



## Our Orthodox View of the Covid19- Pandemic 2020



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# **Our Orthodox View of the COVID-19 Pandemic**

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**This series was presented before in short lecture.  
A blessed lady in New Zealand, Ghada Hanna, wrote it down and I  
reviewed it and republished it.**

# 1

## **The Divine Economy (plan) & The COVID-19 Pandemic**

Towards the end of 2019, the Coronavirus appeared in China and in early 2020 it spread with tremendous speed in most countries of the world. Millions of patients caught the virus and as of now, the estimated number of deaths is more than a million.

Because of this disease, some universities and schools were forced to shut down. Many restrictions were also imposed to restrict travelling not only between countries of the world but also between provinces and counties within the same country. Some countries in the East and West restricted travelling in some cities from one region to the other. This phenomenon had a devastating effect on many businesses. Governments also took many precautions to avoid gatherings even in workplaces, as well as banning parties or limiting them as much as possible. Governments started also emphasizing on the importance social distancing and wearing a mask covering the nose and mouth. Many universities, health research centers and governments started researching vaccines, whether to prevent disease or to treat it.

Pessimism often prevailed due to the difficulty of finding radical solutions to this dangerous phenomenon, and some governments called for the necessity of adapting to the new norm, with this dangerous disease as a reality that is almost impossible to stop.

**Consequently, many questions came up everywhere:**

1- What is behind this difficult phenomenon that the whole world is suffering from?

2- Why did God allow this bitter tribulation?

3- What is the benefit of this pandemic which swept through rich and poor countries, and equally grieved the educated and uneducated?

4- Is this pandemic one of the signs that are mentioned in the Bible, especially in the book of Revelation about the end of the world and the second coming of Christ?

5- Does this plague relate to what Peter the apostle said: *“But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers. And above*

*all things have fervent love for one another, for “love will cover a multitude of sins.” (1 Peter 4:7-8) “Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.” (1 Peter 4:12-13)*

### **What is God’s plan for us?**

Because we are the children of God, we know with certainty that this pandemic, whether under natural circumstances or was man-made, occurred with the permission of God. That is why we will not worry because we are carried on God’s arms. He transforms what is bitter into sweetness, and whatever hardship will not be for the purpose of destruction but for edification. That is why it is appropriate for us to go through it joyfully, accepting whatever its outcome may be.

As believers in the grace of God, His love, and His care for us, we can pass through this time successfully and learn a lot from it through our relationship with the beneficent God.

### **Our Main Approach: Joy in the Lord**

In the epistle of our teacher St. Paul to the Philippians, which he wrote while he was in prison without mentioning anything about his sufferings in prison and without complaining. In this epistle, he wrote his famous phrase, “*Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!*” (Philippians 4:4)

The Apostle felt that he was always going from glory to glory (2 Corinthians 3:18) under all circumstances, whether he was in a city preaching or travelling from one city to another, or being brought to trial, or in prison, whether he was ill or in good health.

This is what prompts us not to be too concerned with these events in a negative way that causes anxiety, at the level of the individuals, families, church, or society as a whole. Rather, we should hold on to God by praying for the sick, confident that all things lead to the benefit of humanity. We truly mourn with those who suffer and we share everyone their feelings without falling into anxiety or despair, but rather we ask God to support us all.

### **The Spread of the Pandemic and the Experience of Family**

The rapid spread of this pandemic has led to some degree of sympathy between people for their pains and the desire for everyone to be in good health.

In light of this cruel experience, many have come to understand the concept of the ‘litany of the sick’ whereby the priest, with the deacons and

congregation, lift up their hearts to pray for the sick, regardless of their nationalities, beliefs, age, or culture. This pandemic does not distinguish the rich from the poor, the educated from the uneducated, or the senior from the child.

I remember visiting a family in Alexandria who had a little girl. As we stood up to pray, I asked the child to pray. The mother said: She is the best person to pray. When I asked for the reason, she responded: “Yesterday, while we were watching the Tsunami that happened in Japan on TV the child stood and prayed:

‘Father Jesus, who will take care of those children whose parents drowned?  
Who will take care of the adults whose children drowned?  
Lord, remember those who lost their homes and cars’”

She prayed with tears for what happened in Japan, while she is a little girl living in Alexandria.

