



Church website: [www.hrocby.org](http://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

Rectory Phone: (724) 929-9194

Email: [stephangresh@gmail.com](mailto:stephangresh@gmail.com)

Ordained Reader

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

**April 26, 2020**

## ***Christ is Risen!***

**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*)

(Acts 5:12-20)

And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch.

Yet none of the rest dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly.

And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women,

so that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid *them* on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them.

Also a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed.

Then the high priest rose up, and all those who *were* with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with indignation,

and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison.

But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said,

“Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life.”

## Gospel (*Resurrection*)

(John 20:19-31)

Then, the same day at evening, being the first *day* of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, “Peace be with you.”

When He had said this, He showed them *His* hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.

So Jesus said to them again, “Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.”

And when He had said this, He breathed on *them*, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.

“If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the *sins* of any, they are retained.”

Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came.

The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord." So he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."

And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!"

Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand *here*, and put *it* into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing."

And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!"

Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed *are* those who have not seen and *yet* have believed."

And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book;

but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

\*Next Sunday's scriptures readings:

***Resurrection: Epistle:*** Acts 6:1-7

***Gospel Reading:*** Mark 15:43-16:8

## *The Sunday after Pascha:*

**Holy Apostle Thomas**

**By Very Rev. Fr. Lawrence Farley**

Thomas was also called the Twin. He was a sensitive, impulsive man who felt deeply and spoke quickly. When he thought his Master planned to go to Judea to die, Thomas instantly said to the other apostles, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him" (*John 11:16*). During the Last Supper, when the Lord said they would know the way He was to go, he spoke out, "Lord, we do not know where You are going; how can we know the way?" (*John 14:5, RSV*).

After the Resurrection, Thomas was not with the others when Christ appeared to them and, being emotionally wrung out from the strain of the last days, he was too numb to accept the apostles' testimony to Christ's Resurrection. He said he would not believe it unless he could see His wounds for himself on His risen Body. Christ came to the apostles and offered to show Thomas His wounds. Thomas fell down in joy, crying out, "My Lord and my God!" (*John 20:24-29*). Thus his hesitancy to believe confirmed the truth of the Resurrection for future generations. He ended his life as a martyr for his Lord.

## **Announcements from Fr. Stephan:**

1. The Church will continue to be open from **12:00 until 3:00 on Saturdays.**
2. We received some new opportunities from the Diocese of Western Pennsylvania. **During the Paschal season we are permitted to have additional Liturgies throughout the week.** All of the restrictions will still be in place.
  - a. **Upcoming Scheduled Liturgies:**
    - Sunday, April 26 - Saint Thomas Sunday at 10 a.m.;
    - Saturday, May 2 at 9 a.m.;
    - Sunday, May 3 at 10a.m.; and
    - Monday, May 4 at 9a.m.
4. We are still limited to a total of 10. This includes the priest and the cantor. Father Stephan will use the parish directory to contact parishioners alphabetically. If you plan to attend one of the services you will be added to the list. If you are not listed in the directory, please contact Father Stephan.
5. Don't forget to keep in touch with our home bounds! 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

# How the Grinch Stole Pascha

The year 2020 will be remembered by Orthodox as the year without Pascha. At the beginning of the year, and even at the beginning of Great Lent, it hardly seemed possible. I remember the second Sunday of Great Lent here at St. Herman's. We had served the Liturgy of St. Basil and commemorated St. Gregory Palamas. We were looking forward to the coming Sunday when we would venerate the Cross, and I gave our little hand-cross into the care of one of our people asking her to decorate it with flowers as she did so beautifully last year. She accepted the cross and the assignment and I looked forward to receiving the decorated cross from her skillful young hands the next Saturday. Then a day or so later a letter came to all of us Canadian clergy from our bishop informing us that he very reluctantly was closing the churches at least until the end of the month. There would be no beautiful cross to venerate this year.

