



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

April 28, 2020

To the faithful of the Eparchy of Passaic, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Christ is Risen! Forgiveness is risen from the grave!

Thank you to everyone who has labored selflessly and at great personal risk for working to save the lives of the infected and to keep safe the rest of us. These are somber times in the northeast. A priest in central Jersey told me he was at a cemetery last Friday and he counted nineteen hearses—and he didn't count them all! I also thank all those who have cared for your fellow parishioners or the priests, buying them groceries and medicine so that they could stay safely at home. I also thank everyone who has made it possible for us to have services online, and who worked in other ways to keep our parishes alive.

My heart goes out to everyone who lost a loved one in this time. It is unspeakably sad that people now die and are buried without their family and friends. As a Church we will take time for public mourning at a later date.

In all parts of the Eparchy of Passaic, all the faithful are still dispensed from the obligation of attending services, and are dispensed from the so called "Easter duty" for the year of 2020. Even if services resume in your area, please stay home if you are weak in health, or if you might be infectious.

I urge everyone to make a good confession later in the year when it is safe. As King David said, "Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against him and in whose spirit is not deceit. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.... Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,' and you forgave all the guilt of my sin. Therefore, let everyone who is godly pray to you in seasonable time."

All public services in the Eparchy of Passaic were suspended from March 16 through April 30. At this time, we see that some local governments are loosening restrictions, while others are not.

In those states where the government is allowing churches to meet, pastors may use their judgment to have services that are in conformity with local restrictions and the recommendations of the health authorities. I ask all the lay people to respect the decision of the pastor. As the Epistle to the Hebrews says, "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an accounting. Give them reason to do this with joy and not with grief, for that would surely not benefit you."

BYZANTINE CATHOLIC EPARCHY OF PASSAIC

In those states where the government has not eased restrictions on public gatherings, the suspension of public services continues through May 13. The suspension of public services includes all activities at a church that involve a physical gathering of parishioners or interaction with the public.

Baptisms, weddings, and funerals may only be celebrated privately with immediate family, and in compliance with the guidelines of the civil authorities, at this time no more than ten people present counting everyone. Communion should not be distributed at these events except the precious blood to the newly baptized. People who do not live together should keep social distancing in compliance with public health guidelines.

Confession or individual communion may be administered on request, but only in compliance with public health guidelines. No priest is required to put his own health at risk, especially those over 65 or with compromised health. The lay people must not ask the priest to put his life in danger with unreasonable requests.

In ministering to the sick or dying, the priest should follow the advice of health workers. If communion is possible, the spoon must be sterilized or destroyed afterwards.

What are we to learn from our loving Creator in this time of plague? For those who have died, we pray for God's visitation, and recall the words of the Song of Songs, "Hark! My lover—here he comes springing across the mountains, leaping across the hills. My lover is like a gazelle or a young stag. Here he stands behind our wall, gazing through the windows, peering through the lattices. My lover speaks; he says to me, 'Arise, my beloved, my beautiful one, and come! For see the winter is past, the rains are over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth, the time of pruning the vines has come, the song of the dove is heard in our land. The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines, in bloom, give forth fragrance. Arise, my beloved, my beautiful one, and come!'"

For those of us who remain behind, we devote ourselves to the love of God and avoid gossip, especially those news channels and publications which are almost entirely malicious gossip. We pray for our civil authorities, and for those working in the hospitals, and driving the ambulances, and burying the dead. St. Paul counsels us, "Let your love be without pretense. Hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Anticipate each other in showing honor.... Be patient in tribulation; persevere in prayer... Bless those who curse you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

I commend all the people of the Eparchy of Passaic to the protection of the great Archangel Michael, to the gentle kindness of St. Joseph, and especially to the care of the all holy Mother of God.

Your servant,

+ *Kurt*

Most Rev. Kurt Burnette
Bishop of Passaic

