



Church website: www.hrocby.org

Church Social Hall: (724) 929-7448

Holy Resurrection Orthodox Church

222 Mary Street, Rostraver Township, PA
(Serving the faithful of Belle Vernon and surrounding areas)

Reverend Father Stephan Gresh

Cell Phone: (937) 869-8037

Rectorry Phone: (724) 929-9194

Email: stephangresh@gmail.com

Ordained Reader

& Choir Master: Peter Merella: (724) 787-2031

April 12, 2020

Per the Holy Synod, the Archdiocese of Pittsburgh and His Eminence, Archbishop Melchisedek: Effective March 17, 2020 AND will extend until April 30, 2020:

1. All parishes of this Archdiocese are to *immediately* cease all services, activities, social gatherings, etc. with the exception of 2 items below. This closure will continue until the end of March at which time further directives will be issued by the Chancellor. (***This is a directive of the Bishop, NOT an option for the parishes.***)
 - a. Special services (i.e., funerals, baptisms, etc.) may only be held IF discussed with the Chancellor before scheduled – attendance is limited to immediate family ONLY.
 - b. The Archdiocese has limited the opening of parishes to a few hours on Saturdays ONLY.
Fr. Stephan will have our parish open ***Saturdays from Noon to 3 pm*** to offer parishioners time for private prayer and light candles. (High risk individuals such as senior citizens, people with ongoing health problems and people not feeling well currently should not consider this act.)
2. Confession are suspended, except for deathbed confessions.
3. Informal spiritual discussions are permitted via phone and e-mails with Fr. Stephan.
4. Fr. Stephan is available to his faithful in emergency situations, following personal safety protocols. However, he will not be able to visit his homebound during this health emergency period.
5. Please contact Fr. Stephan if any Parishioner is in need of assistance in obtaining the basic staples of life since they cannot visit the grocery stores. He has a group of volunteers ready and able to help!

Please note, much care was used in making these decisions by His Eminence after much prayer, dialogue with members of the Holy Synod, consultation with medical professionals and lengthy conversations with the Chancellor. These decisions were not made lightly! We must eliminate the spread of this virus NOW! His Eminence stated that out of “something bad, perhaps something good can come about” -- this period of limited interaction “opens the window of opportunity” to individually “plunge” into the quiet depths of Holy Lent by increased personal prayer, Bible study, and time with the myriad of “good” Orthodox material available through the Internet and our Orthodox bookstores.

“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.” (2 Timothy 1:7)

Epistle (*Resurrection*)

(*Philippians 4:4-9*)

Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!

Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord *is* at hand.

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;

and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things *are* noble, whatever things *are* just, whatever things *are* pure, whatever things *are* lovely, whatever things *are* of good report, if *there is* any virtue and if *there is* anything praiseworthy – meditate on these things.

The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.

Gospel (*Resurrection*)

(*John 12:1-18*)

Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead.

There they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him.

Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil.

But one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's *son*, who would betray Him, said,

“Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?”

This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it.

But Jesus said, **“Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial.**

“For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always.”

Now a great many of the Jews knew that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead.

But the chief priests plotted to put Lazarus to death also,

because on account of him many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus.

The next day a great multitude that had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem,

took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him, and cried out:

“Hosanna!

‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!

The King of Israel!”

Then Jesus, when He had found a young donkey, sat on it; as it is written:

“Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your King is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt.”

His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about Him and *that* they had done these things to Him.

Therefore the people, who were with Him when He called Lazarus out of his tomb and raised him from the dead, bore witness.

For this reason the people also met Him, because they heard that He had done this sign.

*Next Sunday's scriptures readings:

Resurrection: Epistle: Acts 1:1-8

Gospel Reading: John 1:1-17

Palm Sunday

By Very Rev. Fr. Lawrence Farley

When it was apparent that Lazarus was sick unto death, the Lord Jesus discerned that this mortal sickness, occurring so close to the Passover, was to serve the glory of God. He realized that it was the Father's will that He raise Lazarus from the dead as an astounding testimony to His power and as a way of calling the attention of Jerusalem to His messianic authority.

