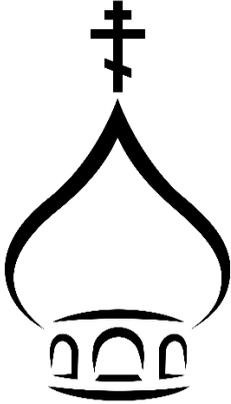


Readers Vespers

Wednesday, May 23, 2020

6th SUNDAY OF PASCHA – Sunday of the Blind Man



SAINT NICHOLAS
RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH



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RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

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Note to our Guests and Friends Visiting St. Nicholas:

We offer a most sincere and heart-felt welcome to St. Nicholas Church! Please be advised that according to the ancient traditions of the Orthodox Church, the Sacrament of Holy Communion is to be administered only to Orthodox Christians who have prepared themselves to receive the Holy Sacrament.

(Please note - Information to be included in next Sunday's bulletin must be submitted by noon on Thursday. Thank you! ~ Jennifer N. Bzik)

980 Bridle Path Road | Bethlehem, PA 18017-3120 | T: 610-867-0402
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Readers Vespers

Wednesday, May 23, 2020

6th SUNDAY OF PASCHA – Sunday of the Blind Man

At the appointed time we begin:

O God cleanse me a sinner and have mercy on me (3).

Blessed is our God, always now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Christ is Risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, **and upon those in the tombs bestowing life! (3)**

Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us. (3)

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

O Most Holy Trinity, have mercy on us. Lord, cleanse us from our sins. Master, pardon our transgressions. Holy One, visit and heal our infirmities for Thy name's sake.

Lord have mercy. (3)

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Our Father, Who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

For Thine is the Kingdom, and the power and the glory of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. (Amen.)

Lord have mercy (12) Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Come, let us worship God our King! (metania)

Come, let us worship and fall down before Christ, our King and our God!
(metania)

Come, let us worship and fall down before Christ Himself our King and our God!
(metania)

Psalm 104

Bless the Lord, O my soul! O Lord my God, Thou art very great! Thou art clothed with honor and majesty, Who coverest Thyself with light as with a garment, Who hast stretched out the heavens like a tent, Who hast laid the beams of Thy chambers on the waters. Who makest the clouds Thy chariot, Who ridest on the wings of the wind, Who makest the winds Thy messengers; fire and flame Thy ministers. Thou didst set the earth on its foundations, so that it should never be shaken. Thou didst cover it with the deep as with a garment; the waters stood above the mountains. At Thy rebuke they fled; at the sound of Thy thunder they took to flight. The mountains rose, the valleys sank down to the place which Thou didst appoint for them. Thou didst set a bound which they should not pass, so that they might not again cover the earth. Thou makest springs gush forth in the valleys; they flow between the hills, they give drink to every beast of the field; the wild asses quench their thirst. By them the birds of the air have their habitation; they sing among the branches. From Thy lofty abode Thou waterest the mountains; the earth is satisfied with the fruit of Thy work. Thou dost cause the grass to grow for the cattle, and plants for man to cultivate, that he may bring forth food from the earth, and wine to gladden the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread to strengthen man's heart. The trees of the Lord are watered abundantly, the cedars of Lebanon which he planted. In them the birds build their nests; the stork has her home in the fir trees. The high mountains are for the wild goats; the rocks are a refuge for the badgers. Thou hast made the moon to mark the seasons; the sun knows its time for setting. Thou makest darkness, and it is night, when all the beasts of the forest creep forth. The young lions roar for their prey, seeking their food from God. When the sun rises, they get them away and lie down in their dens. Man goes forth to his work and to his labor until the evening. O Lord, how manifold are Thy works! In wisdom hast Thou made them all; the earth is full of Thy creatures. Yonder is the sea, great

and wide, which teems with things innumerable, living things both small and great. There go the ships, and Leviathan which Thou didst form to sport in it. These all look to Thee, to give them their food in due season. When Thou givest to them, they gather it up; when Thou openest Thy hand, they are filled with good things. When Thou hidest Thy face, they are dismayed; when Thou takest away their breath, they die and return to their dust. When Thou sendest forth Thy Spirit, they are created; and Thou renewest the face of the ground. May the glory of the Lord endure for ever, may the Lord rejoice in His works, Who looks on the earth and it trembles, Who touches the mountains and they smoke! I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have being. May my meditation be pleasing to Him, for I rejoice in the Lord. Let sinners be consumed from the earth, and let the wicked be no more! Bless the Lord, O my soul! Praise the Lord!

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: both now and ever, and to ages of ages. Amen. Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia. Glory to Thee, O God! (3)

Great Litany

The regular petitions are not intoned, instead:

Lord, have mercy! (12) Through the prayers of our holy fathers, O Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us and save us. (Amen.)

Lord, I Call

(Tone 4) Lord I call upon Thee, hear me! Hear me, O Lord! Lord, I call upon Thee, hear me! Receive the voice of my prayer, when I call upon Thee, hear me O Lord! Let my prayer arise, in Thy sight as incense, and let the lifting up of my hands, be an evening sacrifice, hear me O Lord!

