

Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy of Toronto and Eastern Canada Українська Католицька Єпархія Торонто й Східної Канади

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April 2, 2020

To the Reverend Clergy, Members of Religious Orders and Faithful of the Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy of Toronto and Eastern Canada

“Our pioneers and ancestors kept the faith even though, at times, they seldom celebrated the sacraments in churches because of external circumstances or oppression. Let us hear God speak to us through their example and learn from them as they strengthened their domestic churches – by interior and external faith.” (Bishop Bryan Bayda)

ATTITUDE - Maintain an active attitude of constant discernment, both secular and sacred

As COVID-19 information is constantly updated, so must we continue to learn from our science and health communities about the virus, ways to self-check for symptoms and best practices. Likewise, we must continue to update ourselves regarding the spiritual impact of this pandemic and be revitalized about how to spiritually strengthen ourselves and others. **We don't have the comfort of adopting a spiritual routine and then leave it at that, such as reading a directive that may be days old and think it won't be updated.** That is why I continue to meet, by Zoom and telephone, to bring to you the best practices and directives. No one should make decisions in these days without consultation, for the Holy Spirit speaks through all of us.

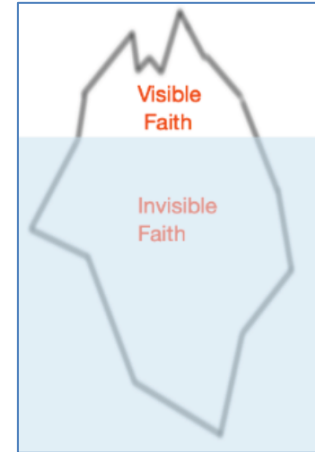
Since my last pastoral letter to you on March 20, 2020, more directives and suggestions have become available from the Eastern Congregation of Churches in Rome dated March 25, 2020 and in the [Letter of His Beatitude Sviatoslav with Recommendations as to how to serve the Holy Week and Easter Services During the Covid-19 Pandemic](#) (24 March 2020). Clergy and parish leaders have worked tirelessly to be pastoral and understanding of the physical and spiritual needs of their families of faith. They have issued pastoral Parish directives. **Yet we must be prepared to receive new and updated directives. Directives are progressing all the time.**

These directives have always been given in the context of the civic authorities and their directives and the progress of safety (meeting of groups limited to 250, then 100, then 50, 10, 5). **Therefore, when a church official may suggest a spiritual practice, it is based on a specific context. However, this is not meant to provide someone with a means to justify a personal decision so as to ignore another church official. In other words, following the “letter of the law to avoid the spirit of the law” is not right.** For example, one directive says “one may venerate...” but, more locally, the directives says “it is forbidden”. Like the Code of Canons for Eastern Churches, there is a general law and then there is a particular law. Please don't use one directive against the other to merely justify your actions.

Hours ago, I consulted about these directives, and discussed them at great length, with all of the Ukrainian Catholic Metropolia (Bishops) of North America of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. I continue to consult with Roman Catholic bishops; the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops; the College of Consultors and other leadership in our Eparchies that administrate or work in hospitals and care homes. So, when I urge you to follow this directive keeping in mind the previous ones, it is with utmost love, consideration and compassion

that I give you direction in the Eparchy of Saskatoon and the Eparchy of Toronto and Eastern Canada. Broader consultation takes more time but it offers a more comprehensive update.

Much, much more importantly, it is following the **spirit** of these directives that we should focus on. As the external marking of our faith is important, we must strive to have a **disposition of the connectedness between symbols/actions and internal faith**. For example, mindful that the tip of an iceberg is still the true iceberg, we must focus on both dimensions of the entire iceberg, the portion that is visible as well as invisible. Likewise, while our spiritual ritual is **visible**, a truly significant part of our faith is that which is internal or **invisible** and is 100% connected to the visible. **Don't reduce your faith and relationship with Christ to merely external visible rites of passage.** Your body and your soul are unique but inseparable.



Your encounter with Jesus is the entire iceberg. We encounter Him in all ways that He witnessed to the Father's love, His private prayer life (*JN 17:1-26*), His passion, obedience and humility, death and glorious resurrection. Please read a wonderful reflection on how it is Christ who blesses (*The Domestic Church: A Place of Prayer and Blessing compiled by Fr. Onuferko*). Every person allows Christ in them to bless according to their sacramental status in life. The visible part of your faith points to the invisible participation in the life of Christ. Vice versa, your interior life is expressed in your visible life. As much as Jesus through Jordan water blesses an icon, an object, a willow or food, so does Jesus bless all things through your interior disposition of fasting, obedience, prayer, intercession, charity or reverence.

