Beloved in the Lord

The end of this Lenten Fast is very different from what we expected at the beginning. All of you know what has happened, and continues to happen, in our world since the beginning of March. Under the direction of their Eminences, Metropolitan Nicholas & Archbishop Elphidophoros, and the rest of the Eparchial Synod, and of His All-Holiness, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, we have celebrated most of the services of Great Lent and the entirety of Holy Week with only myself, the chanters, and one altar server present, and it appears that this will continue at least until May.

I know that it is tremendously hard to be separated from one another and from the Church in this time. It is tremendously hard for me to see nothing but empty pews, and the red light of the camera, each time I turn to face the Church during the services. To see the Church empty on Pascha will be heartbreaking for me, as I know it is for all of you.

And yet - in the face of all this trouble and brokenness in the world - Christ is Risen! Regardless of the grief and loss that we face, both the general loss of our regular worship, and normalcy in all aspects of our lives, and the more specific loss of those who have lost loved ones, both in our parish and throughout the larger community…regardless of all of this, Christ is Risen! And therefore, we who are Christian people dare to rejoice, dare to hope for better days, and most importantly of all, dare to celebrate that the brokenness of this world cannot triumph in the end. For Christ is Risen!

We cannot recover the lost opportunities of this Holy Week - but there are two parts of these saving days that we believe we will be able to celebrate on that blessed day when we are able once again to gather together in the Church. The first is the Evchelaion, the Holy Unction service. This service, which we customarily do on Holy Wednesday, consecrating the oil and anointing the Faithful for the healing of soul and body, we omitted on this Holy Wednesday, as this service is not limited to Holy Week, and can be celebrated at any time. We intend to do this service, then, at the first opportunity we have to come together in the Church. It will serve both to bring us back into the Church, and to uphold and strengthen our health, both in soul and in body, for whatever difficulties the days ahead may hold – and I pray that it may be a comfort to all of us as well, a small taste of Holy Week. The second is that, once the Church can be opened again, we will distribute the Holy Light of the Resurrected Lord to all the Faithful. The reality which we often forget is that...
every Sunday is a little Pascha, a little commemoration of the Lord’s Resurrection. So it is entirely appropriate that we make the first Sunday that we are all able to gather again in the Church a celebration of Pascha. We will be awaiting guidance and instructions from His Eminence regarding specifics of how the service will go, but this is the intent.

Moving forward from Pascha, we will continue to live stream our services, including the Vespers, Orthros, and Divine Liturgy for St. George. Candles can be donated and names submitted for prayer on the Church website - or you can call the Church office with those requests. We will meet by computer, smart phone, or phone on Zoom each Sunday at noon to have a virtual coffee hour - Orthodox Life continues as well on Zoom (Zoom information is at the bottom of this page). Other virtual events will be announced by email.

Normally we include in the Trophybearer the Church calendar and several flyers. As all normal activities are cancelled for the time being, we will instead include the transcript of several sermons from Great Lent and Holy Week, in both Greek and English.

One final point - the disruptions during Lent, and the uncertainties regarding Holy Week, prevented us from sending our normal mailing requesting Easter Donations. We know that these times are uncertain, and do not ask anyone whose financial resources are reduced in these times to make the donation - but we do ask all of you who have not seen interrupted income to please consider making as generous a donation as you can to the Church, both for Easter, and moving forward. The shutdowns have disrupted our normal income from the Grecian Center, as well as the weekly offering trays, and yet the costs of operating the Church continue. If you are able to make a donation, then please do so - your Church needs your support. You will find the Easter Envelope enclosed - you can also make a donation online at the Church website, or by calling the Church office.

Please pray for me, and our chanters, and our staff, and the entire parish, as you pray for your families and loved ones and all the world. Know that I pray always for all of you - since this began, I have remembered, by name, every member of the parish each time I celebrate the Divine Liturgy. I will continue to do so until we are able to gather once again, in joy, to celebrate the presence of the Lord in our midst.

ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ ΑΝΕΣΤΗ! Christ is Risen!

+Fr. Anthony Cook

Basic Information for St. George "Shelter in Place"
Church Website: http://stgeorge.mi.goarch.org
Church LiveStream: https://www.youtube.com/c/franthonyc-stgeorgesouthgate
Online Giving: https://giving.parishsoft.com/app/giving/st1630219
Parish Facebook Page: https://www.facebook.com/StGeorgeGOCSouthgate/
Fr. Anthony Facebook Page: https://www.facebook.com/franthonyc

PARISH ZOOM INFORMATION for Virtual Coffee Hour, Bible Study, etc
https://zoom.us/j/9419524282
1-312-626-6799 OR 1-929-436-2866
Meeting ID: 941 952 4282
Greek