May the Lord of Glory give us the heart of this young girl who prays for those in distant lands whom she does not know.

If only we could cry with the Apostle with all our hearts: “*Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?*” (2 Corinthians 11:29). He considered everyone who conquered and took the Victory Crown as if he had put on this crown.

In Denver, during a conversation with young children, a child asked me: “In Heaven, will the color of our skin be white like Europeans, slightly dark like Middle Easterners, black like South Sudan, or yellow like the Japanese?”

And the answer was, when a very strong light shines on a mirror, whatever its background color may, the background color does not appear, only the strong light does. This is how our bodies in heaven will reflect the splendor of the glory of God on us. We will not see different colors of those sitting at the right hand of God, but we will feel that we are all one church that includes the victorious believers from Adam until the day of the Lord's coming on the clouds. We will feel that we have one homeland: heaven where everyone will be in an incomprehensible glory.

This is a wonderful feeling that we experience as the world groans due the Coronavirus, having this mutual love to one another.

### **Experiencing the Acceptable Loving Prayer**

It is appropriate for all of us during this difficult time to join the Psalmist who says: “*But I give myself to prayer.*” (Psalm 109: 4). David the Psalmist used to pray even for his enemy, King Saul, who was insisting on killing him. David did not ask for revenge, despite the king devoting his means to kill him. David longed for the king to be holy, that he may act according to what is

befitting of him being the Lord's anointed.

It is fitting for us, as people of God not to gloat over a sick person and consider what happened to him to be because of his sins, but rather to pray for the healing of his soul and body. It is not appropriate for us to follow the daily number of patients and the number of deaths on the news, but rather to pray for the holiness of humanity and their love for one another.

## **Learning from the Sufferings of the People of God**

The Bible and history give us examples, whether of holy or wicked people who fell into many hardships and sufferings. Some walked as befitting of them as the people of God and God was glorified in them, and they won the crowns of victory, while others have gone astray and because of temptations, returned to the living faith and gained salvation. We cannot also forget those who even in the midst of their sufferings, complained about God and considered Him to be cruel instead of repenting and returning to God. These people could not benefit from the tribulations, despite God's long patience for them.

### **1- Joseph Son of Jacob**

In his young age, Joseph was known for his kindness, tenderness, and service to his parents and his older siblings. His father loved him and gave him a colorful shirt. Instead of his brothers following his example, they envied him. In simplicity he loved them, and the Lord announced to him in a dream that the sun, moon, and planets would bow down before him. And when he narrated the dream to his parents and brothers, they learnt that they would bow down to him and his brothers grew envious of him and wanted to get rid of him.

His father asked him to take food to them as they were tending the sheep and were late to return. He searched for them until he knew where they were. And when they saw him from afar, they said among themselves, "Behold, the dreamer is coming," and decided to kill him, but Judas advised them to sell him as a slave to merchants who were on their way to Egypt.

These merchants in turn sold him to Potiphar, the officer of Pharaoh and captain of the guard. When Potiphar's wife loved him and wanted him to commit adultery with her, he refused, so his fate became imprisonment unjustly. In all of this, Joseph did not reproach his Lord, but rather laid his life in the hands of the Lord, and by enduring this experience, God gave him grace in the eyes of Pharaoh who made him the second man after him and assigned him the management of Egypt during the famine. His brothers took refuge in

him during the famine, so he honored them and asked them to bring his father and his younger brother Benjamin. When his father died, his brothers were afraid that he would take revenge of them, but he told them: *“But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.”* (Genesis 50:20)

When Joseph was sold as a slave, he trained himself to love his brothers as he loved Potiphar's servants, and loved his imprisoned colleagues. On the other hand, he laid his life in the hands of the Lord and discovered that God had allowed him this experience for the sake of his salvation and the salvation of his brothers and his father.

The late Dr. Youssef Attalla used to tell us (when I was a university student) the time of Joseph's difficult temptation, when Potiphar's woman tried to force her servant Joseph to sin with her. Joseph tried to deviate her eyes to God saying: *“How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?”* She was astonished because there was no one else in the room and the doors were shut.