But we all still set our hearts on Pascha and looked forward to gathering again then, processing around the church with our candles, gathering at the front door at midnight and crying "Christ is risen!" and then feasting after Matins and the Liturgy in the church hall until the wee hours of the morning. Such optimism now seems hopelessly naïve. We imagined the Covid 19 storm would blow itself out in a week or two. At time of writing, it seems as if the storm might last on into the summer. But on the Sunday of St. Gregory Palamas the thought of losing all of Lent was horrific. The thought of losing Pascha was unthinkable. How could we survive without it? I am not the only one to mourn 2020 as the year without Pascha. All over the world Orthodox are grieving and struggling to cope.

My wife, as usual in our house, found just the right words to describe the feeling. It was, she said, something like "How the Grinch Stole Pascha"—the Grinch being the faceless Covid virus that stalks the land like an invisible enemy. And hidden in that characterization is perhaps the Orthodox answer to our grief, a way of seeing our situation in its true light so that we can better cope and survive.

Let us return to the Grinch—not the 2000 film with the talented Jim Carrey, but the real Grinch—the animated short film voiced by the immortal Boris Karloff, created in 1966. In that story, the Grinch hated the annual celebration of Christmas with all its joyful noise, and he was determined to stop the whole thing. He decided therefore to steal Christmas from the inhabitants of Whoville who lived at the base of his mountain home. He disguised himself as Santa Claus and, with coerced help from his hapless dog Max, entered every home in Whoville and stole all their Christmas presents, their Christmas trees, their Christmas decorations, and their Christmas food. In the famous ending to the short tale, after his night of Grinchy work he ascended to the top of his mountain to dump all the stolen Christmas swag into the deep valley below. But before he did so, he waited gleefully to hear the

mournful lamentation of the Whos down in Whoville below who, he felt sure, would all cry out in grief when they discovered that he had stolen Christmas from them.

Who can forget the ending? “The Grinch put a hand to his ear. And he did hear a sound rising over the snow. It started in low and it started to grow. But this sound wasn’t sad. This sound sounded glad. Every Who down in Whoville, the tall and the small, was singing—without any presents at all. He hadn’t stopped Christmas from coming—it came! Somehow or other, it came just the same.”

The Grinch puzzled and puzzled til his puzzler was sore. How could it be so? The answer, as the Grinch finally discovered, was contained within the song the Whos sung as they gathered in the public square: “Christmas Day is in our grasp, so long as we have hands to clasp.”

Dr. Seuss, that theologian of childhood’s joy, gives us insight into our current situation, and a new way to understand our Paschal deprivation. Pascha in Orthodoxy is not dependent upon our assembled Eucharist and feasting any more than Christmas in Whoville was dependent upon the presents and the decorations. Pascha is the inextinguishable hope that Christ kindles in the hearts of His people, a hope that we who have been united with Him in His Church will finally share His triumph over death. Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing life.

And it is not as if Christians have never before been forced to cope with liturgical deprivation through extraordinary circumstances. I remember the story of some Orthodox Christians imprisoned for their faith and political dissent after 1949 in Romania. In one such prison in Jilava, the prisoners lived fifteen meters underground in dampness and darkness, the single window there sealed against light and fresh air. They were hungry, hemmed in, living in semi-darkness during the day and pitch blackness during the night, forty-five Orthodox men in the stench of mold, urine and excrement waiting in a tomb.

As Pascha approached, they were determined to keep Pascha. They calculated when the midnight hour would arrive because they remembered that the nearby train blew its whistle at 11.40 p.m. as it left the station. When midnight finally arrived, they all raised the cry, “Christ is risen!”, and led by the two deacons among them, sang Paschal Matins from memory at the top of their lungs. Outside their cell, the guards went crazy, running up and down and banging on the doors, yelling at them to be quiet. But nothing could quench their joy and stop their mouths, and all the Jilava prison rang with the hymns of the Resurrection. Circumstances prevented the prisoners from serving the Paschal Eucharist and keeping the feast as they had done in happier days. But no circumstances could separate them from Christ and from their Paschal hope.

That hope remains in our hearts as well, even as Christ’s presence remains with us, whether or not we can gather together physically on Pascha night to serve the Eucharist and keep the Paschal feast. Christ remains in our midst, and we have still Him, because we still have each other. For now, we

must meet together separately, and share the Paschal celebration virtually through our computer screens at home. Soon enough we will join together and clasp hands physically as well. For now, from our homes on Pascha night let us rejoice in our risen Lord. We Orthodox Whos, the tall and the small, will sing to the Lord this Pascha. Pascha is within our grasp, so long as we have hands to clasp. Covid 19 cannot grinchily steal Pascha from us. Somehow or other, it will come just the same.