H Ekkhliasia StékeTai Díplá Sa

Π. Άντωνιος Cook - Παρασκευή, 20 Μαρτίου, 2020

Σε αυτές τις Άγιες αλλά και παράλληλα δύσκολες μέρες που περνάμε όλοι, μοι είναι σημαντικό να σας μάλω στα Ελληνικά. Εδώ, στην Εκκλησία του Αγ. Γεωργίου του Τροπαιοφόρου, γνωρίζουμε ότι αυτό το διάστημα είναι πολύ δύσκολο για όλους, και περισσότερο για τους ηλικιωμένους της ενορίας μας. Επειδή τώρα όλοι καλείται να μείνει μακριά από την εκκλησία, να μην πηγάνετε στις ακολουθίες. Καταλαβαίνουμε ότι είναι ιδιαίτερα δύσκολο για τα άτομα που δεν έχουν διαδίκτυο (internet) στο σπίτι τους και δεν μπορούν να παρακολουθήσουν τις ευχές, τους όμοιους, τις ακολουθίες και τις προσευχές της εκκλησίας. Ετοί μεμει, εγώ και ο κοσ Ευάγγελος, κάναμε μία ακολουθία για εσάς, μόνο στα ελληνικά, για αυτές τις δύσκολες μέρες, του ιού. Η ακολουθία ήταν του Ακάθιστου Ύμνου, μαζί με άλλες ακολουθίες για την Παναγία Θεοτόκο μας είναι για αυτό το λόγο, όταν υπάρχει πανδημία. Προσεύχομαι για την βοήθεια της Παναγίας, και όλων των Αγίων, την βοήθεια του Χριστού μας, και την βοήθεια του Θεού μας. Ζητάμε την ελπίδα που μόνο θα βρούμε στον Θεό και στην βουλιά των ωρανών. Θέλω να ξέρετε ότι η εκκλησία δεν σας έχει ξεχάσει τώρα που μένετε από. Σας αγαπάμε, κανονικά προσευχές πάντα, στην εκκλησία και στα σπίτια μας. Αν εχέτε κάποιο πρόβλημα ή χρειάζεστε κάτι, όπως τα φάρμακα σας, φαγητό ή οτιδήποτε άλλο, σας παρακαλώ να με πάρετε τηλέφωνο και θα βρουμε βοήθεια από τους ανθρώπους της ενορίας μας. Ο αριθμός μου είναι: 734-716-2268

Σας παρακαλώ κάνετε προσευχές για όλους εμάς στα σπίτια σας, όπως εμείς κάνουμε πάντα προσευχές για εσάς. Παρόλο που δεν μπορούμε να είμαστε μαζί μεδα στην εκκλησία, μενούμε ενομομον στον Χριστό, και στα σπίτια καθένα μας, παραμένουμε μαζί στα χείρα του κυρίου μας. Οι Άγιοι μαζί μας είναι, η Παναγία Θεοτόκος μαζί μας είναι, ο Χριστός μαζί μας είναι, και όλοι εμείς, όλη η εκκλησία, είμαστε μαζί, και συντομά θα βρουμε χαρά, ελπίδα, ευάγγελη στον Χριστό. Ο Θεός μαζί σας πάντα, καθήκοντα σας και Καλή Ανάσταση σε όλους.

Amήν.

Grief, Repentance, and Quarantine

Fr. Anthony Cook - April 14, 2020
The Bridegroom Matins of Holy Tuesday Evening, with the Hymn of Kassiani

There is a common conflict in times of loss, in moments of grief. When we are seeking to comfort ourselves, or whoever it is that has suffered the loss, we desire above all to make it better. So we may say to ourselves, or we may say to our friend or neighbor who has suffered loss...we may tell ourselves or them that it's okay. We may tell them, if someone they love has died, that the person has gone to a better place, that they are at rest with the saints, that they have gone to heaven, and they no longer must suffer any pain. And therefore we may tell them it's okay, that they don't have to cry.

And all of these things are true, but that does not make this impulse to try to fix the loss right. In fact, it is very wrong, because it misses a critical piece of the puzzle. All of these things may be true about the person who has died, but our friend who is grieving, or our own heart, if it is broken in the face of loss, still suffers. It still is troubled, it still has been torn in two by the loss of one who is dear.

We see the same tension in moments of repentance. It is a hard thing to come for confession precisely because we know that the point of confession is that, in offering our sins, offering our brokenness to the Lord, He will forgive us, He will make it okay. And therefore it is a common struggle for all of humankind to come and actually repent. More common we see people coming and saying things that try to make it all okay. We catch ourselves saying things that try to make it all okay. "Sure, I committed this sin, I committed that sin, but I'm not worse than anyone else." "I did this thing or that thing, but these are common. Everyone struggles with these things." "Yes I committed this, yes, I did that, I know." "I'm trying, I'm struggling." "It's my vice, it's my my little sin on the side."