**Joseph benefited from all these difficult situations he passed through:**

- a- He met his brothers' hatred with love and gave them food.
- b- He did not utter a hurtful word to them while they were selling him as a slave.
- c- He did not treat his fellow slaves with arrogance, but rather loved them and served with them.
- d- His master's wife wanted to cause him to sin, but he announced to her the divine presence, even at moments of difficult temptations.
- e- When Joseph was imprisoned, he did not reproach God because his dreams were not fulfilled, but rather offered the prisoners true spiritual love. Thus, the prison official discovered his wisdom.
- f- Joseph felt that God in his love was allowing him to go through tribulations to grow in wisdom and surrender to the hands of God.

We never heard of him, in all stages of his temptations, seeking vengeance from those who resisted him or accused him unjustly or complain against God.

## **2- Samson the Great**

God gave Samson great power. When a lion attacked him in the wilderness, he grabbed his jaws and split them. And the next day, he saw the bees had built hives containing honey in the belly of the dead lion, so he ate from it and gave to his parents.

Samson did not forget this event, as God brought out of the eater something to eat, and out of the strong something sweet. Thus, it is appropriate for us to trust God who brings us sweetness out of tribulations.

### **3- Daniel the Prophet in the Land of Captivity**

God granted Daniel a special grace while he was in exile, and lest Daniel thinks that he became great by his own efforts, God allowed those who were with him to envy him and plot against him by persuading the king to issue an edict that orders anyone who asks something from someone other than the king to be thrown into the lions' den. Daniel was not troubled, but opened his window and prayed to God, asking Him for what he needed, and the king was forced to order him to be thrown into the lions' den, despite his great love for him. In the very early morning the king hastened to the pit, as he had not slept all night. The king cried out : "*Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?*" (Daniel 6:20)

The king was surprised by God's miracle with Daniel. **St. Jacob of Serugh** says that when Daniel was thrown into the pit, the lions stood on their front legs to protect him, so he was not injured by throwing him on the floor of the pit. He says that when Daniel was praying, the lions stood in reverence and bowed their heads as though they were sharing in his worship. The nature of the lions was changed for they did not attack Daniel while they were hungry, or the nature of Daniel changed, so that he was no longer a prey in the eyes of the lions. The lions' den became a place of prayer for Daniel and the lions that Daniel may joyfully worship God!

### **4- David the Prophet**

David made a mistake when he counted the young people who would enter the war, for the Lord of Glory would not allow this to avoid him from attributing victory to the human arm instead of God's pastoral work. The angel of the Lord rebuked David for erring by conducting such census, and God allowed a plague to spread. When he offered repentance, the Lord lifted the plague (2 Sam 24).

### **5- During the Exile**

During the days of the exile, God permitted Israel and Judah to be disciplined for their deviation into idolatry and for their corruption. But God in His long-suffering raised wonderful characters to serve in captivity such as

Queen Esther, Daniel the Prophet, Ezekiel the Prophet, Nehemiah, Mordecai, and many other people of God.

May we ask God to be glorified in us and in all His people, to shine forth the light of faith on all mankind, to grant us to be prepared for His second coming, and not to be frightened by pandemics, earthquakes, or any other disaster. May we trust in God's miraculous plan to bring us to Him.

## **Prayer**

Lord, shine forth Your light on our hearts  
that we may experience the richness of Your love and wisdom.

May You transform our hardships into victories and our pains  
into joys

May You reveal to us the glories that You are preparing for the  
faithful humanity.

May You transform us to be like the hosts of heavenly angels.

## 2

# The Lover of Mankind Transforms Evil into Good

### The Beneficent

In our previous talk, we saw the love of God who transforms our painful matters, whether they were diabolic war, harassing of the wicked, or diseases such as the **Covid-19** pandemic. This pandemic is for our good and to prepare us for the eternal heavenly inheritance. Now we would like to understand what it means to say that God is '**Beneficent.**'

**Saint Clement of Alexandria** (Dean of the School of Alexandria in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century) says that saying God is 'Beneficent' does not only mean that He provides us with many good things, but also transforms, even the evil that afflict us into good things and blessings that we may enjoy.