(10) Bring my soul out of prison, that I may give thanks to Thy name!

By Thy precious Cross, O Christ, Thou hast put the devil to shame. By Thy Resurrection, Thou hast blunted the sting of sin and saved us from the gates of death. We glorify Thee, O only-begotten One.

(9) The righteous will surround me; for Thou wilt deal bountifully with me.

Christ was led as a sheep to the slaughter in order to grant Resurrection to the human race. The princes of hell were frightened by this, for the gates of sorrow were lifted. Christ the King of glory had entered, saying to those in chains: "Go forth!" And to those in darkness: "Come to the light!"

(8) Out of the depths I cry to Thee, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice!

O great wonder! The Creator of the invisible suffered in the flesh in His love for man and rose again immortal. Come, O sons of nations, let us worship Him, for delivered from error by His compassion, we have learned to sing of one God in three Persons!

(7) Let Thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications!

We offer Thee our evening worship, O never-setting Light, Who didst come in these last days to the world in the flesh; Who even didst descend to hell to dispel its darkness. Who hast revealed the light of Resurrection to the nations. Glory to Thee, O Lord and Giver of light!

(6) If Thou, O Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with Thee.

We glorify the Leader of our salvation; by His Resurrection from the dead, the world was saved from deceit. The assembly of Angels rejoices as the deceit of demons is overthrown. Fallen Adam rises as the devil falls.

(5) For Thy name's sake have I waited for Thee, O Lord, my soul has waited for Thy word; my soul has hoped on the Lord.

The guards were instructed by the lawless ones: "Hide the rising of Christ, take money and say: 'The body was stolen from the tomb while we were asleep.'" But who has heard of a body being stolen, a body embalmed and naked, with its grave clothes left behind in the tomb? Do not be deceived, O Jews, study the words of the Prophets and understand: Christ is the Redeemer of the world and all powerful!

(4) From the morning watch until night, from the morning watch, let Israel hope on the Lord!

O Lord, Who hast captured hell and trampled on death, Thou hast enlightened the world by Thy precious Cross. O Savior, have mercy on us!

(3) For with the Lord there is mercy and with Him is plenteous redemption, and He will deliver Israel from all his iniquities.

(2) Praise the Lord, all nations! Praise Him, all peoples!

The man blind from birth asked himself: "Was I born blind because of my parents' sins? Or am I a living sign of the people's faithlessness? I am not content to continue asking whether it is night or day. My feet can no longer endure tripping on the stones. I have seen nothing: neither the sun shining, nor the image of my Maker. But I entreat Thee, O Christ God, look upon me and have mercy on me!"

(1) For His mercy is abundant towards us; and the truth of the Lord endureth forever.

Jesus, passing by the Temple, met a man blind from birth. He had compassion on him and put spittle on his eyes, saying: "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam!" He washed himself and then gave glory to God. His neighbors asked him: "Who opened thine eyes, which no one could heal before?" He cried out: "A man called Jesus said to me: 'Wash in Siloam!' and now I see; He is truly the Christ, the Messiah Whom Moses foretold in the Law. He is the Savior of our souls!"

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;

Passing by the way, O Lord, Thou didst meet a man blind from birth. Thy Disciples were puzzled and asked: "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered: "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be revealed in him. I must work the works of Him Who sent me, which no one else can do." As He said this, He spat on the ground and made clay of the spittle, and anointed the man's eyes with the clay and said to him: "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam!" He went and washed,

and was made whole, crying: "Lord, I believe!" He worshipped Thee, and we cry: "Have mercy on us!"

Now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

In the Red Sea of old, a type of the Virgin Bride was prefigured. There Moses divided the waters; here Gabriel assisted in the miracle. There Israel crossed the sea without getting wet, here the Virgin gave birth to Christ without seed. After Israel's passage, the sea remained impassable; after Emmanuel's birth, the Virgin remained a Virgin. O ever-existing God Who didst appear as Man, O Lord, have mercy on us!

(Wisdom! Let us attend!)

Gladsome Light

O Gladsome Light of the holy glory of the immortal Father, heavenly, holy, blessed: Jesus Christ! Having come to the setting of the sun, and beheld the light of evening, we praise the Father, Son and Holy Spirit: God! At all times Thou art worthy, Thou art worthy of praise in songs as Son of God, and Giver of Life. Therefore, the world glorifies Thee!

Evening Prokeimenon

Wisdom! Let us Attend! The Prokeimenon in the 6th tone: The Lord is King, He is robed in majesty.

Verses: The Lord is clothed with strength and He hath girt Himself. For He established the world which shall not be shaken. Holiness becometh Thy house, O Lord, unto length of days.

