March 2020