Saint Clement gives us an example on how God is beneficent. He says that God transformed the evil intentions of Joseph's brothers towards him into wonderful blessings that Joseph, his brothers, and their father enjoyed. Joseph said to his brothers: *"But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones. And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them"* (Genesis 50:20-21)

It is appropriate for us in our daily lives to trust in God's providence and that He transforms whatever hardships occur to us (what we call evils) to our good. Whether they were natural disasters such as pandemics, or hardships caused by our fellow human beings due to evil intentions or unintentionally, or from any other factors, we know that our God transforms them for our good, especially on the eternal level.

### Our God Leads our Life to Edification

Many years ago, at the beginning of my priestly service, a young man in great distress came to me and asked me for advice, because he was expecting a huge problem to occur to him the next day. We prayed together and I talked to him. The next day, I called to check on him. He answered me that he was grateful for my advice. When I asked him what he had done, I realized that he heard the exact opposite of what I said.

I was surprised by God's providence for us, as He turned all my words into their opposite, and that was to save this young man. I realized God's love and

His sweetness in dealing with us, and even when I did not know what to say to that man, God turned my words to the opposite for the sake of his edification.

### **Samson's Riddle**

I talked before about God's work with Samson and how God transformed the lion who attacked him in the wilderness for a swarm of bees to build their hives in its carcass that Samson could eat from and provide food for his parents.

At the beginning of the Coronavirus pandemic, the American President Trump announced the closure of many places, because they were infected and that no one could move from New York to New Jersey or vice versa except with a very special permit to prevent the transmission of the disease and to control the spread of the virus. This warning was issued by the United States of America which is proud of its scientific advancement and tremendous capabilities. It remains for us to believe in saying: "*Out of the eater came something to eat, And out of the strong came something sweet.*" (Judges 14:14)

### **A Swordsman Sees the Open Heavens**

In church history, it once happened that a cruel governor ordered a swordsman to strike a Christian who refused to deny his faith. The swordsman was astonished at those coming forward for martyrdom, as none of them were terrified of death. The swordsman whispered to one of them and said to him before beheading him: "I ask you to close your eyes so that I can strike your neck quickly and you won't feel much pain. But I ask you to do something for me. When you meet Christ, ask Him to allow me to follow you quickly, that I may martyred for Him like you."

The martyr was astonished at the behavior of the swordsman, who did not praise him for not being afraid of death, but rather what really concerned him was to join the martyr in heaven and to see the Savior of the world!

Why are we afraid of Coronavirus? Let us truly ask God to take away this pandemic from the world and thank God who has given humans the ability to seek treatment for it and to research for a vaccine to protect us from it, but we should not fear death, nor should we fall into a state of terror and frustration. God created us to be in His image, not afraid of death despite making every effort to preserve the health of our brothers as much as possible.

### **Our Whole Lives Record Great Memories**

It is appropriate for the believer to know that his life is in the hands of the Creator, the lover of mankind who desires for all people to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth. While many are confused by what has

befallen the world as a result of this pandemic, believers find signs of God's grace that makes the hearts of many rejoice, among which I mention the following:

1. One of the priests told me: "If the Coronavirus pandemic has deprived me of my daily visits to the people and from serving in church meetings, a larger number of people call me to confess."
2. I remember that one lady called me to confess saying: "I have not confessed in 28 years, but the rapid spread of the Coronavirus urged me to repent and confess, as I feel that death has become very close to me, so I felt the need to prepare myself to depart from this world."
3. Many have reconciled with those who were hostile to them, as life in the world became in their view on its way to end.

### **The Flood and the New World**

What do you think was the position of Noah's contemporaries when the disaster of the flood began? What was the view of Noah before the start of the flood? And after the flood?

Undoubtedly, Noah's contemporaries and even those who built the ark mocked him. They definitely asked: "What is the benefit of this ark? How foolish Noah is, spending all this money on building an ark that he will not use? Can anyone believe that God could send a flood that would drown the whole world?!" As for Noah, he was a man of God who believed and trusted in God's promises. How joyful Noah was when he saw God Himself shutting the door of the ark and not entrusting any of His angels with closing the door. When he, his wife, three children and their wives went out of the ark, they saw the new world in which there was no evil. Noah, his children, and their wives, all lived in great joy that God, in His love, created the new world as a symbol for the Church of the New Testament, which Christ redeemed with His cross.