Vouchsafe, O Lord

Vouchsafe, O Lord, to keep us this night without sin. Blessed art Thou, O Lord, the God of our fathers, and praised and glorified is Thy Name forever. Amen. Let Thy mercy be upon us, O Lord, even as we have set our hope on Thee. Blessed art Thou, O Lord, teach me Thy statutes! Blessed art Thou, O Master, make me to understand Thy statutes! Blessed art Thou, O Holy One, enlighten me with Thy statutes! Thy mercy, O Lord, endureth forever. O despise not the

works of Thy hands. To Thee belongeth worship, to Thee belongeth praise, to Thee belongeth glory: to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen

Litany of Supplication

The regular petitions are not intoned, instead:

Lord, have mercy! (12) Through the prayers of our holy fathers, O Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us and save us. (Amen.)

Aposticha

Tone 5 (for the Resurrection)

We magnify Thee in songs of praise, O incarnate Christ and Savior. By accepting the Cross and death for our sake, as the Lord and Lover of man, Thou didst overthrow the gates of hell, and didst arise on the third day, saving our souls.

Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered; let those who hate Him flee from before His face!

Today, a sacred Pascha is revealed to us: a new and holy Pascha, a mystical Pascha, a Pascha worthy of veneration, a Pascha which is Christ the Redeemer, a blameless Pascha, a great Pascha, a Pascha of the faithful, a Pascha which has opened to us the gates of Paradise, a Pascha which sanctifies all the faithful.

As smoke vanishes so let them vanish; as wax melts before the fire!

Come from that scene, O women bearers of glad tidings, and say to Zion: "Receive from us the glad tidings of joy, of Christ's Resurrection! Exult and be glad, and rejoice, O Jerusalem, seeing Christ the King, Who comes forth from the tomb like a bridegroom in procession!"

So the sinners will perish before the face of God. But let the righteous be glad!

The myrrh-bearing women, at the break of dawn, drew near to the tomb of the Life-giver. There they found an Angel sitting upon the stone. He greeted them with these words: "Why do you seek the Living among the dead? Why do you

mourn the Incorrupt amid corruption? Go, proclaim the glad tidings to His disciples!"

This is the day which the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it!

Pascha of beauty, the Pascha of the Lord, A Pascha worthy of honor has dawned for us. Oh, Pascha! Let us embrace each other joyously! Pascha, ransom from affliction! For today, as from a bridal chamber, Christ has shown forth from the tomb, and filled the women with joy saying: "Proclaim the glad tidings to the Apostles!"

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

O Christ God, Thou Sun of Righteousness, by Thy touch Thou didst enlighten all. Give sight now to our spiritual eyes, and show us to be sons of the day! Great is Thine ineffable goodness towards us! O Lover of man, glory to Thee! Now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

This is the day of resurrection! Let us be illumined by the feast! Let us embrace each other! Let us call "Brothers" even those that hate us, and forgive all by the resurrection, and so let us cry:

Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing life! (once)

St. Symeon's Prayer

Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy Word, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people: a light to enlighten the Gentiles and the glory of Thy people, Israel.

Trisagion (Thrice Holy)

Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us. (3)

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

O Most Holy Trinity, have mercy on us. Lord, cleanse us from our sins. Master, pardon our transgressions. Holy One, visit and heal our infirmities for Thy name's sake.

Lord have mercy. (3)

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Our Father, Who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

For Thine is the Kingdom, and the power and the glory of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. (Amen.)

Tone 5 Troparion (Resurrection)

Let us, the faithful, praise and worship the Word, co-eternal with the Father and the Spirit, born for our salvation from the Virgin; for He willed to be lifted up on the Cross in the flesh, to endure death, and to raise the dead by His glorious Resurrection.

**Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit,
now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.**

Rejoice, Impassable Gate of the Lord! Rejoice, Wall and Protection of those who run to thee! Rejoice, Unshakable Refuge! Rejoice, thou who knewest not wedlock, who gavest birth in the flesh to thy Creator and God! Do not cease praying for those who praise and worship thy Son!

Dismissal

Wisdom! Blessed be He Who Is, Christ our God, always now and ever, and unto ages of ages. **Amen. Preserve O God, the Holy Orthodox faith of Orthodox Christians, unto ages of ages.**

Most holy Theotokos, save us! **More honorable than the cherubim, and more glorious beyond compare than the seraphim: without defilement thou gavest birth to God the Word. True Theotokos, we magnify thee!**

Glory to Thee, O Christ our God, and our only sure hope, glory to Thee! **Christ is Risen from the Dead, trampling down death by death. And upon those in the tombs bestowing life! (3)**

May Christ who is Risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing life, our True God, through the prayers of His most pure Mother, of the glorious and all-laudable Apostles, of Nicholas the Wonderworker of Myra in Lycia, and of the **Martyr Isidore of Chios**, who we commemorate today, and of all those Saints who have shone forth in this North America land, and of the holy and righteous ancestors of God, Joachim and Anna, have mercy on us and save us, for as much as He is good and loves mankind. Amen.