Thus, after the raising of Lazarus, all Jerusalem was stirred and overwhelmed with the report of Jesus' miracle, and when He rode into Jerusalem six days before His Passion, the entire city was jubilant at the thought that their Messiah was coming to them, bringing the Kingdom of God. Our Lord entered the Holy City in humility, riding a donkey, not a warhorse, in fulfillment of the prophecy of Zechariah. He thus proclaimed that His Kingdom was not a military one but a spiritual one, and that He had come not to destroy Israel's national enemies but death itself, the enemy of all mankind.

Even the children rejoiced in Jesus' messianic Kingdom, shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" as all the people threw their garments into the road and cut palm branches to strew His path with honor as He entered the Holy City. Thus, the ancient prophecies were fulfilled as the Messiah entered Jerusalem in humility and in triumph, bringing the eternal Kingdom of God.



Announcements from Fr. Stephan:

This is a difficult one! The Hierarchy's have wrestled valiantly with what we are able to do without endangering the flock. They gave us the opportunity for a very small number of us to celebrate the Entrance into Jerusalem as well as the journey to Pascha. This small group would be permitted to share the services with the rest of the parish online. I asked the parish council to labor with me on the directions that we would take to both feed and protect the whole flock. It is with great pain that we have come to this decision.

1. There will be no change to the current status of services at Holy Resurrection Orthodox Church in Belle Vernon. We are humbly asking the parish to:
 - a. ... celebrate the Entrance into Jerusalem as well as the Journey to Pascha by a live stream online at the Elwood City Monastery via the YouTube channel: *EllwoodCityChapel*. They are doing a full cycle of services. This is a truly peaceful, beautiful, loving, and fruitful pasture that many of us have never visited.
 - b. ... take the current health concerns seriously and do our parts to minimize the spread of the virus.
 - c. ... pray during this Lenten season for the whole world and especially all those who are affected by the virus.
2. I am going to request that we keep a vigil with Christ at our own homes from the time of the Passions until the Resurrection. To do this I am going to ask everyone to read from the Psalms for a couple hours. I will keep a simple schedule at the rectory indicating the times that you choose to read the Psalms. I would love to be able to keep it.
3. I am also going to ask that we call each other on Pascha to proclaim Christ's Resurrection.
4. Because of the pandemic restrictions, it is even harder for our beloved home-bound to deal with the new social distancing guidelines. Whether our loved ones are receiving care at-home or in a facility, the current restrictions limit visitors to protect their health. Now, more than ever, please brighten their day with a card or note. Nothing fills a person's soul with hope more than being remembered. One little action can bring so much joy! Below is a listing of our home-bounds. Keeping with privacy standards during this pandemic, please contact Father Stephan for their addresses.

HOME-BOUND ADDRESSES:

Below is a list of those of our Parish Family who would especially appreciate a card during the Paschal Season:

Mary Brassart

Katherine Dupay

Rose Janus

Sylvia Stephan

John and Sandy Timko

Charles and Julia Urdenis

Chuck Yetsconish

Claudette Yuschak

Brighten their day with a card:

Charlene Butcher

Jack and Jean Fayak

Dorothy Karbowski

Anne Matty

Larry Morozek

Parish Friends Separated by Miles:

Sophia Krill

Sonia Walsen

Orthodox Church in America: Reflections in Christ

April 1, 2020 ~~ The Pascha No One Wants ~~ **By Father John Parsells**



True leadership brings people where they need to be but don't want to go.

No Christian worth their salt believes Christ went to His crucifixion subservient to the Jewish leaders and Roman state. Even though the Jewish high priest, Caiaphas, gave voice to the common plot to put Jesus to death when he said “it would be better that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perishes” (*John 11:50*), it was Christ, the true High Priest, who said, “No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.” In fact, it was Jesus’s filial obedience even unto death which most profoundly made manifest His divinity and union with His Father. Jesus said to them, ‘When you have lifted up the Son of

Man, then you shall know that I AM, and that I do nothing of Myself, but as My Father has taught Me.’” (*John 8:28*)

Today our Church hierarchs call us to take up this same Cross, not in capitulation to the State as conspiracy theorists “theologize” but as imitation and participation in the self-sacrificing life of Christ. We are called to experience in some small way what Christ went through “suffering outside the camp”, outside the Temple, outside the holy city of Jerusalem – in isolation. He entered an inconceivable quarantine. His “social distancing” was so complete that He even experienced divine “abandonment”, crying out from the Cross, “My God, my God, why has Thou forsaken Me?”. The sinless One became sin on our behalf (*2 Corinthians 5:20*) and the One who said, “I and My Father are One” (*John 10:30*) experienced “separation” from His Father.