### **Moses the Prophet and the Liberation of the People from Slavery**

In every age, God transforms the sufferings of the believers into glories. Moses was born in Egypt and faced death when he was an infant. Pharaoh was enslaving the people of God, but God took care of Moses who fled from the face of Pharaoh. After their exodus from Egypt, the people were subjected to many troubles, so they preferred to return to Egypt as slaves instead of going into the wilderness under the leadership of Moses and his brother Aaron. God turned all events into symbols of the believers' exodus from the bondage of Satan to the glorious liberty of the children of God through the Cross,

resurrection, and ascension of Christ.

Also, Moses the Prophet passed the leadership of God's people to his disciple Joshua, to bring them into the promised Land

### **Marvelous Weapons for Victory in our Warfare Against Satan**

Three experienced kings allied against Jehoshaphat, King of Judah, and they were the kings of Edom, Ammon, and people of Moab. And while Jehoshaphat was afraid to fight these huge armies, he confessed to the Lord that he was afraid. The Lord offered him a wonderous weapon! He summoned those who praise God to praise Him in the field. As they began to praise, Jehoshaphat and his men were surprised that the three armies started attacking each other. And when their praise ended, Jehoshaphat and his men came to overlook the three armies. They were dead bodies fallen on the earth, without the hand of any of Jehoshaphat's men stretching out over them. At that time, the men of Jehoshaphat came to take away the spoils of the enemies that were in their tents (2 Chronicles 20: 20-30).

### **A Strange Battle against the Children of Bethlehem!**

Jeremiah the Prophet had previously prophesied about the children of Bethlehem, when he said, "*Rachel weeping for her children, Refusing to be comforted for her children, Because they are no more.*" (Jeremiah 31:15). Their mothers felt the bitterness of seeing their children being slaughtered on their breasts. Years and centuries passed, and the Lord Jesus Christ died for the world on the Cross, descended into hades, and there, the Savior was received with joy and cheer by the procession of the children of Bethlehem.

### **How did the Departed Believers Welcome Their Savior?**

The children of Bethlehem came in the frontline thanking the Lord Jesus Christ, because He allowed their martyrdom so that they become at the forefront of the processions of the faithful whom He delivered, carrying their souls from Hades to heaven. Joseph the son of Jacob, began to praise Him because he was unjustly allowed to face tribulations until imprisonment, in order to rejoice with the Savior. Samson also started to praise Him because God had previously granted him the sweetness of honey along with his parents, which was in the belly of the lion that tried to devour him. The martyrs began to thank Him for making them preachers of His salvation, amid the oppression of rulers, governors, judges, and fierce soldiers. Thus, all the hardships that the believers had previously suffered in their lives on earth were transformed. In

light of the Coronavirus, we see many people glorifying God, who gave them joy and cheer, even in the midst of the deadly pandemic. Let us all joyfully say with Paul the apostle: *“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.”* (Galatians 2:20)

## **Prayer**

We bless You, lover of mankind!  
Sanctify the life of all, that we may taste the sweetness of  
heaven.  
May our hearts ascend to Your throne, that we may enjoy  
fellowship with the heavenly hosts.  
We praise You, O You the heavenly Bridegroom.



### 3

## Covid-19 & the Church Worship

Many around the world were asking when this pandemic outbreak began: Why did God allow its rapid spread which led to the closure of places of worship in most countries of the world for fear of infection in closed gatherings? This question and its likes are an echo of how many people view death as well as the church worship.

### **Our View of Death**

The apostle calls death: “The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.” (1 Corinthians 15:26), and at the same time he declares: “For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.” (Philippians 1:23). He called it: **‘the last enemy’** with regards to the salvation of all mankind, as when death strikes non-believers there is no longer an opportunity for their repentance and they perish, which saddens the heart of the apostle. As for those who met Christ and experienced the power of the Cross and the joy of His resurrection, death is a supreme gift for them and a path to heaven. In other words, the apostle looks to death from two perspectives. The first is that there is no longer an opportunity for those who are stubborn and disobedient after death to retreat from their stubbornness, but at the same time he desires to go to heaven.

