

March 29, 2020: THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT (Of St. John of the Ladder)

Epistle: Hebrew 6:13-20:

For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, "Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you." And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is for them an end of all dispute. Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

Gospel: Mark 9:17-32:



Then one of the crowd answered and said, "Teacher, I brought You my son, who has a mute spirit. And wherever it seizes him, it throws him down; he foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, and becomes rigid. So I spoke to Your disciples, that they should cast it out, but they could not." He answered him and said, "O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him to Me." Then they brought him to Him. And when he saw Him, immediately the spirit convulsed him, and he fell on the ground and wallowed, foaming at the mouth. So He asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. And often he has thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." Jesus said to him, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes."

Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, "Lord, I believe; help my

unbelief!” When Jesus saw that the people came running together, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it: “Deaf and dumb spirit, I command you, come out of him and enter him no more!” Then the spirit cried out, convulsed him greatly, and came out of him. And he became as one dead, so that many said, “He is dead.” But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose. And when He had come into the house, His disciples asked Him privately, “Why could we not cast it out?” So He said to them, “This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting.” Then they departed from there and passed through Galilee, and He did not want anyone to know it. For He taught His disciples and said to them, “The Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him. And after He is killed, He will rise the third day.” But they did not understand this saying, and were afraid to ask Him.

It is impossible to read or hear this biblical passage and not feel compassion for the father of this young man who was severely demon-possessed. It is clear from the description of the symptoms of this case that the evil spirits, intent on inflicting the greatest damage and suffering on people, would not spare anybody, including children.

It is difficult enough when one of the spouses suffers with any illness; but the suffering is so much more amplified when children have to go through such a predicament. The parents, who are supposed to care and help their children feel hopeless and the level of their anguish grows with each day. They look everywhere for help and are willing to do anything to alleviate the suffering of their child. With each unsuccessful attempt, they become more desperate and their faith and hope become casualties of the unfortunate situation. That's why the father of the young man asked first the disciples for help: *I spoke to Your disciples, that they should cast it out, but they could not.* The failure of the apostles diminished the faith of the father. So, when he came to Christ, doubt had already crept in his mind and heart: *But if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.*

The Lord is quick to restore the faith of the distraught parent by assuring him that *all things are possible to him who believes.* This causes the wonderful reply of the father who says: *“Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!”*

There is some similarity between the father of this child and Thomas the Apostle who would voice his doubt about the Lord's resurrection. Then, when confronted with the Risen Lord, he said: “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28). To go even further, we can say that there is more than some similarity between these men and us. Most of us experience some level of uncertainty or even doubt, especially when our prayers are not answered right away. The good news is that our Lord and Savior is ready to extend His redeeming hand, lift us up (as He did to the demon-possessed child) and give us assurance, restoring our faith: *all things are possible to him who believes.*

The gospel reading continues by clarifying our dilemma, as to why the apostles failed to heal the young man and, at the same time, to teach us the importance of fasting and prayer in the spiritual warfare we all face: *“This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting.”*

May our good and loving Lord give us faith and strength so that we may finish our spiritual journey in fasting and prayer!

Fr. George Bazgan

SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

Due to the coronavirus pandemic and, in accordance with the measures taken by our Hierarchs, for the time being, the following changes will go into effect:

1. **The Divine Liturgy is to be attended only by the clergy, the chanter and those who help with the church service.**
2. **All other services during the week are suspended, except Vespers (Saturdays at 5:00), mainly for those who come for Confession**
3. **Our Sunday fellowships are being suspended** until further notice.
4. **All Sunday School classes are suspended.**

We ask all of you to observe the recommendations made by the health experts, such as: stay home if you are not feeling well, wash your hands, keep the social distance, etc.

Don't forget to read our weekly electronic Bulletin, which comes out every Thursday at 6:00PM, for other details and updates.

We apologize for the inconvenience and thank you for the understanding!

May God keep all of us safe!

MEMBERSHIP

The Board of Directors extends a warm appeal to all supporters of our parish, asking them **to pay their membership until Easter.**

This way we can ensure that we have the necessary funds to fulfill our financial obligations during the Summer months and for the rest of the year as well.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH!

LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR!

During these trying times, we expect some of families (individuals) of our community to experience a higher degree of hardship, in terms of paying the rent, groceries, etc.

In order to help them cope with such difficulties, we are announcing the creation of a Humanitarian Fund, called "LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR."

Fr. George is committing \$500 per month for this cause until the current situation is resolved.

Those who want to contribute, with any amount, please call Mrs. Corina Sasu (780-200-1171) to make arrangements for payment.

Thank You and God Bless!

CHURCH DIRECTORY PICK UP

The 2019 Church Directory is now available for those who participated in this project. If your family came to the Hall for a photography appointment or submitted your own family picture (for \$15), then you will receive a Directory. There is no rush to pick up your family directory.

Under the current unusual conditions, it is better to contact Fr. George (780-473-0029) to make arrangements for pick up.

We appologize for the delay and thank you for your patience and support for this Church project!

Have a happy and safe Spring!

