

Українська  
Православна Церква  
св. Юрія



ST. GEORGE  
UKRAINIAN ORTHODOX  
Church

Tuesday, March 17, 2020  
Ven. Gerasimus of Jordan

Glory to Jesus Christ!

Dear brothers and sisters,

In light of yesterday's directive from our spiritual father, Metropolitan Yuriy, and today's pronouncement of a 'state of emergency' from the Premier of Ontario, Doug Ford I felt a need to connect with the faithful and visitors of our beloved St. George's. Since we have this crisis before us, we are invited through pressure and stress and by difficulties in our lives, to decide how we are going to face it. We can face crisis with fear, panic and as 'deer in the headlights'. Or we can face it through the lens of our faith.

Our Orthodox faith invites us to sobriety. Sobriety like any physical and spiritual undertaking is not easy; as anyone who has dealt with a physical addiction can attest. Sobriety is something you have to focus on, it has to be something you desire and want.

We have become addicted to freedom; freedom of movement- being able to go where we want, when we want to. Yet now, we are being asked to practice an askesis (a spiritual labour) of coming to grips with that which we have become accustomed to being removed from us. The question arises, "Who am I" in the midst of this want and difficulty, in the midst of this worry and in the midst of this concern? In the midst of this REAL difficulty, not a false one. In the midst of this REAL worry, not a false one. In the midst of this REAL concern, not a false one.

Some might say, "all of this is being blown out of proportion!". This is not at the core of what is going on. This is a moment, a chance to reflect and truly discover "who I am" in the midst of this challenge going on around us. "Who am I" with the removal of all these freedoms, these freedoms we have become accustomed to? We may have become intoxicated by freedom, and when it is not there, our life is overcome with panic, fear and perhaps even a lack of faith.

It is impossible to live our daily lives and not experience challenge. Suffering and difficulty is part of everybody's life. Our spiritual mother the Church always, and especially during this period of preparation towards Pascha (Great Lent), gives us the spiritual tools to deal with these challenges before us today and in the coming days and weeks. Our faith is that grounding point in the midst of chaos and we ought not to forget that. Often times we think of this period of Great Lent as a time of removal, taking away certain things from our lives. Rather, the Church calls us to increase in our works, to increase our spiritual endeavours through prayer and self reflection; to increase our almsgivings and to increase our fasting not only what we put into our mouths but also what comes out of our mouths. When we acquire a sober mind and a spirit of peace, all of life's challenges are easily overcome.

We are challenged, each and every one of us to increase our good works through a number of ways:

- **Support the parish council.** Through the spiritual guidance of our Bishops they are navigating through uncharted territory. There is no road map, no one right answer in dealing with the challenges facing our community. Trust that the decisions they are making are made through time in prayer, discernment and very difficult conversations.
- **Send in your offerings.** This might seem like a small thing in the grand scheme of things, right now. Even the healthiest congregations can find themselves in a predicament, and quick, after just a few Sundays of missed offerings. Even if the building is empty, bills need to be paid. If you are able to mail in your offerings, please do so; or set aside a weekly offering in a safe place to be given when services resume.
- **Check on your neighbours.** Your older neighbours, your neighbour who still has to go to work and could use help with childcare... Any time you help someone in your proximity, you are living out the values of your faith. You are embodying what the gospel is all about. You become the face of Christ in an all too dark world.
- **Pray for your church family.** Send notes or make phone calls. All the things that we do for shut-ins, do for each other now that we are all shut-ins, so to speak. We are one body, even when that body is not together in the flesh. There are plenty of ways to stay connected in spirit and care for each others' spiritual needs.
- **Reserve time for prayer and self reflection.** Although the doors of the church might not be open, that doesn't mean we get Sunday mornings off to sleep in. In addition to your usual prayer life, pray more often. A Typica has been prepared for you to use Sunday mornings at home instead of attending the Divine Liturgy. It will be posted Friday of each week on our website. In addition to prayer, now that we are "shut-ins", dust off that spiritual reading you have been putting off and fill your soul and heart with the wisdom of the Church.
- **Stay healthy.** Listen to the recommendations of local health professionals, good hygiene, washing your hands, social distancing, etc.

"Completely have trust in God, leave everything in His hands, and believe that His love will act for your own benefit. Then God will take care of everything, because there is nothing He cannot do; everything is easy for Him. The difficult thing is for man to decide to humble himself and leave everything to God's providence and love." – Saint Paisios of Mount Athos

If there is anything I can do to help you during this difficult time, please do not hesitate to contact me.

With blessings in the name of our Loving and Merciful Lord,

Fr. Gregory