

SUMMER OF 2020 - SPIRITUAL DESERT

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,
Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory Forever!

As we are sending this Monthly Mailing by email, I wanted to share few thoughts and parish update with all of you, for the beginning of this unusual summer.

Unless we find ourselves on an exciting vacation somewhere far from home (which is unlikely during this summer), it seems that nothing can conceivably be more uneventful than summer during “stay-at-home”. The only “variety” offered seems to be found in the weather. Will it rain or will the sun shine? Will the blistering heat continue, or will we feel some relief? It feels that there isn’t much to look forward to – or if we are really “lucky”, we are awaiting an upcoming trip that at least fills us with some sense of anticipation and “escape.” Which poses a further question: are those carefully-planned vacations into which we invest so much time, energy, money – and even hope – always as rewarding, relaxing and renewing as anticipated? I suppose that can only be assessed once we have returned – hopefully as intact as when we departed! Whatever the case may be, the following passage from the Scriptures may just inspire us to see beyond the tedium that leads to the forgetfulness of God: “Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather healed” (Hebrew 12:12-13).

Adding to our spiritual “*ennui*” (listlessness and dissatisfaction arising from the lack of occupation or excitement) is, admittedly, the fact that summer is the most uneventful months of the year liturgically: no major fasts or feasts occur during this months. Basically, there is “only” the Liturgy on Sundays and the commemoration of a few well-known saints throughout these months. There may also be certain signs of “spiritual laziness” setting in (induced, perhaps, in part by the haziness of the weather) leading to that condition of spiritual torpor known in our spiritual literature as “*akedia*”. Summer, therefore, is something of a months - long stretch of desert, for we celebrate Pentecost, the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul at the end of June and await the major Feasts of the Transfiguration and Dormition in August, within the context of the two-week fast from August 1-14.

Of course, we never want to find ourselves saying that there is “only” the Liturgy on Sunday mornings. The word “only” is hopelessly inadequate when applied to the celebration of the Eucharist! “Only” implies “uneventful.” Yet, every Liturgy is the actualization of the Paschal Mystery of the Death and Resurrection of Christ, and our participation in that mystery. At every Liturgy we proclaim and bless the presence and power of the Kingdom of Heaven. We are praying to and praising the Holy Trinity together with the angels and the saints. We are in direct communion with God and one another in the Liturgy. This means that every Liturgy is “eventful” in a manner that we can barely comprehend!

If, indeed, the summer proves to be something of a spiritual drought, then we can only thank God for the weekly liturgical cycle that begins and culminates with the Divine Liturgy on the Lord’s Day so that we can recover and renew our genuine humanity that has been created, redeemed and transformed “in Christ.” To speak of our life “in Christ” on the communal level we believe that at every Liturgy, we anticipate the messianic banquet where and when “many will come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 8:11). The heavenly manna, or the “Bread from heaven” that we receive by the grace of God, strengthens us in the somewhat outward and inward “desert-like” conditions of the world around or within us.

On a more interior level, we may one day make the wonderful discovery that we need not travel far away geographically in order to embark upon a life - transforming journey. In the Prologue to his book The Orthodox Way, Metropolitan Kallistos Ware relates the following anecdote.

“One of the best known of the Desert Fathers of the fourth-century Egypt, Saint Sarapion the Sidonite, travelled once on pilgrimage to Rome. Here he was told of a celebrated recluse, a woman who lives always in one small room, never going out. Skeptical about her way of life – for he was himself a great wanderer – Sarapion called on her and asked: ‘Why are you sitting here?’ To this she replied: ‘I am not sitting, I am on a journey.’”

Admittedly, this will not work well with the children. But at one point in our lives, we need desperately to make that discovery of our interior depths wherein we find a point of stillness that will further still our excessive restlessness that endlessly pushes us “outward” rather than “inward.” In one of my favorite sentences in *The Orthodox Way*, Metropolitan Kallistos puts it this way: “We are on a journey through the inward space of the heart, a journey not measured by the hours of our watch or the days of the calendar, for it is a journey out of time into eternity.”

“Vacations” are one thing, and “journeys” (or pilgrimages) another. The packaging and planning of the former make them much more predictable than the limitless possibilities of the latter. So, as we plan our outward vacations by plane or car, we need make provisions for the interior journeys into the greater space of our hearts through “faith, hope and love,” as well as through the practices of prayer and fasting, so as to remain attentive to the “still voice of God” that gives direction and meaning to our lives. Be that as it may, we pray that God will bless us on both forms of travel!

With an incredible optimistic energy your beloved parish is hard at work, during this time when most of our people can’t come to church.