And our confession begins to sound more like self justification than actual repentance. We're trying to make it all okay before it actually IS okay. And although the Lord will forgive us, although he will wipe away our sin,
although he will abolish the blot on our name, the writ of condemnation against us, and embrace us and accept
us as His children...nonetheless, to pretend that it is okay is to miss the point. The point is that our hearts are
wounded by our sin, that we are sick. And as we seek the cure it does not change the fact that at the present
moment we remain deeply troubled and ill with the many sins that oppress us.

The marvel of the sinful woman about whom we sing hymns tonight is this: she who had never done anything
righteous, she who had rushed after every sinful deed, was able to come and repent without justification,
without trying to make it better before it was. Everything that she did was done in abject humility and
repentance, not because she had read a book saying that, if you want to repent you need to say these words, but
because, for a critical moment, she saw herself truly, she understood how far she had fallen, how distant she was
from the Lord and Creator before Whom as she stood, how much she did not deserve what she was going to ask.

We do not know what was in her mind. We do not know whether she doubted and questioned whether He would
or could forgive her, or whether she simply stood in stark self-knowledge. But she came, and she begged His
mercy, making no excuses, hiding behind no justification, facing the brokenness of her heart, the sickness of her
life, head-on, and offering that, offering the craven and filthy sacrifice of herself to the Lord. And therefore,
because she came honestly, she was forgiven, and all was made right which an instant before had been so very
wrong. But it could not have been that way if she pretended that everything was okay.

There is a lesson for us here, a lesson for me, as the priest, and for all of us, because in these strange times, the
urge is to say that it is all okay, that perhaps there is a blessing hidden in these troubled times, that somehow it is
a more authentic experience of Holy Week that we are blessed to have, shut up in our homes and away from the
church.

I have said all of these things in the last few weeks. I have said these things even this very day. And the same
thing is wrong with these things as with the false comfort in the face of grief and the false humility and
repentance that so often we see, and which we have already spoken about. To pretend, to try to say that there is
good in this...all those things may be true that they miss the critical reality that all of us are struggling with.

Today, tonight we are kept from our Lord. In these troubled days we are bereft of the most critical support to our
lives. We have lost the comfort of Holy Week and Pascha. We stand in darkness, we stand in trouble Grief and
loss are a present reality for us. Brokenness and sickness are a present reality for us. And although we know that
the other truth, the other reality, that Jesus Christ is in our midst, that he has conquered sin and sickness and
death, and that in the darkness of the Church that is empty of all the Faithful, there will once again shine the
Light of the Lord's Resurrection, there will once again resound the voices proclaiming the Lord's Resurrection...
although these things are true, they are not yet present.

And the honest thing for us right now, for me, and the chanters, and the altar helper, who are here, and for all of
you who are trapped within your home – the honest and right thing for us to do is to confess the truth that it is
not okay, that this is not a good thing, that nothing about this is right. Not in order that we rail against it, not in
order that we complain about it, not in order that we give ourselves over to anxiety, or to fear, but to confess
rather that this is the present darkness and brokenness of this world. This is the present darkness and brokenness
of our lives. This is the present reality of a fallen world, exiled from God.

And then, in the midst of that darkness that we have owned, that we have confessed, that we have
acknowledged, we hear this confident assurance. To us in our brokenness and sickness and death – Christ
comes. To those who grieve He brings comfort. To those who repent, He brings forgiveness. And to those who
labor in exile and loneliness, in sickness and in trouble, He brings reconciliation, He brings light, He brings life
from the tomb.

We stand in darkness tonight. We acknowledge it. We do not pretend it is anything other than an awful thing that
has come upon us. But we look to Christ, Who is the source of light and life and salvation. We confess our grief,
we confess our sin, we confess our fear, our anxiety, our pain – and we look to Him to give us comfort and
healing and forgiveness and life. Once again, we say Kali Anastasi. A blessed resurrection to all of you. And
may the Lord deliver us from every trouble. Amen.
On Communion and Exile  
*Fr. Anthony Cook - April 5, 2020*  
*The 5th Sunday of the Fast, of St. Mary of Egypt*

In the gospel today (Mark 10:32-45), the Lord tells his disciples what is going to happen. He lays out the whole story – that He will go to Jerusalem, and He will be welcomed first and then rejected, that He will be condemned, that He will be crucified, that He will die, and that on the third day He will rise. Everything that is going to happen, He tells them in advance.

And then two of them come to Him and they say they want a favour. They say, "Lord when You come in Your kingdom, we ask You...let it be the two of us, us brothers, that stand that Your right and at Your left."

It is as though they were not listening to what He said. He tells them that He is going to suffer, He tells them that He is going to die, He tells them that this truth, this reality that He is bringing to them is not what they expected...and their response is to ask Him if they can be the two most important people after Him. This doesn't make sense.