Amen. Christ is Risen from the Dead, trampling down death by death. And upon those in the tombs bestowing life! (3) And unto us He has given eternal life. Let us worship His Resurrection on the Third Day!

Heavenly Father...

Physician of our souls and bodies, Who has sent Your only-begotten Son to heal every sickness and infirmity, visit and heal us, Your Servants, from all physical and spiritual ailments, through the grace of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Grant to us patience in this sickness, strength of body, and recovery of health. Lord, You have taught us through Your Word to pray for each other that we may be healed. For You are the source of healing, and to You we give glory; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayers at the Divine Liturgy for the Health of the Servants of God:

Igumen David Lewis

Archbishop David Mahaffey

Archpriests: Thomas Edwards, John Perich, Rodion Pfeifer, James Mason, Claude Vinyard, Dimitri Oselinsky, David Shewczyk, Dennis Swenki, James Weremedic

Priests: Matthew Joyner, Ian Shipley, John Nightingale

Matushki: Ashley Joyner, Marie Mason, Johanna Bohush, Evelyn Edwards, Paraskeva Vansuch, Myra Kovalak, Gloria Martin, Maryann Oselinsky, Priscilla Shipley, Katia Vansuch, Lisa Weremedic

Servants: Bethany Bruder, Mary Brzuchalski, Jean Butrymowicz, Jennifer Bzik, Helen & George Cotirgasanu, Roberta Cusick, Val Danchenko, Christopher Felix, Olga Frimenko, Patricia G. Fu, Barbara Horsky, David Gowarty, Walter Grigoruk, Rachel Hardesty, Nicholas Hazzard, Jonathan Hontz, Michael H. Isbansky, Sarah Jubinski, Pauline Kasick, Greg Konsevitch, Mary K. Koretski, Stephanie Koretski, David Lezinsky, Judy Lezinsky, Olga Maksimova, Peter Marsh, Lanelle Mikolaitis, Catherine Miller, Mary Orzolek, Ryan Pinkowicz, Kiera Pheiffer, Gordon Roberts, Clara Roman, Victoria Ross, Mary Ruzila, Nancy A. Sabol, Robert Schainfeld, Cate Shea, Julia Smith, Julia G. Smolenski, Mary Strohecker, Ola Tatusko, John Uzick, Irene Witanek

Child of God: Emily Estrin

Please remember them and all our homebound and nursing home parishioners in your daily intercessory prayers.

St. Nicholas Reopening Planning

Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!

Dear Faithful of St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church,

The Federal Government has provided *"Guidelines - Opening Up America Again"* for moving forward carefully and responsibly. Additionally, health authorities and the governor of Pennsylvania have issued guidelines to ensure a safe and cautious reopening of various functions within our state. Most importantly, we have been blessed to receive direction from the Holy Synod and His Eminence Archbishop Mark to begin the process to develop a plan to ***"Open our Parishes"***.

The Parish Council of St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church has appointed a task force to develop the Parish Reactivation Plan. The guiding principle of this group is to reopen the church for worship and eventually return parishioners to liturgical services, in a deliberate manner that protects the safety and wellbeing of laity and clergy.

When we return, it will be to a different environment, with new worship and fellowship criteria. Our approach to bringing parishioners back to church will be thoughtful and phased to ensure proper preparedness and safety.

Initially attendance will be limited, therefore we will continue to live-stream the liturgical services for parishioners to participate.

Attached, you will find a letter from His Eminence Archbishop Mark entitled *Continuing the Discussion --- the Process to Open our Parishes*. The letter can also be found on the St. Nicholas Website.

As progress for reopening the church is made, the Reactivation Task Force we will keep you informed.

Yours in Christ,

Bryan Distefano

Parish Council President



The Orthodox Church in America
DIOCESE OF PHILADELPHIA AND EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA
The Most Rev. Mark, Archbishop of Philadelphia

May 16, 2020
St. Carantac, Welsh Prince who aided St Patrick

***TO BE PUBLISHED IN THE BULLETIN
AND POSTED ON THE PARISH WEBSITE***

Continuing the Discussion --- the Process to Open our Parishes
"If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail!" --- Benjamin Franklin

Dear Rev. Frs., esteemed members of the parish councils and faithful,

Christ is Risen! Indeed, He is Risen! This letter is primarily a revision of the past one, with updated information and clarification. Having read through all 700 surveys received so far, I realized that many comments submitted were made in ignorance of the guidelines and procedures already being put into place beyond those listed in the survey itself. Other comments are helpful in correcting and changing some of those and giving insights overlooked. Therefore, I insist the clergy and parish councils keep the faithful informed of the process and plans being developed. Given pushback on some guidelines, I realize perhaps explanations would be helpful. While we do not wish to stress the faithful with ever changing guidelines, as new information is received and as parishes begin to open, procedures will need to be adjusted. Please be patient.

So as to be inclusive of information already shared, I am using that text in order to keep all the information in one convenient place, but will highlight by underlining additions and corrections for simplicity's sake. This letter supersedes my previous letter, *BEGINNING THE DISCUSSION ---THE PROCESS TO OPEN OUR PARISHES, OF MAY 6th*.