### **Our view of the church**

We see the Church as the house of God, that faithful believers enjoy in their living faith. They feel that they are getting a taste of heaven when they are in church. They repeat the words of the apostle: “[He] raised us up together and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,” (Ephesians 2:6). The Lord allowed this pandemic so that neglectful people would review their position, especially those who worship in church only in appearance, without enjoying a sincere fellowship with God. Many have turned their lives into deep worship, whether inside the church building or in their lives at home, at work, and with their friends. Many practiced true repentance with spirituality after this pandemic outbreak because they realized that departure from the world is nearby.

I also remember that some people felt during the Holy Pascha week that their children participated in this week’s service through “Zoom”. Many felt the blessing of ecclesiastical worship and the communion of believers together with priests and deacons. I remember a lady called me and said: 'For the first

time I understand the prayer that we always say: "O Lord, keep the gates of the church open to the faithful" Never before had I realized its significance.' Many realized these feelings after they were deprived of church meetings for months, and the possibility of enjoying the divine liturgies, and bible studies.

### **The Church in Your Heart**

This pandemic is not able to stop the indwelling of Jesus, the Lord of Glory, in our hearts, but on the contrary, it inflamed the hearts of many with the longing for ecclesiastical worship, whether inside the church building or in their private rooms. If only we would follow the example of Saint Paul the hermit, who had not met anyone for decades, but his heart was crying out to God for the salvation of all people.

Let us imitate Saint Mary of Egypt, who asked the monk Zosimas to bring her the sacraments with great longing, and she became the intercessor for many even after her departure to heaven. Currently, the Russian Church celebrates her feast for a week every year, and she became a living model for the believers.

### **Do not be Fear the Pandemic**

The church is in your heart, the pandemic will never be able to shut it down. For us, God is the Savior of the world, and no power on earth can take our Christ away from our hearts. Let us engrave on our hearts through the Holy Spirit: "**Here is the dwelling of God within me.**" Let us say with determination: Dwell O Lord in my heart and let me dwell with You in your heavens. May the gates of heaven be opened before humanity and Your light shine upon everyone and let the doors of your church be open before us until the day we pass from this world!

I met a senior man who thanked God for making one of his friends take him once a week to enjoy the divine liturgy. When I asked him about his service, he was astonished. I asked him to pray for the sick, for the Sunday School service, and for the salvation of all mankind on early mornings, evening prayers and during the day. Thus, he would be counted as a servant in the church while he is in his private room since he cannot go to the house of the Lord because of his old age.

### **How do I practically enjoy the church in my heart?**

1- Let God be first in our lives. When I stand up for prayer, I turn off my cellphone so that it will not distract me from the joy of being with God my

Savior.

2- Let us imitate Saul of Tarsus, who in his encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ, on his way to Damascus, he asked Christ: '**Lord, What do you want me to do?**' Instead of persecuting the believers, he asked that the Lord Christ would reveal to him what service he can do for the sake of the faith in Christ. He wanted to make up for the long years he thought he was righteous, and now he realized his need for salvation. Let us not stop inviting our brothers to imitate Saul of Tarsus when he met Christ, and all would repeat: 'Lord, What do you want me to do?'



## 4

# The Covid-19 Pandemic and the Church in Your Child

## The Church in Your Child

We spoke before about the Coronavirus and the church in your home. Let us now talk about 'the church in your child.' You may be single or married and have no children, but you consider all children as though they were your own. Our children, whether spiritual or actual children, are a great wealth that we must not ignore.

Years ago, the church in Egypt had a problem that concerned many. Someone from Los Angeles called me while I was in New Jersey and asked me if I have heard of what happened in the church of Egypt, so what did I do? I replied: 'There is no cure to this problem but prayer to our Lord to intervene and solve it better than any person would.'

He told me, 'There is a group that we are forgetting though!' And when I asked him to clarify, he said, 'If we ask our children to pray for the church, God will definitely listen to their prayers.' Indeed, I asked the servants to pray with the children for the church, without going into details. Indeed, the children prayed, and God intervened in a miraculous way. The children's prayers are a great wealth for the church. Let us ask them to pray for all of humanity so that God may intervene in the issue of Coronavirus. Christ said: *"Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven."* (Matthew 18:3) Do not ignore the role of our young children, they are a wonderful model that is appreciated in the eyes of God.