St. Paul tells us, “Therefore let us go to Him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace He bore” (*Hebrews 13:13*). Here the Apostle links suffering with disgrace, yoking union with Christ together with being an outsider. The early Christians knew this disgrace well, being persecuted as godless by their Jewish brothers, yet paradoxically at the same time experiencing deeper communion with God in Christ outside the Jewish Temple where they had formerly become accustomed to worship.

As centuries passed, things have certainly changed, the Church has become the new Camp, the new City, the new Temple, built upon Jesus Christ. “The stone which the builders rejected, has become the chief cornerstone; this is the Lord’s doing and it is marvelous in our eyes” (*Psalms 118:22*). A whole Christian world has developed “outside the camp”, so much so that in our contemporary times, things are reversed, we experience disgrace and shame from “not going” to church, because it is “inside” that we commune with Christ.

Yet, in this time of pandemic, God who is always providing opportunities for us to more fully experience the life of Christ, who is always guiding His Church, allows us in this Great Lent, Passion Week, and Pascha to participate in a very deep way in the foolish wisdom and salvific power of the Cross. By instructing us through our hierarchs to temporarily and selflessly stay outside the church for the benefit of others, so that not one may perish, He gives us a unique opportunity, an otherwise impossible chance, to sacrifice our normal church life, and the best of it in Great Lent and Pascha. We are challenged to once again go “outside the camp”, to experience even for a short time “isolation” from God Himself, and to do so in obedience, even unto death, the death of our own will.

St. John of the Ladder tells us that “Obedience is the tomb of the will and the resurrection of humility.” Now we know well that obedience by definition is only possible when we have to do something that we don’t want to do or when we have to give up something we don’t want to give up; otherwise it is just meeting of the minds. This is why the measure of one’s obedience can be properly gauged only by the extent of one’s desire to resist what is commanded.

For Orthodox Christians our greatest desire is to worship God in His Church and we would rather be martyred than give that up. Yet, we know that there is a world of difference not only between martyrdom and suicide, but also between martyrdom and murder. Our bishops instruct

us to stay home, not because we should be afraid of martyrdom, for they tell us to fearlessly minister to the sick and dying, even at our own personal risk. Rather they wisely counsel us in this way to protect us from false bravado and recklessness lest we needlessly, and perhaps pridefully, harm ourselves or others.

Some, perhaps unaware or unwilling to acknowledge what our bishops are actually teaching, will accuse us of faithlessness for temporarily and strategically practicing social distancing in order to minimize the impact of COVID-19 on the least of the brethren (elderly, immunocompromised, etc). We will be slandered as capitulating to the State when we are voluntarily obedient to the Church. Yet we mustn't be discouraged by this because in this too we have a share in the life of Christ, bearing the reproach even of brothers so as to be faithful to the Father's command to love and sacrifice, doing what is best for them and all, even if it means "bearing the disgrace" (*Hebrews 13:13*) and "despising the shame" (*Hebrews 12:2*).

What we go through now can feel very isolating for faithful Christians, yet we are resolutely encouraged remembering that the Cross of Christ reveals isolation as the door to communion. In obedience even unto death, we find the life that can never be put to death. Amidst our distress and anguish, we find the "man of sorrows, acquainted with grief" (*Isaiah 53:3*), Christ Himself who says to us what He promised His disciples in their own time of tribulation: "I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy!" (*John 16:22*).