In evaluating the data, in one Pennsylvania county 100% of the deaths were in a nursing home. The percentages from Pennsylvania records and the *CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL* demonstrate how dangerous the virus is for certain segments our population, especially the elderly with comorbidities. A simple side by side comparison of *DEATHS WITHIN A COUNTY ATTRIBUTED TO THE CORONAVIRUS* with *DEATHS ATTRIBUTED TO THE VIRUS WITHIN VARIOUS COUNTIES IN PERSONAL CARE HOMES AND NURSING HOMES* have some of the

following numbers: 65%; 80%, 88%, 50%, 72%, 73%, 80%, 56%, 65%, 80%, and 77% respectively. This information, as well as *Rate of Infection by Age; Hospitalization Rates by Age Range to Date; County Case Counts to Date and COVID-19 Cases Associated with Nursing Homes and Personal Care Homes to Date*, may be found on this website: <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/coronavirus/Pages/Cases.aspx> (see attachments) Hopefully, having actual data from the state will assist the faithful in making wise decisions for their personal health and discerning the actual level of risk.

As you may have read our clergy participated in several video conferences over the last few weeks, the last of which was earlier today. First and foremost as a way of doing a wellness check with the clergy, get a sense of how they were doing, as well as the faithful entrusted to their care. Given these video conferences, I can say without hesitation, the clergy who participated have a grasp of the complexity involved as each parish has its own unique situation. The Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church in America also met via video conference to discuss the care of the faithful, directives and a way forward on various occasions, most recently, April 29th and May 01st.

The reaction to simply asking clergy and parish councils to begin putting a plan in place for their parishes, was perceived as premature and threatening for some. This underscores all the more how necessary it is to begin discussions within every parish about “how,” even before we talk about “when,” a parish will reopen. Hopefully, our clergy can begin to address the concerns, fears, anxieties, and trauma in the wake of the coronavirus in an informed way. I remember a year ago seeing a billboard along SR 33 which read, “ALL FEELINGS ARE VALID!” and laughing at how ridiculous a statement it was. There can be a great gulf between feelings and reality. Nevertheless, while we must be mindful of feelings, fears, and anxiety, we cannot as a Church be paralyzed by them. *‘He who fails to plans, plans to fail.’*

The Federal Government provided “*Guidelines OPENING UP AMERICA AGAIN*,” for moving forward responsibly. The *CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL* published guidelines, the governors of Pennsylvania and Delaware also issued directives and guidelines and finally the Holy Synod issued a *Pastoral Letter* and *SYNODAL DIRECTIVES Towards a Re-Opening of our Churches* on May 01, 2020. All of these various documents are helpful, requiring prayerful discernment, careful reading, interpretation and application. The process to reopen will not be done unilaterally by any priest, parish council, parish or combination thereof. This is not the time for presumptive actions, wherein anyone is put at risk, especially as it may result in severe canonical consequences or for liturgical innovations. Therefore, I will address each one. We have a challenge to be creative in

addressing ‘how’ we move forward responsibly when the time is right, but we cannot use creativity as license for irresponsibility.

Let me affirm my commitment to protect the most vulnerable as best we can, while seeing our parishes opened as fully as is safely and responsibly feasible. I want to affirm my love for our clergy, their families, our parishes and the faithful. While we are One, as an Orthodox Church, every parish is unique in its own composition, age groupings, health issues, normative attendance, building design and size, which directly affects application of the various guidelines and requirements provided. One must also consider one’s proximity to the epicenters of the virus’ adverse effects. A “one size fits all,” approach is simply not feasible or practical, for the government, the Holy Synod or even the Diocese. Therefore, as we consider a path forward, we will do so with all these various policies and guidelines *in mind*, but realize that final discernment of their *interpretation* and *applicability* rests with the Bishop. If you have not done so, please ask you parish priest or council chair for the *password* for our online survey, REOPENING OUR PARISHES SURVEY, found at <https://doepa.org/reopeningsurvey> and take it as soon as possible. Some of the Safety Measures listed under Q10 will be deleted and others added. If this medium is unfamiliar to you, please ask your priest or parish council chair to send you a copy of the survey to complete and mail it back ASAP. This will help your priest in collaboration with your parish leadership to better prepare for the eventual reality of Liturgical services to resume in a responsible manner. A comprehensive plan of action must be submitted to the Diocesan Office for review and a blessing. We would like all surveys completed ASAP, as insufficient surveys will likely delay your priest and parish leadership in preparing adequately and delay the opening of the parish due to insufficient information.