ACTION - Allow the indwelling Trinity to develop your Interior Life and your Domestic Church. Pruning helps the branch to bear more fruit. Move from maintenance to mission! You are invited to preach in word and deed a Domestic Church Mission over the upcoming days!

Therefore, mindful of the mystery of the pandemic and its ultra-infectious properties, in addition to the previous directives:

- 1. In the Eparchy of Saskatoon and Toronto and Eastern Canada, there is to be no public veneration in a church during Holy Week, including the shroud on Holy Friday, and Easter because of COVID 19.**
 - a. WHY?** In the Eparchy of Toronto and Eastern Canada, it is reserved to the clergy to venerate and carry out the services in our churches and share them online. Understandably, faithful may not have a physical or electronic means to join in, but this is because of numerous complications and risks of sanitizing, marshalling people in lines, etc. In the end, it is still participation but in a different way. Other bishops have made directives for their faithful but their circumstances have different variables.
 - b. ALTERNATIVELY:** faithful can celebrate the service at home, with parallel symbols and gestures that normally would take place (willows, Shroud, Cross on Doors, Pascha) and do them coinciding with a televised or live-streamed service. Encounter Christ in your family or in the person who is caring for your personal needs. *“For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”* *MT18:20*
- 2. Clergy are to prepare their parishioners to receive parts of the services in printed or online form as much as possible.** Read the Gospels so to participate in these mysteries of Christ's Life and love for us. Reflect with Jesus and the *Theotokos* about the mystery of His suffering, death and resurrection and yours.
- 3. All faithful are encouraged to make a sincere Act of Contrition.** This, of course, refers to the situation when “a penitent sincerely regrets his/her sins, not out of fear of God's just punishment; but because of having offended our loving Lord.”¹ Ask your local parish priest how to do this, or check online.
- 4. All faithful are encouraged to make a sincere Spiritual Communion.** Ask your local parish priest how to do this or check online.

¹ [Letter of His Beatitude Sviatoslav with Recommendations as to how to serve the Holy Week and Easter Services During the Covid-19 Pandemic](#) (24 March 2020), n. 7

5. There are to be no pedestrian gatherings at churches or halls for the sacramental blessings of willows or food in a pedestrian fashion.

- a. WHY? While the blessing of Christ through the Pope or Bishop or Priest is sacramental and of great value, your blessing is also important.
- b. ALTERNATIVELY: The Pope blessed over electronic platforms. Have your willows or food blessed by the bishop or priest over electronic platforms also. And though your blessing is not sacramental in the same sense, God is calling laity to experience this, given the circumstances. Try to discover your dignity and worth when Christ, through you, blesses your family and items for your home. Share in Christ's priesthood since you have been baptized in Christ.
- c. Discover how Christ wants to use you in more at-home ways to bless; your belongings and gifts from God; your brother, your sister, your parents by your actions and words. When you forgive you bless. Through your love, kindness and compassion you bless (and not just with water). **You are empowered to express your baptismal priesthood in Christ!** Encounter Him through confession and forgiveness in your daily life from one another on a one-to-one basis. This is a preparation for a sacramental confession with a priest who at a later time, on behalf of the entire Body of Christ, will provide an encounter with Christ on a sacramental level.
- d. Discover how Communion with Christ sacramentally in the Eucharist should be enhanced by desire, by spiritual communion several times a day, every day. The opportunity has perhaps never been more timely. **Receiving the Eucharist physically at church is prepared by many spiritual communions daily at home or elsewhere in your life.** As a parent, child, relative or friend, spiritually commune with Christ for others, thus, expressing your baptismal priesthood in Christ when interceding for others!
- e. Experience the crescendo that should take place before attending a parish service. (A metaphor from secular life: practices and the regular season games make the playoffs and the championship game that much more meaningful).

To appreciate the presence of Christ in the entire Church, the Body of Christ, focus on the Domestic Church and **the role God calls you to play in your church as a missionary disciple**, a branch of the larger vine. Like a team is strengthened by each member that physically trains or deepens their personal commitment, so does your spiritual prayer and domestic development enhance the Body of Christ. God is present in the entire Body of Christ where in our parishes we sacramentally receive the Eucharist. This is preceded by a reverence for God's presence in Scripture; God celebrated in our domestic churches; God's presence celebrated in our personal lives; and God encountered in the poor. Kindly read the following passage slowly, as if God is reading it to you:

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full." (John 15:1-11 (ESV) 1)

In Christ,

Bishop Bryan Bayda, CSSR
Apostolic Administrator of the Eparchy of Toronto and Eastern Canada