



## **Bulgarian Diocese of Toledo** **Orthodox Church in America**

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### **COVID-19 Guidance for the Clergy and Faithful of the Bulgarian Diocese**

13 March 2020

The Second Week of Great Lent

From the **Life of St. Mary of Egypt**: *On the Sunday which customarily gives its name to the first week of Lent, the divine liturgy was performed as usual, with each monk participating in the undefiled and life-giving sacraments; and then, according to custom, they partook of a small portion of food. Afterwards they all gathered in the chapel and, after long prayers and many genuflections, the monks kissed each other and each one embraced the father superior. Then they made obeisance and asked for his blessing, so that they would have it with them as an experienced fellow combatant in their forthcoming spiritual struggle. After these proceedings, the gate of the monastery was opened and all the monks came out singing in unison, "The Lord is my light and my Savior, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the defender of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?," and the rest of the psalm. Often they left one or two monks behind to guard the monastery, not to guard what was stored inside (for there was nothing that could be taken away easily by thieves), but so that the chapel might not be left without ministry.*

Beloved, along with diocesan leadership, I have been closely monitoring the developing status of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the past 48 hours it has become clear that we if we do not slow the rate of infection through social distancing (self-imposed quarantine) our healthcare system is likely to be overwhelmed by the number of cases. As we can see from the situation in Italy, this will result in a significantly greater number of deaths, due to lack of treatment. Further, there is a growing body of evidence that suggests COVID-19 is an airborne contagion that cannot be contained by the reasonable hygienic measures we are all familiar with (handwashing, disinfecting of surfaces, etc.).

In light of this, I am asking all parishes and missions in the Bulgarian Diocese, in addition to the directives from [the Statement of the Holy Synod](#), to respond in the following manner:

- All parish and mission events and activities, including coffee fellowship, church school, and the rest, and all services other than Vespers on Saturday evenings (Vespers with priest, deacon, server, chanter), the Sunday Liturgy of St. Basil the Great, the Vespertal Liturgy of the Great Feast of Annunciation, and the Presanctified Liturgies, are cancelled beginning Monday, March 16 through Sunday, April 5, at which point we will adjust as the situation warrants.

- All who are at risk: the elderly, those with pre-existing conditions, any who are actively sick or exhibiting signs of illness including choir directors, singers, servers, readers, subdeacons should consider the guidelines from the [Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\)](#) and the [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#) and act prudently first with regard to others and then with regard to themselves.
- Clergy who are actively sick or exhibiting signs of illness should stay home and contact Very Rev. Andrew Jarmus, the chancellor at [ajarmus@bdoca.org](mailto:ajarmus@bdoca.org)
- Priests are instructed to commemorate all of the faithful on the diskos at the proskomedia (as I presume is your practice, regardless).
- Those who do not attend the divine services are encouraged to say prayers from their prayer books at home during the time of the divine services.
- The clergy are to either:
  1. Include the Orthodox Church in America's petition or prayer in your services, or add into the Great and Augmented Litanies the special petitions from the Molieben in Times of Pestilence which are appended to the end of this letter. In our prayers we should especially remember health-care workers. They are going to bear a heavy burden during this time of trial.
  2. Offer the Molieben entirely following the Divine Liturgy. (Great Book of Needs Vol. IV, pg 90 and following)
- Clergy are reminded that they have the primary responsibility of visiting the sick, but should take care not to expose the faithful and others to the virus.

This is not the season of Great Lent we anticipated, but it is nonetheless a fitting Lenten effort: focus on the greater good of our neighbors, recognizing that this initial response to this pandemic will work for the greater good of our faithful and our neighbors. Use this time of "social distancing" for prayer and to keep vigil "in one's cell."

Please continue to work through the chancellor and diocesan leadership to address any particular concerns not covered here, and I will let you know of further directives.

Wishing you strength for the weeks ahead, and assuring you of my prayers, I remain

With love in Christ,



+Alexander

*Archbishop of Toledo and the Bulgarian Diocese – Orthodox Church in America*

## Prayer from the Statement from the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church in America

**Deacon:** Let us pray to the Lord. **Choir:** Lord, have mercy.

**Priest:** O God Almighty, Lord of heaven and earth, and of all creation visible and invisible, in thine ineffable goodness, look down upon us, thy people gathered in thy Holy Name. Be our helper and defender in this day of affliction. Thou knowest our weakness. Thou hearest our cry in repentance and contrition of heart. O Lord who lovest mankind, deliver us from the impending threat of the Corona Virus. Send thine angel to watch over us and protect us. Grant health and recovery to those suffering from this virus. Guide the hands of physicians and preserve those who are healthy. Enable us to continue to serve our suffering brothers and sisters in peace that together we may glorify thy most honorable and majestic name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages.

