



HOLY MOTHER QUEEN OF ALL (*PANAGIA PANTOVASILISSA*) GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

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And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

[John 1: 5]

To the beloved members of the Holy Mother Queen of All/ *Panagia Pantovasilissa* parish family: Greetings in Christ, the only True Physician of our souls and bodies.

My friends, this past weekend some few of us gathered together, amidst the gathering storm, to calmly worship our Lord, and to seek the strength of our Saviour. We had not yet reached the point where such a gathering presented a grave risk. With many of you joining the few of us in attendance through our live-stream on Facebook, we joined together in prayer for the commonwealth, and shared the spiritual succour that we can only derive from our Saviour Jesus Christ, the only True Physician of our souls and bodies. It is something that we will all sorely need in the days ahead.

We have now reached the point where the temporary suspension of in person gatherings, coupled with extraordinary measures to minister to the members of the Body of Christ through technological means, represents the contribution that we can make as a community towards the ultimate and successful resolution of the current pandemic. This is not a decision we make lightly. It is made in accordance with the advice of the Archdiocese. It is made in light of the policy followed by our separated brethren in the denominations all around us, and throughout the Commonwealth. But above all, it is made in the interests of protecting both those within our community, as well as those in the greater Lexington community which surrounds our beloved parish. We are a family. I hear it time and again from those who visit our parish. And they are always amazed by how we care for our own! We are tight-knit together, and there is something very special and unique about that. In the present situation, however, this poses challenges. We have many who are vulnerable among us, either due to age or because of other medical factors. And we visit each other frequently. This is a good and glorious thing, when the laity take on and support the ministries of the Church. In the present situation, however, it presents a challenge to our corporate worship, due to the very real possibility of community spread at our Sunday gatherings. Consequently, this too played a role in my decision. All of that said, the question remains: So, what are we going to do?

My friends, as surely as we live in uncertain times, we also live in a time of unprecedented technological advancements. It is time for us to take a step back and confirm ourselves in Christ who alone provides comfort. It is up to us, during times of earthly tribulation, to use all of the tools at our disposal to provide His comfort and compassion, both to our own parish family, as well as to the people of the city of Lexington and the Commonwealth of Kentucky. It is our solemn call to be a light to those in darkness, and a comfort to those who are afflicted, and we shall not shirk this task. Consequently, below I have explained what we are doing this week. In the Orthodox

Church, while we value the praxis of our faith, we are not a people of musty rubricism or dead traditionalism. We are a people whose faith is alive with the very Christ who first gave it to the Apostles. Simply put, the entire purpose of the services is to put the people in communion with God, and our presence is an important part of that equation. Since the people cannot be present this week, we need to look at how we might best serve their needs in their absence, and part of that is going to be calming their fears and preparing them for the difficult road ahead. We have all experienced a great upheaval in the normal order of our lives, and the world around us looks very different; it is important, both psychologically and spiritually, that we acknowledge that and also that we may be assured that in the midst of the darkness of the world, the light of Christ continues to shine.

Consequently, in lieu of the normal services on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday of this week, I will be live-streaming a video program via our Facebook page. The title is *Calm Amidst the Storm*. We will discuss both the ongoing pandemic and the panic associated with it, as well as the Lenten services and other themes appropriate to the season of the Fast in which we find ourselves. The tone will be lighthearted. In a world where we are surrounded by bad news, it is important that we remember to smile, to laugh, and to share our joy as well as our sorrow and uncertainty. There should be the opportunity for realtime interaction during the presentation of this program, as we meet together to discuss our fears, our challenges, and our shared commitment to provide Christ's comfort to those around us. We will continue to reassess this ministry as events warrant. In the absence of in-person worship, we will also be streaming the Divine Liturgy through our Facebook page. For those of you who tuned in this past week, that was a test run. We *do* have a tripod that works; the one we tried to use Sunday was not-suited to the task (Many thanks to Trevor and Ann who held the camera!). This coming week, without innovating, or in any way altering the structure and form of our Divine Liturgy, I will continue to try to adapt to the fact that our congregation is remotely participating. Be assured that the suspension of in-person worship is a temporary situation that we will rectify at the earliest opportunity. Now, however, we have a moral obligation to protect those around us. Please be attentive to the parish e-mails and our Facebook page for further clarifications and announcements.

My friends, I close with this assurance: Things will get back to normal. The world around us will settle down. And we shall be stronger, both as individuals and as a community, on the other side of this temporary time of trial. Take this time to recommit yourself to the life of faith in Christ and His Church, which alone can provide lasting strength and the sacramental gift of the grace of God. And to maintain the bonds of fellowship in spite of the separation we are forced to endure, participate remotely in the liturgical worship and ministerial efforts of the Church with the sense of longing which we all share as we look towards the time when we shall be able to meet one another again face-to-face. May this temporary period teach us all how deeply we should cherish our presence in fellowship and worship. And may we all stay safe in the troubled days ahead.

With prayers for the protection of our beloved Commonwealth and for the intercessions of her patron, the Theotokos *Panagia Pantovasilissa*, I remain,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Fr. William J. Redmon". The signature is written in a cursive style and includes a small icon of a cross and a chalice to the left of the name.

Rev. Fr. William J. Redmon

Presiding Priest

Holy Mother Queen of All Greek Orthodox Church