I remember a couple once told me that it was difficult for their son to attend church because the liturgy was long. I met their son, and he was expecting me to ask him why he does not come to church, but he was surprised that I asked him to serve. He asked me: 'What service?' I said: 'I wrote one page in 'Egyptian English', and I would like you to review and rewrite it in 'American English.' So he smiled, agreed, and took the paper and rewrote it and brought it back to me the next day. I thanked him for his efforts, and he asked me, 'Do you have any other papers that need revision?' This boy felt that he had a role in the church and not just a spectator. Our children can be leaders and be proud of their Church.

I remember on one of my visits to Toronto when I met some families, and talked to them about Christ, I gathered their children who were around 20

children of different ages and told them some of the stories that I wrote in English. As they commented on the stories with specific notes, I paid attention to their remarks, and they were happy and felt that I discussed their comments with interest and responded to them.

### **Dealing With Youth**

The matter does not stop at children of young age only, but we must take into consideration the role of the youth, for the work of a successful servant is to establish leaders from the new generations. I remember I previously wrote a book as an introduction to Patrology, and before it was published, I asked one of the youth servants to read it and give me his opinion on it, whether it was suitable for young people or is considered difficult. A few days later, he brought me back the book. I asked him what he thought of it. In simple terms, he told me, "This book is not suitable for the youth, and I do not think even for priests. It is good for postgraduate research but not for service." I rewrote it again to suit young people's mentality, and when I presented it to him, he said that he enjoyed it.

I mention this because it is appropriate for us to take into consideration the mentality of our contemporary youth, and ask them to participate in everything, so that we can insert the spirit of leadership into the contemporary generation, to make of them leaders. At the same time, we have to respect their capabilities and knowledge. We need to deal with them with an open mind and appreciate the new advancements while preserving what we received and was a committed to us in a contemporary manner.

### **Man is a Special Leader**

St. Gregory of Nyssa says that God did not create man to be a slave. Unfortunately, some leaders, whether teachers or parents, think of those under their leadership as machines that should adhere to blind obedience without discussion. God the creator of all mankind says: "*Come now and let us reason together*" (Isaiah 1:18).

When He recommends something, it does not destroy the freedom of a person's will or his mental capabilities, but rather directs him to grow and become a successful leader. I remember a very well-educated and successful grandmother at her job, once told me that she noticed her grandson writing on the computer very quickly. In a gentle jest, she said to him: 'Teach me how to use the computer.' The grandson said to her, 'it's difficult, granny, because you don't know anything about computers.' She told me this and I said to her that children are now trained to use computers and its various applications, but for

us we graduated from the university before the invention of the computer, so we must encourage young people and children to utilize the scientific and technological advancements they received, that the old generations did not have.

### **Let us Learn from our Children and Grandchildren**

It is appropriate for us, while we care about the maturity of our children, regardless of their ages, to put before our eyes that we also learn from them, for their edification and ours. I will mention two examples:

1. In my ministry in Denver, USA, I asked the children on the day of the feast of the Entry of the Christ into the temple, how did Simeon the Elder know that the child that Saint Mary was carrying was the Messiah? One of the children answered, "He knew this through the guidance of the Holy Spirit." Another child said: "when Saint Mary went into the temple, carrying Christ on her arms, the eyes of Simeon the Elder were opened, and he noticed that the angels who were in Solomon's temple quickly gathered together in calmness and reverence and set out in order to organize a procession welcoming the child. Then, worshipped Him and walked with Him while praising and exalting Him. Simeon realized that this is the child, that he was promised by God not to die until seeing Him and that he was born of a virgin, as it is written in the book of Isaiah: '*Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.*' (Isaiah 7:14)" This was a wonderful answer of a child that I have never heard before.
2. One of the Sunday school servants told me that he had taught a lesson about Jacob's ladder. He asked the children about the dimensions of the ladder and then told them that its height extends from Jacob's head (while he was asleep on the road and had placed a stone under his head) to the open heavens where the Lord stood to welcome Jacob. When he spoke about the width of the ladder, the servant spread his arms to reveal the width of the ladder. So one of the children said to the servant: "No sir! its width was not like that, rather its width was equal to the diameter of the whole globe, because God sent down this ladder so that all the inhabitants of the earth would climb on it. God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. (1 Timothy 2:4)" This is how the child imagined the extent of God's love for all humanity in order for them to enter heaven, which was not imagined by all those who tried to present pictures of this ladder.