April 3, 2020 ~~ The Sign of the Prophet Jonah in our days ~~ **By Bishop Alexis**

"For those with eyes to see and ears to hear," these days of being in the belly of the whale, physically separated not only from one another, but also from our beloved Churches and places of prayer, we have a rare opportunity for spiritual growth. In this crisis that has overcome the entire inhabited world, we are given the sign of Jonah that calls forth a response from us all. Saint Ephraim the Syrian writes, "the sign of Jonah served the Ninevites in two ways. If they would have rejected it, they would have gone down to Sheol alive like Jonah, but they were raised from the dead like him because they repented." The sign of Jonah that is given to us in our forced isolation out of love for our neighbor is a call to repentance, a call to change the way we look at the world around us, the world within us, and the world beyond us. As I suggested in an earlier reflection, it is an opportunity to become men and women of deep prayer who have learned to serve the Divine Liturgy on the altar of their hearts.

There are many books about how to pray from which believers can learn the art of prayer. There are many prayer books that have morning prayers, evening prayers, services of supplication, and akathists that the faithful can read on a daily basis. There are the Psalms of David that we can chant throughout the day enabling us to pour out our entire heart before God. And of course, there is the Jesus Prayer, "Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me," that every God-loving soul can say, again and again and again, so that it falls like a droplet of pure water upon our stony hearts refashioning them into hearts of flesh that can welcome the King of glory. But all these beautiful, holy words will enable us to touch the hem of Christ's garment and to become more Christlike in the process only if we say them with the proper disposition of the

heart, a heart that is humble, a heart that yields, a heart that can effortlessly utter the words of the Most Pure Virgin, “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word” (*Luke 1:38*).

This Holy Week and Pascha, the Covid-19 pandemic has given the faithful a hard saying. They will be deprived of celebrating these high and holy days in their parishes. They will be deprived of receiving holy communion. Nevertheless, they need not, now or ever, be deprived of Christ, for nothing, neither death nor life, neither things present nor things to come, can ever “separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (*Romans 8:39*). It may be tempting to become angry or despondent, but neither of these states will enable us to pray to God or permit God to approach us. Neither of these responses will help us to receive the sign of Jonah given to our generation. What will enable us to pray is a humble acceptance of our condition in which we make peace with this world as it is, a willingness to yield before that which we cannot control, and then even further to give thanks for the fact that our own will, no matter how good and holy it may seem to us, is being cut off by the severe sanctions now in place. This may sound strange to those unfamiliar with our monastic tradition, but truly when the will is cut off, “the holy soul steadily ascends to heaven as upon golden wings” (Saint John of the Ladder) by virtue of holy obedience. In other words, gently, graciously, and gratefully yielding to this situation with humble acceptance will enable us to pray as we have never prayed before.

Obedience is not easy. It is “the tomb of the will,” but it is also “the resurrection of humility,” (Saint John of the Ladder), humility, which is “the very raiment of the Godhead” (Saint Isaac the Syrian). In humble obedience, we are following not only the path of the holy fathers of old, we are walking not only in the footsteps of the Apostles who strove to be obedient to every commandment of their beloved Lord, but we are also imitating our Lord Himself, who “as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (*Philippians 2:8*). But death is never the last word with respect to obedience, the final word is always life, abundant life, life everlasting. “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (*Philippians 2:9-11*).

Let us receive humbly the sign of the Prophet Jonah in a way that leads to the light and life that are ours in Christ Jesus. This Pascha, let’s sanctify our homes and lives in wonderful ways. Let’s humbly do whatever is necessary to make one room in our home into a Church. If we don’t have an oil lamp burning before the icon of the Most Pure Virgin Theotokos, let’s try to acquire one. If we don’t have a hand censer, charcoal, and incense, let’s decide to order them. And then with a humble, but grateful heart, let’s worship the holy Lord Jesus Christ, the only sinless One. Let’s venerate the icons in our homes, let’s light our vigil light, let’s cense our icons, let’s make our prostrations, and let’s make the words of whatever prayers we offer our own. Let’s mean what we say. Let’s trust in the Lord. Saint Isaac the Syrian once wrote, “The prayer of a humble man is like a word spoken from the mouth into an ear.” Let’s speak to God now as his humbled children, for in this time of trial, He will surely “hearken unto the voice of

our cry” (*Psalm 5:2*) and in turn make our peace as a river and our righteousness as the waves of the sea (*Isaiah 48:18*).