And yet...and ye... we find that we do the same thing. The Lord says to us, "In this life you will have trouble, you will have tribulation, you will have great suffering...but be of good cheer. I have overcome the world." And somehow we think that means that we are entitled to get to have a peaceful, joyful, stable, safe, secure, and healthy life, with no trouble, with no interruptions, with no disruptions of what we like, of what makes us comfortable. For all of us, it is as though we are not listening to what the Lord says. He tells us, "Whoever would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever tries to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for the sake of the gospel: his life will be saved."

And yet every time something bad happens, every time our hopes and our desires are disappointed, every time we have an opportunity to lose our life, the things that are important to us, to let go of them and to choose instead the Lord and the gospel...every time, we find ourselves, we catch ourselves complaining, resenting this injustice.

And then before our eyes is set St. Mary, who had a comfortable life, who had everything she wanted. It wasn't good, but she had it...and she realized that if she held on to what she desired, what she wanted, then she would lose Him, she would be an exile forever from God. And she repented. She changed the way she thought and the way she lived, she changed where she put her desire. And it was a struggle. it was a fight. For 40 years and more, she struggled against what she wanted, choosing instead, every time, to seek the Lord.

And for us, now, she is a beautiful example. Because in all of those years, not 40 days but 40 years and more, she did not receive Holy Communion. She did not once set foot inside the church. Not once did she receive the sacrament of confession. She received communion twice in all her life: once before she went out into the desert after she had repented, and once, on the last day of her life, she received again. And yet her life was entirely an offering in Thanksgiving to God.

Saint Mary of Egypt was not able to receive the Eucharist frequently, but in her life of repentance, her life of single-minded seeking after the mercy and the Grace and the love of the Lord, she became an offering of Thanksgiving herself. She became a vessel of the presence and the Grace and the power and the love and the mercy and the salvation of God.

And for all of us who are exiled likewise from the church, who are kept away from Holy Communion right now - we too are called to understand that sometimes suffering comes. This is not surprising. This is not unusual. This is not unjust. This is what the Lord told us about before.

And from Saint Mary of Egypt we understand how to face it when we cannot receive the Eucharist. We must become people of Thanksgiving and worship - the people of the Eucharistic life. We offer ourselves and one another and our whole life in Thanksgiving, and we pray eagerly for the day when we are brought back into the church, and we are blessed to receive again the Holy Mysteries of the Lord.

I pray that, for all of us, we may find the wisdom, and the endurance, and the strength to continue in repentance, to continue in self offering, in imitation of Saint Mary of Egypt, and through her intercessions and those of all the saints.

Amen.
Prayers for These Strange and Troubled Times

Psalm 23

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He makes me to lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside the still waters.
He restored my soul;
He leads me in the paths of righteousness
For His name’s sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil; For You are with me;
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life;
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

A Prayer for the Faithful During This Pandemic (from Fr. Teodor Petrutiu)

“ Heavenly Father, Almighty God, Who still the storms and soothe the desperate hearts through Your Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ – bring hope and courage to all people around the world who wait or work in uncertainty.

Make known Your love and peace through those who work to bring order to the chaos: scientists, doctors, nurses, & health workers.

By Your Spirit, we pray, inspire those researching and seeking for drugs, medicines and health care systems to soothe the suffering of the people.

Help us to endure the times of uncertainty and give us strength to face the challenges ahead. Give us the assurance of Your presence even now, that we may hold fast to the promise of hope, and life, and peace that are alone to be found in You. And in the midst of this, keep us strong in faith and in love.

We turn to our Savior, Your Son Jesus Christ, the Physician of our souls and bodies, for His strength and endurance as we entrust ourselves and those affected by this illness around the world to Your infinite and inscrutable power and love.

Help us to shoulder the burden of suffering and make us bearers of the hope that You have given to us, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord together with the Holy Spirit, now and forever,

Amen.”

Comfort from the Lord

(John 14:27/16:33)

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you: not as the world gives, I give unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid...I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But be of good cheer; I have overcome the world!"

(Katὰ Ἰωάννην 14:27/16:33)

«Εἰρήνην ἀφίημι ὑμῖν, εἰρήνην τὴν ἐμὴν δίδωμι ὑμῖν· οὐ καθὼς ὁ κόσμος δίδωσιν, ἐγὼ δίδωμι ὑμῖν. Μὴ ταρασσόσθω ὑμῶν ἡ καρδία μηδὲ δειλιάτω... Ταῦτα λελάληκα ὑμῖν ἕνα ἐν ἐμοὶ εἰρήνην ἔχητε. Ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ θλῖψιν ἔχετε· ἀλλὰ θαρσεῖτε, ἐγὼ νενίκησα τὸν κόσμον.»