[Home](#) / [Work of the Church](#) / [Reflections in Christ](#) / [Fr. Lawrence Farley](#) / April 18, 2020

## Did God Send the Covid Virus as a Judgment?

In the sometimes over-abundant discussion now taking place about the current Covid virus, one sometimes hears the assertion that God has sent Covid 19 as a judgment upon us for our sins to make us repent. What are we to make of this?

First of all, repentance is always a good idea. More than that, it is the usual lifestyle for Christians. Repentance is not something we just do once when we first become believers; it is something we always do as part of our walk with God. Every day we make an examination of conscience and repent of the sins we have committed during that day, confessing them to God and trusting in His mercy and forgiveness. Sometimes we make a thorough interior house-cleaning in the form of sacramental confession. But we are always striving to be repentant since, taught by the Lord's Prayer, we realize that we every day need both our daily bread and the forgiveness of our daily trespasses.

We should do this whether or not we are sick with a virus or are in danger of such sickness. But—let's be clear—we can only repent of the things we have actually done wrong. We sometimes talk about “national repentance” or repenting as a nation. That is not entirely misguided, but it can hide from us fact that repentance is always personal, and is always coupled with a determination to amend one's life and not repeat the sin. I cannot repent (for example) of Canada's sins against the unborn, for I did not sin against the unborn, and I cannot stop my country from performing abortions. I can *denounce* the sin, but I cannot repent of the sin, since one cannot repent of something which one has done not. So, one wonders about the notion that God sent the virus so that Christians will repent of their nation's sins.

Of course it is possible that God has sent the Covid virus to afflict everyone so that the nation as a whole will turn back to God. But though this is possible, it is beyond demonstration.

God does send disasters upon the world as judgments for its sins. A deistic view of God denies such direct involvement in the earth. It imagines that God, having made the world, went on permanent

sabbatical and now just sits back and watches the world He made, like a couch potato watching Netflix. But the Biblical view of God asserts that God is intimately involved in the affairs of the nations, that He judges one and rewards another. “Does evil befall a city unless the Lord has done it?” (*Amos 3:6*). God rules over the nations, lifting up and putting down, guiding everyone and working His will, bringing Israel out of Egypt, the Philistines out of Caphtor, and the Syrians from Kir (*Amos 9:7*).

Yet the specific details of His workings are not revealed to us. We therefore cannot suppose that a tsunami means that those inundated were being judged for their sins, or that those suffering an earthquake were the targets of divine wrath for impenitent transgression. The Lord warned us against supposing that there was a one-to-one causal relationship connecting suffering and sin. In *Luke 13:1-5*, we see that certain people thought that the Galileans slaughtered by Pilate must have suffered this fate because of their sins. And the people of Jerusalem supposed that those killed when the tower of Siloam fell upon them suffered this disaster because they were worse than others. Our Lord contradicted such views, and said that those who suffered those disasters were no worse sinners than anyone else, so that one could not assert that all disasters were the result of particular sins. A particular disaster *might* be the result of a particular sin with a causal connection between sin and suffering, but in the absence of specific prophetic revelation, one cannot know. And prophets are not very plentiful—and are (may I opine) rarely found posting on Facebook.

We must therefore sit very lightly upon the causes of any particular disaster. The current crisis reminds us to repent of the sins we have committed, but this does not mean that our sins caused the crisis. And hopefully Christians would be repenting all the time regardless of such national disaster. We cannot know whether or not God has sent the Covid virus as a judgment. What we *can* know is that repentance is always timely, that godly obedience to secular authorities is always required, and that opportunities to help a needy neighbor will always find their reward. Let us not inquire into things beyond our reach. There is plenty for our hands to do already without such speculation. Let us not occupy ourselves with things too great and too marvelous for us (*Psalms 131:1*). Instead, let us get to work with calm and quiet souls.