From numerous emails, phone calls and texts we know that our people can’t wait to get back to be assembled once again in our beautiful church for Divine Services, so inspirationally sung by our great choir.

Once again, we want to update everyone on continued work of your parish, in the last 2 months, when it seems that the whole world came to a halt, due to corona virus.

Most importantly, our liturgical services not only continued, they have increased! We served Divine Services 7 days a week, “on behalf of all and for all.” We added healing services on all weekdays (with “skeletal crew”) during Great Lent, where we prayed for the health and well-being of all of our parishioners, loved ones and friends, with special prayers for protection from corona virus and healing, written by our Archbishop Michael. We have celebrated all prescribed Services of Holy Week, Pascha, Bright Week, as well as all the feasts.

Thanks to our parish council and volunteers, we have undertaken a major renovation project – repainting the whole church. That involved a lot of work on our part – unfastening and removing all the pews, removing all icons from walls, moving all of analogions, tetrapod, icon shrines, altar table and table of oblation, not to mention smaller items throughout the church. Special thanks to Dick Sura, Mike Pylypciw and all the volunteers who helped during this tremendous undertaking.

This major renovation project was completed and church was put back in order. What an incredible difference! We thank all who helped and generously contributed to this major project and ask God’s blessing on them. As we pray at the Divine Liturgy, in a prayer of Ambo: “Bless O Lord, those who love the beauty of Thy house!”

Upon completion of repainting of the church proper, and by the unanimous decision of our parish council, we have undertaken and completed repainting of our social hall. That also involved a lot of moving of tables and chairs, removing icons from the walls, and other items, such as bookstore and icon displays, as well as baking racks and machinery. We are truly grateful and blessed to have such great people in our parish family!

After repainting of the hall, the entire facility downstairs was scrubbed, washed and waxed. That included the hall, the kitchen, Sunday school classroom, stairs, landings, bathrooms, and common use surfaces. Tables and

chairs were reset in usual Paschal setting, and the entire facility was disinfected with high grade professional MPC A2Z, CDC approved disinfectant cleaner.

While maintaining all of the Liturgical Services of our parish with limited attendance, we have redoubled our efforts in cleaning and disinfecting our Sacred Items, church, pews, hall, Sunday school classrooms, and all publicly used areas. All of those are and will continue to be cleaned and disinfected before and after all the services.

The long overdue beautification and repairs in our Parish Cemetery will be moving forward, as it was approved at our May council meeting, by unanimous vote. This will include fixing and repairs of multiple monuments and tombstones, some of which are lopsided, some broken, and some fallen over. Some of those stones are from 1800's, and we know that it is our responsibility, as a parish family, to show our love to fathers and mothers, children and even grandchildren who fell asleep in the Lord, and to keep their resting place beautiful, sacred and consecrated by prayers of the faithful.

Concurrently, as soon as our region of the State will move to the next stage of reopening businesses, your parish council will finalize scope of work and will solicit several bids (minimum 3) for our next major project - replacement our old and inefficient air-conditioning and heating systems, with new and energy efficient Mitsubishi System, that is whisper quiet and Eco-friendly, capable of cooling and heating square footage of the church proper and the hall.

In addition, it removes humidity and dust and dirt particles, soot and pollen, and makes air healthy to breathe. Once this part of the project is completed, it will be reviewed by your parish council, and recommended contractor, job description and bid will then be presented to the Special Parish Meeting, for everyone's vote and approval, in keeping with our Parish Bylaws. This project, in addition to making our air in the church healthier and temperatures comfortable, will also help to preserve the beauty and cleanliness of our newly repainted church, iconostas, shrines, mosaics, icons and other sacred articles, so generously and lovingly donated by our people.

We are profoundly grateful to our parishioners and friends for their generosity and continued financial commitment to our parish, as stewards of our church. An incredible amount of good works during these difficult times is only possible due to your continued and faithful generosity. It is my belief that we will come out of this crisis stronger and more united than ever before, as a Bride of Christ – His Holy Church!

Please know that your parish is praying for you and your loved ones daily, in all the Divine Services. Please continue to pray for one another, support one another, and love one another. This pandemic too shall pass. Remember that the Lord is our refuge and protector. May our good God watch over us until we all can once again gather to sing His praises, side by side, as a reunited parish family.

If you have any needs where your parish family might be able to help ... or if, you may be able to offer assistance ... we ask you to share these and any prayer requests, for persons you know who are struggling in this present crisis, with Fr. Alexey or any parish council member.

With love in Risen Christ,

Fr. Alexey