FEDERAL and LOCAL GOVERNMENT --- First of all let me say that parishes in Pennsylvania and Delaware, in particular, and in the majority of states were **not** closed because of a state order. Nor were they closed by Federal order, either. The Holy Synod advised closing and/or limiting services for a variety of reasons, one of which was to be in concert with what the government was asking our country to do to flatten the curve and not overwhelm our healthcare systems. *Flattening the curve was intended to allow for those infected as well as those who would eventually be infected to have adequate access to healthcare, not eliminate the virus.* Further the intention was to safeguard our healthcare workers, first responders and others involved in caring for the elderly over this extended period of time. *That being said, as neither the Federal nor State governments told us to close we cannot and should not reasonably expect any direct governmental declaration specific to churches about our opening.* They have respected our First Amendment Rights.

Therefore, if the criterion for returning to the Church is based upon the Federal or State governments to tell us we can now return to our Churches, we would be waiting in vain.

Governmental concerns about the trajectory of the infection rate for specific areas must absolutely be heard and followed. We will look to their guidelines for direction to protect our faithful and surrounding communities keeping in mind the *“Guidelines OPENING UP AMERICA AGAIN,”* acknowledges discretion is required by the state, *“State and local officials may need to tailor the application of these criteria to local circumstances (e.g., metropolitan areas that have suffered severe COVID outbreaks, rural and suburban areas where outbreaks have not occurred or have been mild).* Basically, there is a recognition that places like New York City and Philadelphia, which were hit hard must be dealt with differently than areas less populated and were not affected to the same degree, as Williamsport, Mechanicsburg or even Uniondale.

If this reasonable caveat provided by our Federal government is ignored, within our states, I am willing to listen to appeals from parishes adversely affected and consider moving ahead *where the data does not support improper restrictions.* Why? Because if the state is allowing other counties with more people infected people per 100,000 to have restrictions loosened, it does not make sense for a county with less infections per 100,000 to have tighter ones. Therefore, I am willing evaluate the trajectory and make decisions as appropriate to the actual demographics. Realistic plans require work, thinking, responsible creativity and sharpening the pencil. Even as I write law suits are being filed against State governments with the Supreme Court for abuse of power, unlawful seizure of assets and basically to apply reasonable discretion.

Even so, the metric in Pennsylvania for moving from RED (the severest restrictions) to YELLOW (less restrictive) is based upon the formula: A county will need to have a cumulative number of new infections less than 50 new cases per 100,000 people daily for 14 days. Wayne County, PA for example, is still considered RED, yet they have only had 104 (on May 6th, when this letter was originally written) confirmed cases since the beginning of the pandemic. Northumberland County will remain Red, but only has 98 (on May 6th, now 136, with no deaths) confirmed cases as of this date. We will certainly be watching each county’s infection rate for increases, but blanket declarations without the considerations provided for local discretion is not appropriate policy (see *“Guidelines OPENING UP AMERICA AGAIN,”* footnote on the page entitled, *PROPOSED STATE OR REGIONAL GATING CRITERIA*). Additionally, in the document, *“Guidelines OPENING UP AMERICA AGAIN,”* Phase One, SPECIFIC STYPES OF EMPLOYERS, LARGE VENUES it states, (e.g., sit-down dining, movie theaters, sporting venues, *places of*

worship) can operate under strict physical distancing protocols. Physical distancing (6' between individuals of different households) is quite different from restricting numbers.

CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL --- The *recommendations* from the *CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL* on social distancing (6' from other persons) with a limit of ten persons pertains more to small enclosed places. If a building safely accommodates larger numbers, *there is absolutely prohibition* for more than ten. We can still maintain 6' of social distancing in our churches without being fixated on an inapplicable number. I do not want to come across as dismissive in any way of the CDC, governmental or Synodal guidelines. Interesting formulas have been suggested based upon square footage and the number of people. Please let us use common sense and understand sound judgment. If five people ride to church together from a single household, we are not going to make them sit 6' apart once they enter the Church. The guidelines mentioned above are precisely that, guidelines. They provide vital *advice* and information for our protection and the overall welfare of the public's health and safety. Yet, we need to be mindful of the spirit in which they were written and not bound by a misreading or inappropriate application. Let us keep in mind, 'painting with a broad brush has its place and there are times for a very fine brush.' *A careful reading of the documents actually allows for adjustments based upon actual data.* Please be at peace!

SYNODAL DIRECTIVES Towards a Re-Opening of our Churches --- The members of the Holy Synod are thoroughly aware of the complexities involved with reopening the parishes of their own respective Diocesan parishes. As mentioned above, we cannot move forward with a stilted perspective of 'one size fits all,' or 'painting with a too broad a brush'. The Holy Synod fully recognizes each Bishop will need to make decisions based upon the unique situation of the respective state's laws and mandates, where it is applicable and what is appropriate where and when. None of us claim to be Omniscient. Even as your bishop, I realize, we cannot make one plan for the entire Diocese, to do so would require us to look at the most severe situations and impose restrictions on the whole Diocese, which are markedly dissimilar.

