



FROM YOUR PASTOR

March 28, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ!

Slava Isusu Christu! Glory to Jesus Christ!

*"I will lift up my eyes to the hills - From whence comes my help?
My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth."*

"The Lord shall preserve you from all evil. He shall preserve your soul." Psalm 121:1-2 & 7

I pray this letter finds you well.

During World War II, President Franklin D. Roosevelt was noted to have fireside chats with the nation informing them of events in the nation and world. I would like this letter to be a conversation on many different topics. It will be lengthy. You don't have to read it all at once. Take your time. Also, if you choose to do so, share it with anyone who might find it useful.

In my sermon on Sunday, March 15th, I started by asking "Is this a bad dream? Are you afraid, anxious, nervous, stressed? I am!" So let us turn to the word of God in the Holy Bible for help. There we read":

"Therefore, humble yourselves, casting all your care upon Him for He cares for you."
I Peter 5:7

"For He Himself has said 'I will never leave you or forsake you.'
So we may boldly say 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear.'" Hebrews 13:5-6

But I'm weak in faith. I need comforting. Turn to the Bible. Again God's words say:

"Blessed be the God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our grief and deep sorrow, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort which we ourselves are comforted by God."
2 Corinthians 1:3-4

On Sunday, March 15th, after the Liturgy, I reminded everyone to practice social distancing and to wash their hands while singing “Happy Birthday” twice or “Mnohiya Lita” 3 times. For me, I enjoy singing the Polish “Stolyat” (100 Years). It takes 30 seconds - 10 more than the CDC recommends. It is important to follow their directions. Listen to the advice of country singer John Rich’s new song “Stay Home, Stay Home, No Reason to Roam.”

Also, on Sunday, March 15th, following the singing of “Bozhe Velyky” & “God Bless America” at the Ukrainian Liturgy, I asked the choir to sing a song that is sung on Christmas Eve – “Z Namy Boh” (God is with us, understand all nations.). It was a beautiful way to depart to our homes. Always remember that God is with us. We are not alone in this battle

Reflections

These last few weeks have truly caused us to organize our priorities in life. What we once thought was so important has suddenly lost that importance. Yet, in spite of such a worldwide calamity, we find hope in the fact that there are so many heroes stepping forth to fight the unseen enemy.

We give thanks and pray fervently for the health care workers – the doctors, nurses, hospital (a number of them in our parish) who daily leave their families to go into the trenches to fight the virus head on. We remember the first responders, police and firefighters. I hear the ambulances going by multiple times a day, transferring the sick to Parma Hospital. We appreciate the workers in local grocery stores and pharmacies, the truck drivers, many of them our fellow Ukrainians who deliver the foods to stores all across the nation Remember our military and the National Guard. Remember in prayer their families who worry about them every time they leave their homes. Pray also for our political leaders, that our Lord will give wisdom to do what is right and necessary for our citizens. Pray also for the doctors and scientists who are working for a cure for this dreadful virus.

Helping Others

C.S. Lewis wrote: “Hardships often prepare people for an extraordinary destiny.”

Mark Twain wrote: “Kindness is a language the deaf can hear and blind can see.”

Mother Teresa wrote: “Prayer in action is love and love in action is service. Try to give unconditionally, whatever a person needs in the moment. Do not worry about why problems exist in the world - just respond to people’s needs.”

During the Spanish flu of 1918, a woman named Edna Register Boone, from a small town in Alabama (you can see her interview on YouTube) when, at 100 years old, she gave an oral history of the experience. She was ten years old and said “I was raised in a Christian family. I knew I had to do my part.” She mentioned taking soup to the sick and leaving it on their door steps. Her family was the only family in the town not affected by the flu.

Now is the time to do our part in any small way. Remember the words of Jesus –

“Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of Mine, you did for Me.” Matthew 25:40

Yesterday we took muffins and potato pancakes to our neighbors. It was a small gesture but appreciated. Think of what you can do, especially for someone elderly and alone. Please do something. Even a phone call or a card would show concern and be appreciated. A smile and “thank you” to the workers in the grocery store – simple gestures will mean more than we will ever know.

I am also thinking and praying for the many homeless who are on our streets, sleeping under bridges and those who work with them on a daily basis. They need extra donations to cover the many unexpected expenses during this virus. Please consider making a donation to St. Herman’s House of Hospitality. You will be doing the Lord’s work.

Praying as a Family

During the confinement in our homes I strongly encourage families to pray together, especially before meals. The prayer of our bishops regarding the pandemic has been used at our parish Liturgies and is available on our parish’s website. It is a prayer that encompasses all our cares and needs at this time. Please use it! However, as a family, I hope everyone can recite the Lord’s Prayer together and end with a short blessing including mentioning those in need of prayer. For example, mention healthcare workers, first responders, grocery workers, the sick, the homeless, etc. Please encourage the children in your family to prepare their own special commemorations following the Lord’s Prayer. Tell them before the meal, so that they can think of who they would like to mention. I heard such a prayer and I was uplifted.

