

Combating Corona Through Repentance

A Christian Response in Times of Disaster

1. The Comfort that comes only through Christ

Our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ said... "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." (Mt. 11:28-30).

Our Lord never promised to take away all pain, suffering, sorrow and death in this life. Instead, He called us to take up our cross and follow after Him. But He comes to us in our pain, suffering, sorrow and even death and gives us strength beyond all understanding to get through them. In all circumstances He grants us His grace and peace and the comfort of the Holy Spirit to endure all things and conquer them through His love.

Without God we can do nothing... but with Christ all things are possible! For Christians there is no fear because we know Christ is Risen. Life has conquered death! He is the answer for all the world's fears and doubts. It is time we turn (back) to Him.

Jesus said, "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (Jn 16:33).
Jesus Christ Conquers! IC XC NIKA!

2. A Christian Response to Sickness and Sorrow in the World

All sickness, disease, sorrow and suffering in the world come as a result of sin. (1). Sin is the result of man "missing of the mark" (2) for which he was designed and created by God (3). Perhaps this is an appropriate time to think about and refocus on repentance.

If Christians truly are "the soul of the world," as the early Christian document "Letter to Diognetus" claims (4), in other words, if Christians are to the world what the soul is to the body: the animating, life-sustaining force, then Christians are essential in helping to bring about an end to this pandemic.

Since many of those who do not know God will not repent or intercede on behalf of the world, it is incumbent upon Christians to pray, fast, weep for sins, repent and intercede on behalf of the world for God's mercy. This is needed for all the ways we have sinned and turned against Him and His truth (5), for our own sins and for those sins which God has revealed in Holy Scripture which cry out to heaven (6).

Rather than focusing on the novelty of our quarantined living arrangements, weeping for the tragedy of our closed Churches and lost Paschal celebrations, or even being horrified by the tragedy of our being deprived of essential sacraments, perhaps Christians should realize and focus on our immense need and duty to repent, fast and intercede on behalf of the world -just as God's people did in the days of Jonah (7).

As St. Paul said, “Now is the time, now is the day of our salvation!” (2 Cor 6:2). Let’s pray like the life of the world depends on it... because it does.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me for the many ways I have sinned and failed You. Lord have mercy!

3. The Timing of the Appearance of the Corona Plague:

The Great Fast is a time, among other things, to reflect upon our own mortality. Some day (whether soon or distant) we will all die and go before God to give Him an account for our life (2 Cor 5:10), our decisions, and how we lived in relation to others and, most of all, in relation to Almighty God Himself (Lk 10:27).

Jesus Christ came into this world to free us from the power of death and the fear of death (Rom 5:12-21). He came to save us from the eternal death which is our separation from God as result of our sin (Rev 20:11-15). Jesus Christ is the one, and the only one, who can heal us from our sins, restore our Communion with the Father and help us to live this life of Communion we are called to (Jn 14:6), through His gift of the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:16-17).

The fact that the corona virus has occurred during the Great Fast should, for true Christians, be a real reminder of all this (1 Pet 4:12-13).

Christ has conquered death (1 Cor 15:12-26, Jn 16:33). He has trampled down death (and its power) by His own death. He came down from heaven and, in the womb of the Virgin Theotokos, joined our own death-bound humanity to His own immortal divinity (Jn 1:1-3, 14). He accepted death on the cross (Jn 3:16) in order to triumph over it through His divinity (Jn 2:19-21, Jn 10:17-18).

By being joined to Him in Faith and Holy Baptism we are united to Jesus Christ and become one with Him (Mk 16:16, Gal 3:27), His Father and His Holy Spirit (Mt 28:19). Jesus' death and resurrection become our own. We die and rise with Christ and are born again to a new life (Rom 6:3-14), one that is no longer dominated by the fear of death (Heb 2:14-15) but one that is freed from it completely, knowing that death is simply the end of the earthly and our glorious transition into eternal life with Him (2 Cor 13:4, 1 Thes 4:13-18).

DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP IN VICTORY... WHERE O DEATH IS THY STING???
WHERE O HADES IS THY VICTORY??? THE STING OF DEATH IS SIN, AND THE
STRENGTH OF SIN IS THE LAW. BUT THANKS BE TO GOD WHO GIVES US THE
VICTORY THROUGH OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST!!! (1 Cor 15:54-57).

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The Great Lenten Fast, 2020

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Endnotes:

(1) The Orthodox understanding of sickness and suffering in the world is the following: It's not that God vindictively sends chastisements upon the world to punish us for our sins (although Scripture metaphorically uses language like this, e.g., see notes 3 & 7). Instead, God has made the world to function according to his laws and commandments. When we go against these, when we break these laws that God has established, the resulting breakdown of our rebellion against His design brings sickness and suffering upon us. This is how one's "personal sins" can even affect others. Not because we are being punished for the sins of others but because we are all connected in our humanity (coming from a common source, our father Adam) and we all live together in the same world. My sins affect you and your children as much as your sins affect me and mine. This is one reason why Christians are against such things as abortion, pornography, adultery, gay marriage, sex outside of marriage (between a man and woman) and so many other sins that the world considers "personal choices." They contradict God's design for us and in themselves bring disorder and devastation upon the world, both on the physical and spiritual levels. The more we add to sin in the world, the more pain, devastation and suffering increase in the world. God came to set us free from the tyranny of sickness and death by revealing His truth, showing us how to live and even granting us His power to accomplish it. To the to the degree that we are united to God and do this, we pass on a better humanity in the world to our posterity. Sin is a sickness we are born with passed on from our first father Adam. We all have this sickness and we all need deliverance. Only God can deliver us from power of sin and death. It all begins with God's mercy and our repentance -which is the acceptance of His mercy, the confession of our sins and the turning of our lives away from sin and towards Him and His truth. In Greek this is known as metanoia which is a total turn around and about face from sin and the turning of our lives towards God. For more info, also see the very important explanation on "Sickness, Suffering and Death" in "The Orthodox Faith" by Protospesbyter Fr. Thomas Hopko: <https://www.oca.org/.../spirituality/sickness-suffer.../sickness>

(2) Sin in Greek is *amartia*.

(3) See Rom 1:18-32 "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason, God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise, also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them."

(4) "Christians in the World," from early second century (c. 130 AD) Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus:

"Christians are indistinguishable from other men either by nationality, language or customs. They do not inhabit separate cities of their own, or speak a strange dialect, or follow some outlandish way of life. Their teaching is not based upon reveries inspired by the curiosity of men. Unlike some other people, they champion no purely human doctrine. With regard to dress, food and manner of life in general, they follow the customs of whatever city they happen to be living in, whether it is Greek or foreign.

And yet there is something extraordinary about their lives. They live in their own countries as though they were only passing through. They play their full role as citizens, but labor under all the disabilities of aliens. Any country can be their homeland, but for them their homeland, wherever it may be, is a foreign country. Like others, they marry and have children, but they do not destroy their offspring. They share their meals, but not their wives.

They live in the flesh, but they are not governed by the desires of the flesh. They pass their days upon earth, but they are citizens of heaven. Obedient to the laws, they yet live on a level that transcends the law. Christians love all men, but all men persecute them. Condemned because they are not understood, they are put to death, but raised to life again. They live in poverty, but enrich many; they are totally destitute, but possess an abundance of everything. They suffer dishonor, but that is their glory. They are defamed, but vindicated. A blessing is their answer to abuse, deference their response to insult. For the good they do they receive the punishment of malefactors, but even then, they rejoice as though receiving the gift of life. They are attacked by the Jews as aliens, they are persecuted by the Greeks, yet no one can explain the reason for this hatred.

To speak in general terms, we may say that the Christian is to the world what the soul is to the body. As the soul is present in every part of the body, while remaining distinct from it, so Christians are found in all the cities of the world but cannot be identified with the world. As the visible body contains the invisible soul, so Christians are seen living in the world, but their religious life remains unseen. The body hates the soul and wars against it, not because of any injury the soul has done it, but because of the restriction the soul places on its pleasures. Similarly, the world hates the Christians, not because they have done it any wrong, but because they are opposed to its pleasures.

Christians love those who hate them just as the soul loves the body and all its members despite the body's hatred. It is by the soul, enclosed within the body, that the body is held together, and similarly, it is by the Christians, detained in the world as in a prison, that the world is held together. The soul, though immortal, has a mortal dwelling place; and Christians also live for a time amidst perishable things, while awaiting the freedom from change and decay that will be theirs in heaven. As the soul benefits from the deprivation of food and drink, so Christians flourish under persecution. Such is the Christian's lofty and divinely appointed function, from which he is not permitted to excuse himself." (*Letter to Diognetus*, Nn. 5-6; Funk, 397-401)

(5) See 1 Cor 6:9-11, "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators [a], nor idolaters, nor adulterers [b], nor homosexuals [c], nor sodomites [d], nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified [e], but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God." Note: [a] those engaging in sex outside of marriage, [b] those engaging in sex with married people, [c] lit. those submitting to homosexuals, [d] practicing homosexuals, [e] lit. set apart.

(6) The expression "Sins that Cry to Heaven for Vengeance" is referenced in the Holy Scriptures, particularly in Genesis 4:10 ("Then God said to Cain ... the voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the earth"), Genesis 18:20-21, Exodus 22:21-23, and Deuteronomy 24:14-15. The sins are numbered as four and listed as follows:

1. The "Blood of Innocent Abel": homicide, abortion, infanticide, fratricide, patricide, and matricide
2. The "Sin of the Sodomites": homosexual acts (cf. Jude 1:7, Rom 1:24-27).
3. The "Cry of People Oppressed": the Israelites in Egypt, the cry of the foreigner, the widow, and the orphan": slavery, bigotry, marginalization and neglect.
4. The "Injustice to Workers": the taking advantage of and defrauding workers (cf. James 5:4).

-Adapted from: https://en.wikipedia.org/.../Sins_that_cry_to_Heaven_for_Veng...

(7) See Jonah 3:5-10, "So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them. Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, 'Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water. But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?' Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it."