



Office of the Metropolitan

312 Garfield Street

Johnstown, PA 15906

April 7, 2020

Protocol No. 13/2020

God is with us!

Dear Reverend Clergy and Faithful Laity of the Diocese,

Today I am writing to you with additional details concerning the remainder of Great Lent, Holy Week and Pascha, specifically for our Diocese. These are in addition to Protocol No. 11/2020 dated April 3, which included the Statement of the American Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the USA.

1) The Sacrament of Confession: The days of Lent, even without the pestilence of Covid-19, is an arena of spiritual warfare. The evil one “prowls around like a roaring lion seeking whom he can devour”. During this difficult time many of us are experiencing inner struggles and need relief. Close contact between individuals is strongly discouraged during this time and so by way of economia, I give my brother Priests permission and the blessing to hear the confessions of individuals over the phone. However, the final prayer of absolution will be read over the penitent at a later date when the crisis has passed. People are encouraged to contact their Priests to setup a convenient time.

2) Services during Holy Week: Every effort should be made to serve as many services as possible during Holy Week and Pascha. In some parishes there may be a need to reduce the number of services (for example, the cantor is older and may not be able to serve all the services), so be selective. If you are thinking of reducing the number, it might be best to choose from the earlier services of the week, such as a Bridegroom Matins or a Pre-Sanctified Liturgy.

3) Antidoron, Palms, Pussy Willows, Eggs, Candles, etc : Traditionally various items which have been blessed are distributed by the Church. In order to reduce the possibility of transferring the Coronavirus from one person to another, this year we will not distribute items as normal. For Palm Sunday those Churches who already have palms or pussy willows will bless them as is the tradition, however they will then be placed aside in the Church. They are not to be put outside for people to come by and pick them up as some have suggested, including myself, initially. Later when things return to normal and we are allowed to return to our Churches, the palms and pussy willows will be there for us to celebrate with. As Jesus entered into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, we will enter into our Churches triumphantly and hold our palms and pussy willows (by that time all viruses that might have been present on them will be dead).

The American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese of North America

ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE OF CONSTANTINOPLE

4) Service of Holy Unction: Typically this service is held on Wednesday of Holy Week, although it may be celebrated at any time. It is a healing service with 7 Epistles, 7 Gospels, and 7 Prayers. I ask the Priests to please celebrate this service so that the prayers can be heard by our Lord and all the people in this time of pestilence. The Holy Oil should be kept for future use. When things return to normal and we are allowed to return to our Churches, each parish can schedule a time to hold the Service of Holy Unction again with the parishioners present so that all of us can be anointed with Holy Oil.

5) Private Prayer Time in the Church: Earlier during this crisis, we allowed individuals to enter the Churches for a few minutes for private prayer and an opportunity to light a candle. Until further notice this practice is to be discontinued. I ask the Priests to please light one candle daily representing their entire flock until the Churches are reopened for the return of the people.

6) The Eucharist: Priests are asked to distribute the Eucharist only to those who are dying. In many cases hospitals, assisted living centers and nursing homes are restricting visitors, even clergy. If it is possible to visit the dying, please use the preventative/protective measures that the institutions are requiring. Everyone else should prepare themselves to receive the Eucharist at the first opportunity following the reopening of the Churches. God willing that first Sunday back as a family in our Churches shall be a glorious day for all of us.

7) Resurrection Matins: For those Churches that will be live streaming Matins, it is appropriate to forego the tradition of going outside to read the Resurrection Gospel. This year all the Priests are to read it from the open Royal Doors inside the Church. In this way we are unified in our method of celebration.

8) The Resurrection Candle and the Light: Unfortunately and with great sadness we will not be together as one big family in our Churches to receive the Light of our Resurrected Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ. God willing the Light will arrive and the Priest and those few with him (representing all of us) will light their candles. Those in their homes should also light their candles or candle and sing the Resurrection hymn with great joy. Priests are asked to light votive candles to be kept in the Church and to keep the flame going until that time when the Churches will reopen and the people will be able to light their own candles with the flame of the Resurrection.

9) Blessing of Paschal Baskets: A beautiful tradition of our Diocese is the blessing of baskets by the Priests containing many of the foods that people refrained from during Great Lent and Holy Week. Various strategies and plans have been proposed for continuing this tradition within the current restrictive environment that we live in. However for the protection of all concerned, this year the Priests will not be blessing baskets for Pascha. Instead everyone will be provided with the appropriate prayers and will recite them in their homes following the Divine Liturgy on Pascha. If families have any Holy Water in their homes, they may sprinkle their baskets following the prayers.

10) Holy Week From Home: It is highly recommended that all the families of the Diocese printout the booklet created by Fr. William Bennett and Fr. Jonathan Bannon entitled “Holy Week From Home” and use it as a companion guide as they worship during the live streamed services. The Priests should forward it to all on the parish email lists.

Stay Home and Be Safe: These are very unusual, stressful and challenging times. Governmental, health, and scientific authorities have encouraged everyone to just stay home and shelter in place. Hierarchs of various Orthodox Churches around the world are instructing their flocks to do similar things. It is the hope and prayer of everyone that these adjustments to our regular practices and traditions of celebrating Holy Week and Pascha, will keep people from becoming ill and even save lives. It is extremely difficult and heartbreaking but we must do it. Already we have lost loved ones in our Diocese. Let us pray we lose no more. May the Holy Spirit visit all of our “little churches” (our own homes) in the coming days and weeks.

“But the Lord, He is the One who goes before you. He will be with you. He will not leave nor forsake you: do not be afraid, nor be terrified.” (Deut 31:8)

Working in His Vineyard with great anticipation of receiving the Light,

+Metropolitan Gregory

+Metropolitan Gregory of Nyssa

This Protocol is to be distributed by all means available including the emailing of parishioners as soon as possible.