LET US GET DOWN TO THE BRASS TACKS

Within our Diocese we have parishes that easily allow for social distancing and others that require creative approaches. I ask you to think resourcefully to address this unique and unprecedented situation. The clergy are to work with their parish councils or committees to examine their own unique situations. We must attempt to accommodate all who desire to attend, pray and receive the Holy Mysteries, while maintaining proper

standards of social distancing, facial masks, hygiene, etc. *These Guidelines are not exhaustive, but considered minimal for the present, and unfortunately be modified, expanded and hopefully later reduced and / or eliminated as we move forward.*

1. All clergy and parish councils *must* to begin the work of addressing what will need to be done when the parish can open its doors to whatever degree possible (This itself will be taxing spiritually, emotionally, physically and psychologically);
2. All clergy and parish councils *must* consider for the *immediate* allowance for people to simply come at designated times, to pray and light a candle, as our people desperately need the consolation of what is considered Sacred Space and Sacred Time. (An adequately appointed outdoor shrine is also encouraged as this possibility may also be added as well. *The priest may need to enlist the assistance of council members or parishioners to assist with opening the Church and cleaning afterwards.*);
3. Additional Liturgical services may need to be added to accommodate the more vulnerable or young families, as we proceed in the process. Live Stream or a monitor in a separate part of the facility to accommodate them may be needed;
4. The faithful must be educated on Christian charity toward those who may need to go in and out with *or without* children more frequently due to facial masks, restlessness, etc., rather than simply forbidding them to come. Alternately, young parents and small children could watch via live stream from the hall or a classroom. (Thank God they are there!);
5. Outdoor services when weather permits is a fully acceptable option as it is the practice during pilgrimages at many monasteries. *Our goal must be to serve our people while keeping everyone safe. Proper precautions must remain in place*
6. Each priest in collaboration with their parish council (or in the absence of an assigned Rector, the parish council in consultation were their Dean) must submit a plan for reopening their respective parish, in consideration of the following:
 - a. The current level of infection and the projected trajectory of the virus within their county and the level of restrictions placed upon the respective county (<https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/usa/pennsylvania/>);
 - b. The CDC Guidelines for cleaning are to be followed and a plan developed <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/reopen-guidance.html>;
 - c. The Holy Synod Directives are to be followed where applicable (*If necessary, I am willing to participate in a Zoom Meeting at any point during this process*);
 - d. Adequate responses to the RE-OPENING THE PARISH SURVEY from parishioners and concerns addressed within *the competency of the priest and parish council. (The surveys are specifically intended to assist the priest and parish council in this process, therefore extraneous comments unrelated to the competency of the parish*

- priest and parish council are not helpful*). Admittedly, there are parishes where this information will be more vital to the process than others;
- e. Posting of all necessary posters and website posters as provided by the Diocesan Office (*We will make every effort to provide you posters via email with instructions on where to post.*);
 - f. No parish will be compelled to open in a premature manner, but all parishes *must* begin discussion of a plan and submit it for approval in a timely manner (failure to do so on the part of a priest may be reasonably perceived as dereliction of duties by the faithful);
 - g. Information on Live Streaming must be made available, even if it is not from your own parish for those unable to attend regardless of the reason;
 - h. No one should be shamed or feel coerced to return before they can comfortably attend (Their *reasonable* concerns should be taken into consideration in developing a plan)
 - i. All priest over 65 and / or with major health concerns which place them at a higher risk, must request Hierarchical approval before serving, in accordance with the Synodal Directive;
 - j. Anyone who is currently sick or displaying symptoms of the coronavirus must be told to stay at home, graciously, lovingly, but without hesitation;
 - k. All parishioners will be required to wear a mask, a modest supply is suggested, Children up to 10 years old are exempt, however, those over 2 years of age are encouraged to do so if possible.;
 - l. Records must be kept regarding who attended each service in case there is an outbreak;
 - m. *Contrary to The Safety Measures listed in the Parish Surveys, the laity are **NOT** to bring a throw for their personal space or a pillow case to cover the top of the pew in front of them, as these could be sources of contamination.*

OTHER MATTERS OF WHICH TO BE MINDFUL AND CREATIVE SUGGESTIONS

- I. Live Streaming to a separate part of the facilities for families with young children who are resistant to masks or for the elderly;
- II. Saturday or a weekday Liturgy for high risk persons and Sunday Liturgy for families with young children (Alternately, this could be rotated from week to week);
- III. Parishes with limited space and larger numbers may need to consider the use of their parish hall for Divine Services, adding another day for at risk persons to attend

