

## **Father David's Message to the Parish regarding St. Sophia's Response to Coronavirus Crisis**

### **Transcript of March 18, 2020 Facebook Live Video**

Beloved parishioners of St. Sophia's Greek Orthodox Church, may she live forever as a light of salvation to Syracuse and to the world:

First, I apologize that this is the first of my communications to you concerning the Coronavirus crisis. I have been as blindsided as you, and there have been a flurry of communications coming from other sources - the CDC, the Archdiocese, the Governor, the Metropolitan, the President and local authorities. My plan was to convey their information to you without comment. My comments would have, I think, added to the confusion. And, perhaps I would have found myself needing to back-petal.

Recently the president asked that everyone avoid groups of more than 10 people, and the Metropolis offices took the initiative to require that all parishes close their doors to anyone attending any services. Therefore, starting now, our beloved St. Sophia's will be closed to parishioners for the Akathist Hymn, the Presanctified Liturgies, Great Vespers, and the Sunday Divine Liturgy. All services will be streamed over Facebook. We cannot allow anyone into the Church building who is not absolutely necessary to conduct the services.

There will be other opportunities to interact with our Church. We're planning to live-stream the Jesus Prayer group on Mondays and the Bible study on Tuesday. Keep in mind that the Church website has my Lenten Reflections in written and audio format - we're looking at the lenten readings from Isaiah this year. These will be the ways we stay connected.

I realize that this is an extreme decision. But this is our nation, our people, and we will be good citizens of this land. We could fly under the radar and go on as if nothing was happened, but that would not be right. The American people are going to extremes in order to protect the most vulnerable among us, and St. Sophia's is proud to be a part of that effort.

Let me say four quick things as we move to this “online” format.

The first is that some members of our community do not have the equipment or the inclination to shift to this new situation. Please reach out to them - not just your family members. All of us can think of someone who fits this description. Help them. Or contact me and tell me who it is, and I'll contact them. If we were starting a live-streaming program at our parish, it would be fine if some people didn't get it, but this is different! The computer will be the only open door to our Church.

Secondly, people have asked how parishioners will get Holy Communion. We have it good in this country, with churches and priests always available for us, and communion available anytime we want. At many points in the history of the Church and in many areas of the world today, that was/is not the case. In those circumstances, people learn to experience unity with God in other ways - prayer, fasting, scripture reading, singing. The most powerful tool in our spiritual tool chest is not available to us right now, Holy Communion, and so we need to learn or re-learn to use some of those other tools.

That being said, if you need Holy Communion, don't hesitate to call me, I'll be more than happy to bring it to you at home. Don't say you don't want to bother me. If you need to, contact me and don't think twice. Don't call the church office, it's closed. Call me direct at 315-269-4940.

Thirdly, some have asked - why? Why hold a Divine Liturgy with no choir and no people? The answer is in the Liturgy itself - when I consecrate the bread and wine these are the words from the Liturgy of St. Basil:

Make this bread to be the precious Body of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ.

And this cup to be the precious Blood of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ.

Now listen to this:

Shed for the life and salvation of the world. Τὸ ἐκχυθὲν ὑπὲρ τῆς τοῦ κόσμου ζωῆς καὶ σωτηρίας.

The world does not continue to exist because physical laws keep plodding along. It exists because the Divine Liturgy gives it life and salvation. You personally may not

believe that, but I do, and the Church does. We believe it is critical for the life of the world that we celebrate the Divine Liturgy here, in our beloved St. Sophia's, may our parish live forever as a light of salvation and life in our city and world. The angels will be here, and our departed loved ones - this is enough.

And finally, when my children were young, we bought a VHS tape of a movie called "An American Tail" about a mouse that gets separated from his family as they were traveling from Russia to New York City. I think we watched the movie a hundred times.

A song from that movie popped into my head last night as I was on a Telos Project webinar with young people from all over North America. It was amazing to think that individuals from such distant places could be together, meeting face to face as a group and sharing ideas about how the Church could reach out to people during this crisis. That was when "Somewhere Out There," popped into my head. Fievel, the little mouse, sings this song as he reassures himself that at some point he will be reunited with his family, and his family sings it as well:

Somewhere out there beneath the pale moonlight

Someone's thinking of me and loving me tonight

(Perhaps you remember the song. The chorus ends with the lines:)

And when the night wind starts to sing a lonesome lullaby

It helps to think we're sleeping underneath the same big sky

Humor me with a little idea. We are going to be apart from one another, perhaps for the next few weeks, perhaps longer. When you walk outside, look up at the sky, day or night, and remind yourself that we will not be apart forever, St. Sophia's will not be an on-line Church forever, we will survive the Coronavirus and its effects, and this is our pact, you and me: by looking up at the same big sky, we who are temporarily kept apart look toward the time when we gather together again in our beloved Church.

God bless you, brothers and sisters. This will be an adventure. We may not worship in Church during this time, but always remember that our faith sustains us and there will be plenty of opportunities available to interact with our faith online.

Our first service will be tomorrow night at 6 pm, the Presanctified Liturgy.