

PASTORAL ENCYCLICAL IN THE TIME OF CURRENT EPIDEMIC

Our Righteous Father Paul the Simple of Egypt March 7/20, 2020

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The Holy Church has always enjoined Her children to use the occasion of trials and tribulations as a sobering reminder of the fragility and brevity of our earthly sojourn and as a call to turn our sinful lives towards our living God.

Now that the world is experiencing the spread of an epidemic, and all of us are equally exposed to its harmful effects, we should heed these injunctions of the Church, wake up from our spiritual slumber and use this time to bring forth fruits worthy of repentance. Fervent prayer, especially for those suffering from this epidemic, redoubled fasting, deep repentance of our sins, generous almsgiving, readiness to be of help to those afflicted, reconciliation with them who we have offended and forgiving those who offended us, these are the things that should occupy our mind in these moments, this is the mindset with which true Christians face the times of troubles.

Moreover, by offering repentance to God we not only help ourselves, but we also ask for God's forgiveness of the sins of the whole world and this way we become benefactors to our fellow men. And by turning our minds and hearts towards God we show our Saviour that we have received the message and we acknowledge that this calamity was brought upon us by our sins and because of our separation from Him. From this ensues deep humility and brokenness of heart, which are very pleasing in the eyes of God.

As an expression of our common repentance and united supplication to God in these trying times, the clergy of our Church will be instructed to read the following prayer at the end of each Divine Liturgy, before the dismissal:

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Let us pray to the Lord. Lord, have mercy.

Almighty God, Lord of Heaven and earth, and of all creation visible and invisible, in Thine ineffable goodness, look down upon us, Thy people. Be our helper and defender in this day of affliction. Thou knowest our weakness, Thou hearest our cry in repentance and contrition of heart. O Lord Who lovest mankind, deliver us from

the impending threat of the death-bearing pestilence. Send Thine angel to watch over us, grant health and recovery to those suffering in sickness, guide the hands of the physicians and preserve those who are healthy. Enable us to serve our suffering brothers and sisters in peace that together we may glorify Thy most honorable and majestic Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

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Likewise, we encourage everyone to make supplication to our Saviour, the Most Holy Theotokos and all the Saints in their private prayers. To this end, it will be good if we all recite daily (or even many times a day!) Psalm 22, "The Lord is my Shepherd...". As for how to deal with an epidemic in practical terms, the answer of the Church has always been the same – by prudence. By the virtue of prudence the Holy Fathers mean that we should avoid two opposite extremes in our behavior. On the one hand we should not be reckless and put our lives in danger foolishly. This smacks of pride and would amount to tempting God. We all remember the answer that our Saviour gave to the devil who told Him to throw Himself down from the roof of the Temple, because the angels would bear Him up – "thou shall not tempt the Lord thy God". (Matthew 4:7). On the other hand we should not sin with faithlessness, which makes us doubt the power of God in face of the tempestuous but ultimately vain power of any threatening of our lives, including the threat of an epidemic. As if anything could happen to us without God's knowledge and permission! As if God would abandon those who out of love and trust in Him perform all the acts of piety of our Holy Church without any fear or faintheartedness! We must remember here our Saviour's words to Peter, when he, walking on the waters but intimidated by the tempestuous waves, doubted whether the power of God was enough to save him from them – "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" (Matthew 14:31) Between recklessness and faithlessness lies prudence, by means of which neither do we tempt God by foolish behavior, nor do we insult Him by putting more trust in anything but in His power.

Therefore, let us walk this season of tribulation with prudence, casting away from us both senseless recklessness and fainthearted faithlessness. Let us use this time for our spiritual benefit by offering heartfelt repentance to our God, putting the trust of our salvation in His compassionate hands and beseeching Him that He should soon "remove His righteous threatening that hangeth over us, and have mercy on us." Amen. (Litany of the Lity)

Your fervent supplicants unto God,

- + **Gregory, Metropolitan of Boston, President of the Holy Synod**
- + **Andrew, Metropolitan of Toronto**
- + **Ignatius, Metropolitan of Seattle**
- + **Paul, Metropolitan of Nairobi**
- + **Chrysostomos, Bishop of Lanham**