

His Eminence
The Most Reverend
Metropolitan JOSEPH



Archbishop of New York and
Metropolitan of
All North America

ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ARCHDIOCESE
OF NORTH AMERICA

March 17, 2020

Beloved Faithful in Christ,

Greetings and blessings to you and your families in the Name of our Great God and Savior, Jesus Christ!

As we cautioned in our encyclical of last week, we are in the midst of a rapidly changing situation, and it was likely that we would be asked to make more sacrifices to contain the spread of the coronavirus. With yesterday's announcement of the new CDC recommendations by President Trump, that time has sadly come. With pain of heart, but also hope in our Lord, I ask the clergy and faithful of our Archdiocese to abide by these new directives that we may do our part in combatting this pandemic:

1. Beginning today, all parishes are instructed to cancel all non-liturgical, in-person activities including schools, business meetings, and social functions.
2. All liturgical services will be served with only clergy, servers, and chanters. No liturgical service can total more than ten persons.
3. Churches should remain open during the week as much as possible for people to offer individual prayers and light candles.
4. Priests are instructed to limit services to only the Akathist/Medayeh and Sunday Orthros & Divine Liturgy as well as the liturgy for the Annunciation on March 25th as outlined by the Department of Liturgics.
5. All parishes are encouraged to take advantage of the technology at our disposal to livestream the divine services and offer education to the faithful.
6. The Archdiocese will provide service texts for the faithful to pray at home during this time of social distancing. Please see the **Liturgics section** of our website for the new offerings.
7. All measures to ensure the cleaning and sanitizing of the church must continue even though we are limiting our numbers of faithful in attendance.
8. Funerals must be limited to the guidelines set by our civil authorities.
9. Baptisms should be postponed except for cases of emergency.
10. Finally, we pray that by implementing these measures in coordination with our civil authorities, we can hasten the time when it will be safe to return to a full liturgical life in church, and, God willing, save lives at the same time.

While we hoped that these kinds of measures would be unnecessary, I ask that we keep in the mind the example of the monastic rule kept by the brotherhood of St. Zosimas described in the Life of St. Mary of Egypt:

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After crossing the Jordan, they all scattered far and wide in different directions. And this was the rule of life they had, and which they all observed — neither to talk to one another, nor to know how each one lived and fasted. If they did happen to catch sight of one another, they went to another part of the country, living alone and always singing to God, and at a definite time eating a very small quantity of food. In this way they spent the whole of the Great Fast and used to return to the monastery a week before the Resurrection of Christ, on the eve of Palm Sunday. Each one returned having his own conscience as the witness of his labor, and no one asked another how he had spent his time in the desert. Such were the rules of the monastery.

Although our time of social distancing is not quite the same type of asceticism, let us treat it as a sacrificial offering of love to God and our neighbor. We hope that this will be a time reminiscent of the home churches of the early days of Christianity and that there may be a hidden blessing of families being together to pray and nurture one another in the Faith. Let us continue our work of prayer, repentance, and almsgiving during this time, and beseech God to grant us to come together once again, as those monks of the Sinai desert, to commemorate His Life-Giving and Saving Passion and Glorious Third-Day Resurrection.

With great paternal love and fervent prayers for the health of the souls and bodies of all of our faithful, I remain,

Your Father in Christ,

+JOSEPH

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