- or Live Streaming for persons who may not fit into the limited worship space, but still able to be present within the facility;
- IV. Minimize parishioner contact with surfaces, e.g., a person or persons appointed to open doors for entry into the church. The doors from the Narthex to the Nave should be left open (MANDATORY, but alternate plans may be submitted);
 - V. Hand sanitizer must be provided in appropriate areas, i.e., entrances, elevators, etc. and supplies regularly checked (MANDATORY);
 - VI. Every parishioner must wear a mask, except the clergy who are serving and the choir (MANDATORY). Please let us voluntarily accept restrictions for the sake of others, as St Paul instructs in Romans 14:1ff, let us not have strife over masks or other matters, but let everything be done in love and in consideration of others. *“As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand.”* (Those under 2 years of age are exempt as it is medically contraindicated.);
 - VII. Choirs are to be moved to the front of the Nave and limited as social distancing dictates (MANDATORY). (This will minimize any contamination associated with Choir members projecting their voices over the top of other people. While choir members are not required to wear masks, they are to be mindful of not projecting too loudly or projecting towards another member of the choir);
 - VIII. Markers indicating proper distancing for Holy Communion are to be placed upon the floor. THE PRIEST WILL THEN SAY, “The servant of God N., partakes of the Precious and All-Holy Body and Blood of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ, unto the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting”, BEFORE THE COMMUNICANT COMES FORWARD TO RECEIVE. (MANDATORY);
 - IX. Paper towels or Kleenex may be used instead of a communion cloths, held by the communicant and placed in a respectfully placed in a basket for burning (a new cloth must be used for each family household and properly hand washed between services. The intention here is to not possibly contaminate the communion cloth by wiping everyone’s face with the same cloth and then inadvertently pass anything on to someone else. This is a very different issue than the use of the spoon for administering the Body and Blood of Christ. The spoon is cleansed each time it is immersed in the Life Giving Mysteries by the Sacred Body and Blood itself. Therefore, to do anything different would be to deny the Real Presence of Christ in the Life Giving Mysteries.);

- X. Candles will be placed in the candle stands in advance for a designated person to light (alternate proposal will be considered. *The faithful are encouraged to include the donation for candles within their offering envelope. It is expressly forbidden to engage in making change as money is easily contaminated*);
- XI. Windows are to be opened if possible to provide fresh air;
- XII. Air Condition / Furnace Filters must be changed regularly. Dirty return air vents and dirty air supplies indicate dirt is being circulated and filters are not being changed according to manufacturer recommendations. *The fan for the air system should remain off if it is a closed system which only recirculates air.;*
- XIII. Offering baskets *are not to be passed*, a basket in front of the icon of Christ or another designated place;
- XIV. Parish Websites and Social Media should instruct potential visitors from other parishes to follow proper protocol, by contacting the parish priest in advance to insure the parish is able to accommodate them and inquire about the disciplines temporarily mandated (A posting to this effect should be placed on your website).
- XV. The clergy together with the parish council must develop a punch list of items to be addressed before and after each service and designate who is responsible, e.g., verifying the church is cleaned, adequate hand sanitizer remains at each location, hand soap, paper towels, Kleenex and other supplies are sufficient, etc.;
- XVI. Utilization of ushers to maintain social distancing and while insuring space is maximized in parishes where this could be problematic (We may need to let people know that someone may instruct them where to sit to maximize our ability to accommodate, therefore people may not be able to sit where they have always sat. *Ushers may be needed to stagger seating to maximize space. This may include asking family grouping to sit together at one end of a pew, and the next row be seated at the opposite end, for example. The faithful who are already gathering together outside the Church without social distancing, should be encouraged to sit together as a group in the Church as well.*)
- XVII. The clergy and parish councils are required to appoint a person to ask about coronavirus symptoms of all persons entering the Church, e.g., Fever, Cough, Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, Diarrhea, Chills, Repeated shaking with chills, Muscle pain, Headache, Sore throat, New loss of taste or smell before they enter the Nave. A touchless thermometer for temperature checks may assist in putting some of the faithful at ease.

Please forgive the length of the letter and directives. In no respect should this letter or any attachments be considered exhaustive. We are simply providing direction as each priest and parish council evaluates what needs to be done on the local level. I would ask that each of you be loving and patient with one another, giving your full cooperation for

the good of the Church. *I offer my heartfelt thanks to those who completed the Parish Surveys, as there were a number of helpful ideas brought forward.*

We have all been wounded in one way or another over the past two months. From our surveys I see there some who believe we do not need to follow any precautions, or less stringent precautions and others feel they are not strong enough. St Paul taught the Corinthian church a very basic Christian principle of being deferential to others in matters of conscience. Let us keep the words of the Apostle Paul ever before us from I Corinthians 10:23ff:

Do All to the Glory of God

“All things are lawful,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful,” *but not all things build up.* 24 *Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor.* 25 Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience. 26 For “the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof.” 27 If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience. 28 But if someone says to you, “This has been offered in sacrifice,” *then do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience—* 29 *I do not mean your conscience, but his.* For why should my liberty be determined by someone else's conscience? 30 If I partake with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of that for which I give thanks?

31 So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. 32 *Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, 33 just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved.*

I ask with tears, please let us strive for the greater good. Your unworthy father in Christ,

+ *Mark*

+ MARK, Archbishop of Philadelphia and the Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania
CC: Diocesan Clergy, Council Chairs and Treasurers

Attachments will be coming as they are prepared and as email will accommodate.



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“Thou hast made us for Thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in Thee.” August