Remember the words of Psalm 8:2:

“From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise.”

And our Lord’s words in Matthew 21:16:

“Do you hear what these children are saying?” They asked Him ‘Yes’ replied Jesus, ‘Have you never read, “From the lips of children and infants you, Lord, have called forth your praise.”

Let us all pray quietly throughout the day. It doesn’t have to be a structured prayer - just say

*“Lord help us!”, “Lord Protect those who need you.”, “Lord bring a cure to this virus.”,
“Lord have mercy on your world.”*

I am troubled that our nation has shown little if any desire to turn to God during these trying times. In the past, this was an important part of comforting the nation. I pray that this will change and our leaders will not hesitate to ask us, as a nation, to pray.

Caring For Our Children

It must be very difficult for the children to be confined to their homes and equally challenging for parents. They are faced with learning from home. The zoo, museums, movies, etc. are closed. A sign on the swing at the local park around the corner reads "All Parma City Parks are Closed." Please assure them that God loves us. Read to them His words of comfort.

"Do not be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will help you. I will hold you with my righteous right hand." Isaiah 41:10

Also, please note that there are special children's activities available at uocyouth.org. Use the time wisely to bring your family closer together and to God. Remind them of the joyous times, especially at Easter, and the joy of Christ's Resurrection by keeping our beautiful traditions in your home.

Donations - We need your help!

The economy has been given a lot of attention over the last few days. Millions of people are without work. Hopefully the stimulus package will be of some comfort. However, the stimulus package will not be of any assistance to our parish. We have lost all of our sources of revenue. There are no more Sunday collections, Pyrohy sales or Fish Frys. At the same time, monthly parish maintenance expenses still must be paid.

Donations to the parish can be made electronically by going on to the parish web page.

<https://www.stvladimirs.org/donate1>

When I was ordained and sent to my first parish in Maplewood, New Jersey, at the ages of 22 and 26, Mary Anne and I were excited that we were to be a part of working to construct a new church building. The structure had four cinder block walls, no roof, no windows, mud basement floor and, to our surprise, no money to continue construction. God blessed us abundantly in many unbelievable ways. I, as their pastor, learned that I had to practice what I preached. With that in mind, last week I informed Board president Serhyi Nahornyj that I will not accept my monthly salary until we return to regular Sunday Liturgies and normal parish activities.

Once again, please make donations online.

Directives of our Hierarchs

Please note that during this pandemic, at the direction of our hierarchs, no services with faithful present are permitted. Our church website has a list of numerous services online, including those from our Diocesan Center, Ukraine, Canada and various parishes throughout the country. Some of our parish's services will be broadcast on Facebook Live. Check our web page for updates.

Your Clergy are Willing to Assist

Like so many millions of Americans, your clergy have been working from home. Always remember that you can call Fr. Michael, Fr. Deacon Ihor or me if you would like to speak with us. If I am outside, leave a message on the answering machine and I will call you back. Please don't hesitate.

On a Personal Note

On a personal note, please pray for Mary Anne. Just imagine her hardship living with me 24/7. To give her a break, I asked Michael if I could stay at his house. Without hesitation he said "No." Melanie told me "If we were on an island, you would be voted off."

In all seriousness, both of our children have been very helpful and we are blessed. Because of my two past lung surgeries, they are very protective. Coronavirus is a lung disease. Also, if this confinement continues and Laura, my hair stylist cannot work, I will finally be able to grow my man bun.

Closing

Our Holy Orthodox Church services rely heavily on the 150 psalms found in the Old Testament. These psalms are sung or read at Saturday vespers, Sunday Liturgies and, especially now, during the Wednesday evening Pre-Sanctified Liturgy. The words to Psalm 121 are printed at the beginning of my letter "I will lift up my eyes to the hills." Over the years I have spoken numerous times that I love Gospel music and have attended numerous African American churches on Sunday evenings after visiting parishioners at the Cleveland Clinic. One of my favorite hymns is Psalm 121. During these times of great anxiety and stress I find comfort in the song "My Help" sung by the Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir in HD. You can access the YouTube link here to view it: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k47xB8eoT5g> The choir is directed by their church's "Pani Matka." The site has over 7 million views with over 1,200 comments. I hope you find the song uplifting. Listen to the words and read the entire Psalm. Also, read some of the 1,200 comments.

I pray that we all remain healthy in body and soul as well as we put our Faith and trust in Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He will get us through this calamity. I look forward to a time, very soon, that we will once again gather together in worship. Until then, please pray for me and my family, and know that we are praying for each of you.

May Our Lord's blessings be upon you, your loved ones and our entire world.

In Christ,
Fr. John