



GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF CHICAGO

ΙΕΡΑ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ ΣΙΚΑΓΟΥ

March 18, 2020

My Beloved,

The world has changed unimaginably since the beginning of Great Lent. As we continue to adjust our lives to the rapidly changing times, my daily prayers continue to be with you, the faithful of our Holy Metropolis.

The increasingly stringent guidelines issued by local, state and federal officials have caused us to come to terms with being physically separated from our neighbors, colleagues and friends. A tragic consequence of the current crisis is that we must also be separated from our fellow parishioners and priests and, therefore, cannot partake in the Eucharist and otherwise celebrate the divine services for the time being. The decision to *temporarily suspend* parish worship was the most difficult decision I've made as Metropolitan, and it brings me great heartache to know that one of my decisions brings understandable pain to clergy and laypeople of our Metropolis. At the same time, in accordance with the [Holy Eparchial Synod](#), and in light of recommendations I continue to receive from physicians and infectious disease experts, I believe this decision is still indispensable for the care and preservation of the members of our Metropolis and of our neighbors at large. Please rest assured that our directive will be reviewed regularly according to the conditions on the ground and updates received from expert sources.

While it is difficult for us to comprehend the rate and scale of change happening before our eyes, I remind you that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” (Heb 13:8). I strongly encourage you, my beloved, to reflect on this biblical verse. The truth is that the Church is eternal, because Christ, our Head, is eternal (Col 1:18). From momentary challenge to an existential crisis, our Church has survived and ultimately thrived over the span of millennia—amidst persecution, plague, invasion, genocide, and war. Because our Church is eternal and Christ is our Savior, we are afforded the strength not merely to cope with the trial that is before us, but to transcend it and be transfigured through it.

It is true that our parish churches are our spiritual homes. But ours is a faith that calls us to live a full, constant and complete life in Christ. We pray, venerate the icons, and reflect on the Holy Scriptures at church. But we also maintain these life-giving practices at home, and when we travel away from home. Indeed, when we are away from the parish home, we live in the *kat'oikon ecclesia*, the “Church of the home,” where God is still present and where we still grow as spiritual beings. Because we are created in the image of God (Gen 1:26), the Church is also present in our hearts. Our Lord reminds us, “the Kingdom of God is within you” (Lk 17:21). In this way, our faith is not solely a series of sacred excursions, but an ongoing way of life that is bound to Christ. Though we are separated from our parish communities, the Church always is with us, within us, and the same yesterday, today, and forever.

I fervently believe that, where there is a crisis, there is also opportunity. Given our exceptional circumstances, our distance from the sacraments can deepen our hunger and thirst for Christ; it can intensify our yearning for the moment when we can again be united with our beloved Bridegroom through the Eucharist. It is my heartfelt desire that this momentary hardship cultivates not just a yearning for the Eucharist, but also creates space for contemplation about how we can become one with Christ through all aspects of our lives. As your spiritual father, to see this outcome would bring tears of joy to me.



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To be sure, we are now experiencing the pangs of separation and suffering; we are anxious not only about sickness but about lost jobs and economic uncertainties; we are concerned about closed schools and the education of our youth; we are grieving the cancelation of many anticipated joys—from wedding and graduation celebrations to athletic events, art performances, and planned trips. *We are hurting, one and all.* And yet, our Lord is listening; our Lord invites us to speak our concerns, our pains, and our frustrations to Him. Indeed, this is the core of *prayer*—sharing what is in our hearts with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who is eager to hear from us, to unite with us, and to sanctify us with His grace.

And so, my beloved, I pray you find solace in knowing that we are and never will be spiritually isolated even if we are physically separated. I ask you to pray daily, to check in with and console the elderly and infirmed and to resist the temptation to panic, hoard and lose sight of Christ as our center. Care for and set a good example for all our neighbors. In short, be the living body of Christ in the world.

Please visit the [special page](#) launched on our website for information related to COVID-19 as well as spiritual nourishment. While we cannot physically be in our parishes to experience the Lenten services, we can read or listen to these powerful hymns and petitions, sharing and discussing them with loved ones around us. We can listen to spiritually edifying music and lectures, and watch videos about our faith and spiritual life. The priests, deacons, and I plan to reach out to you regularly in the days ahead with fresh reflections and ongoing spiritual support for our journey toward Christ's Cross and Resurrection.

There is much that is beyond our control amidst this pandemic. However, there is also much that is within our control! May we use the freedom gifted to us by God to choose freely to embrace Christ and each other, to bring goodness out of suffering and to resurrect our faith.

With paternal love in Christ,

+Metropolitan Nathanael of Chicago