**Choir:** Amen.

## Petitions from the Moleben in Times of Pestilence

### **Great Litany**

That he will not remember the transgressions and temptations of us, the sinners and his unworthy servants, but that he will mercifully cleanse our sins and avert his looming righteous threat incited against us, let us pray to the Lord.

That he will not rebuke us in anger nor punish us with wrath, but will remember that we are flesh (whose breath, when it departs, shall not return), and will mercifully spare our souls from death, let us pray to the Lord.

That he will not come in judgment unto his servants and will not look down upon our transgressions, but will cleanse them and be merciful and spare the people that have sinned, let us pray to the Lord.

That he will remember his compassions and mercies that are from eternity, and not remember the sins of our youth and ignorance, and will have mercy on us, let us pray to the Lord.

That he will hearken unto our voice from his holy temple and will heal the sickness unto death that has taken hold of us; and that He will dry up the streams of transgression troubling us, let us pray to the Lord.

That he will quickly pull us out from the snares of death and will deliver us from the sicknesses of Hades, let us pray to the Lord.

That he will mercifully prolong for his servants time for repentance and not afflict them grievously as the barren fig tree but out of kindheartedness will sprinkle and water them with the dew of loving-kindness, out of love for mankind in expectation of the fruits of repentance and our conversion, let us pray to the Lord.

That he will raise us up from the gates of death and the uplifted sword and the bending of its bow, and in it the vessels of death righteously prepared against us, with bitter arrows; and that he will mercifully turn them away from us that we not be destroyed, let us pray to the Lord.

That he will hearken unto our prayer and attend to our supplication, and not remain silent unto our tears, but will forgive us, that, lying down, we not fall asleep and henceforth have no being, let us pray to the Lord.

## **Augmented Litany**

We have sinned and we have transgressed, and therefore your righteous anger has visited us, O Lord our God; and the darkness of death has encompassed us and we have drawn nigh unto the gates of Hades. But, with compunction, we cry out to you, our God, in our infirmities: spare us, spare your people, and destroy us not utterly, humbly we pray you, hear and have mercy.

O Lord, who rules by life and by death: do not enclose the souls of your servants in death, but turn aside from wrath and forsake anger, for our days vanish like smoke, and our strength has wasted away, and we are perishing utterly because of our sins. Be merciful unto your servants who are repenting with tears, we pray you, hear and have mercy.

Remember that we are flesh, O Lord, whose breath, when it departs shall not return, and mercifully turn aside your wrath that has justly taken hold of us, by which, as with a sword, you have grievously visited us. Set right the pain and appease the wounds that suddenly are destroying us. For the dead do not praise you, neither all those who have descended into Hades. But we, the living, praise you, and, groaning with pain in our hearts, we pray you, hear and have mercy.

More than all others we have sinned against you and we have transgressed, O Master, and if we have not acquired repentance, instead of repentance accept our offering. And having set yourself to mercy, as you are almighty, free your servants from death-bearing sickness and grievous afflictions, groaning in pain we pray you, quickly hear and have mercy.

Remember not the transgressions and unrighteousness of your people, and enter not into judgment with your servants, neither incline with wrath because of your servants. If you mark iniquities, O Lord, who can stand? For we are dust and ashes, and our substance is as nothing before you. But as you are compassionate and the Lover of Mankind, show loving kindness and do not destroy us in your anger on account of our transgressions, we pray you, O most-good God, hear and have mercy.

O you who desire not the death of sinners, but that they turn back and live, as the fountain of Life, give life unto us who are worthy of death by your righteous judgment. For you are God, who rules by life and by death. Destroy us not in the wrath of your threatening; with great lamentation in the affliction of our hearts, and with tears, we pray you, hear and have mercy.

Look down with mercy upon the affliction of your people, O Lord, and, showing loving-kindness, with your outstretched arm, command the angel that is destroying us, as once in the time of David you gave the command, that it is enough and stay his hand, that he not destroy us utterly. For we also, confessing unto you in repentance, as did David, cry out: we have sinned and we have transgressed, and none of us are worthy of your tender mercy. But as you are compassionate, yourself, who alone are being entreated because of your loving-kindness, show your ancient mercy, and spare the people and the sheep of your pasture, we pray you: quickly hear and have mercy.