Pastoral guidelines in time of health emergency

Reverend Fathers,
Esteemed Members of the Parish Councils,
Beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord,

Due to the rapid evolution of the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) worldwide and the necessary detection and prevention measures taken by the federal and provincial authorities of Canada, the normal course of liturgical and spiritual life of all of us has been greatly disrupted. Conscious of our spiritual but also social responsibility towards those amongst us, we also join the effort of the whole society - federal and provincial official authorities, - to lessen the impact of coronavirus contamination (COVID-19). The measures required by the actual situation reinforce our sense of human and social solidarity.

After consulting the Eparchial Council and aware of the need of a sustained and consistent effort in the sense of the spiritual and social responsibility we make the following recommendations with immediate effect:

Divine Liturgy and Holy Sacraments

- All parishes and monasteries must comply with the directives issued by the federal and provincial authorities;
- **All religious services of this period (Canonical Hours, Divine Liturgy, Holy Sacraments, other blessings etc.) will no longer have a public character.** They will be performed only by the clergy, a chanter and a person or two who help in the altar or in the church. This is the time when we will need to adapt to this trying period creatively by encouraging us to search the online resources (see end of document);
- Priests will be available and in contact with the believers to respond to their urgent spiritual needs. They will **have to establish a program so that the faithful may receive the Holy Sacraments or benefits from the grace of various prayers, respecting the instructions given by the federal and provincial Canadian authorities (social distancing, etc.);**
- **Baptisms, Marriages and Funerals** will have to be rescheduled. In case the funerals cannot be rescheduled, they will be performed with the doors closed in the presence of the family, in accordance with the instructions of the local authorities;
- The monastic communities will be closed to visitors or they will follow the parish procedure in this regard (priest, chanter, one or two persons) performing religious services exceptionally in a no-public character;
- In the case of the Sacrament of the Holy Unction, by ecclesiastical economy, it can be performed by a single priest;

Pastoral guidance

- Priests will respond to the spiritual needs of all believers, and in particular the elderly, who have a fragile health situation. They have to be available to offer Holy Communion at home as well as other prayers, individually, in accordance with the directives of the local authorities;

- The requests of the believers may be addressed in person, by telephone or electronically to the parish priest and these will be introduced in the petitions of the Divine Liturgy or other specific services during the Great Lent.
- The priests will find the most appropriate means to offer Anaphora, Holy Water (Greater or Lesser) and the Oil from the Sacrament of the Holy Unction;
- Priests and believers in the Romanian Orthodox Metropolia of the two Americas are invited every week - **Tuesday and Thursday evenings - 9 PM-EST; 8 PM-CST and 6 PM-PST**, until the pandemic is over, to read at home the service of the **Paraclisis of the Mother of God. On Wednesdays and Fridays, you can follow the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts at the Metropolitan Cathedral in Chicago and broadcasted live on the biserica.tv starting at 5:00 pm - CET, and on Sunday, the St. Basil's Liturgy at 9:30 am-CET.**

Religious education and AROLA

- All AROLA courses, meetings and events, as well as other public activities of the parish, such as coffee-hours etc. will be suspended for the present time;
- The Metropolitan Religious Education Department will provide weekly video recordings lessons as well as printed materials for parents and children;
- AROLA will also send short weekly interviews or lessons on spiritual themes from nuns, preotese or priests.

Financial concerns

As you could see, all authorities - federal and provincial - are aware of the major financial impact that the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) will have on both personal and institutional level.

- We will have to be attentive and sensitive to the situations of financial fragility and to intervene to the extent of our individual possibilities or as parish/monastery;
- Some parishes and monasteries are engaged in loans and mortgages. The special situation of this period will also affect them. It is good for those in charge - the Parish Council - to pay attention to all the economic and financial and banking proposals, as well as to the different financial packages, the different periods of extension, delay, temporary exemption of payments in order to have a better perspective on the possibilities to go safely through this difficult period;
- Parishes or monasteries with more financial possibilities or without debt can contact the Eparchial Center to show their willingness to help. Also, the parishes or monasteries that have financial difficulties should contact the Eparchial Center for information. We hope that through faith, courage, solidarity and creative ingenuity we will succeed together and become stronger in this endeavor;
- The financial impact of this crisis will also be felt on parishes and monasteries because of the very limited participation of believers in Church services. Every believer is invited to think and help with the little or more to the expenses of the parishes and monasteries at this time;

Let us use this time to get out of the vortex of the world to pause for a moment on God and on the reordering of our priorities and understanding of our essential needs as they arise

from this divine purpose. The grace of God to the extent of our faith works in every circumstance as in this time of trial.

I thank everyone - clergy and faithful - for their effort, understanding and solidarity.

We pray to the Good God that all - clergy and faithful - of the parishes and monasteries of our Diocese find comfort and healing of soul and body through the prayers of our Protectors - **the Mother of God, St. Andrew the Apostle and St. John Cassian.**

The faithful together, with the clergy of our Diocese, are invited to remain united in prayer for the whole world even if limited by '*social distance.*'

With charitable love and hope in Christ our Lord,

†Ioan Casian

Romanian Orthodox Bishop of Canada

Saint-Hubert, March 20th, 2020

Online resources

English language

Orthodox Christian Network (OCN)

<http://myocn.net/worship/>

Ancient Faith Radio

<https://www.ancientfaith.com/radio>

Greek Orthodox Archdiocese

<https://www.goarch.org/live-broadcast>

Greek/english

Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Canada

<https://www.gometropolis.org/multimedia/live-broadcast/>