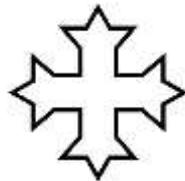
It is in these two examples that we appreciate our children's great ideas that we might not even imagine.

If only we would learn to deal with the new generation on every occasion in a spirit of mutual love and mutual appreciation.

The spread of the Coronavirus prompts us to move wisely, in the Spirit of God, to edify ourselves and the new generations.

## **Prayer**

Our God of perfect love, wisdom, and power, we ask You to  
lead us with Your Holy Spirit,  
To edify our souls and the souls of all those around us,  
To grant us wisdom to deal with the new generation,  
For our salvation and their salvation. Glory be to You forever.  
Amen



## 5

# The phenomenon of Covid-19 pandemic and the life of hope

At the start of the rapid spread of this pandemic, I was in deep sorrow because many people in Egypt and abroad were fell into despair. Saint Philoxenus of Mabbug spoke about the danger of despair, saying: “If despair enters into a person’s mind, all demons follow it.” Satan's first blow with the spread of this pandemic is not the closure of the church or the reduction of the number of attendees, but rather the creep of despair into the human mind. That is why during this period, we have to ensure that we are armed with the mentality of joyful hope.

The main role of the church is to spread hope, by revealing the outpouring love of God for mankind. When He calls us to repentance and confession, He invites us to rejoice and thank Him for his blessings and His deeds with us. As he invites us to confess our weaknesses and sins, He forgives us because He loves us and longs for us. Our God knows that without Him we are unable to do anything. He permitted this pandemic so that by faith we may come to realize that He transforms bitterness into sweetness. He knows that we are dust, indulged in sins and thus He came down to us to raise us from the death of sin. He gave us the spirit of sonship to the Father and gave us His Holy Spirit to grant us from what is His, so that we do not fear the enemy, the forces of darkness, the corruption of sin, nor pandemics for we are preserved by Him and in Him. He always opens our inner eyes to be filled with hope, awaiting the glories that He presents to his loved ones

We always look to the right-hand thief, who looked at the crucified one next to him, and cried out in a spirit of hope: “*Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.*” He then enjoyed the Savior's response, saying: “*Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Heaven.*” He received permission to enter heaven and made him admired by the heavenly ones. The earthly being was transformed to a heavenly angel and was granted the divine righteousness. God granted him the grace of the ascension of his spirit to heaven, opened the gates of Heaven for him, and revealed to him the glories that He prepared for those returning to Him by the power of his life-giving cross. And we also let us say together,

**Grant me, O Lord, that my depths may reach out to you.  
I the poor sinner may encounter with the heavenly hosts.**

What I hope for is not only to eliminate this pandemic and to  
open the doors of your church to everyone,  
But rather that You may enter into my heart and establish Your  
heavenly kingdom in my depths and grant me the joy of sincere  
repentance.

Let me renew my covenant with You and let me rejoice with  
Your constant presence in my depths.

Let my heart rejoice by the repentance of everyone, and by  
Your wondrous work in the lives of all priests, servants, and all  
people.

Sanctify us, O Holy One, and raise our hearts to Your heavens,  
so that they may not creep on earth nor be attached to the earthly  
matters.

Let Your grace be at work in us, so that we may live and walk  
according to your Holy Spirit. Glory be to You, O wonderful in  
Your love. Amen.

## 6

### **The Covid-19 Pandemic and the Divine grace**

The children of God do not stand in weakness and fear due to the rapid spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, but rather trust in the grace of God that works in the lives of those who are serious in their faith. This is what the apostles confirm. St. Peter the apostle says: *“Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”* (1 Peter 1:13) St. Paul the apostle invited his beloved spiritual son saying: *“You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.”* (2 Timothy 2:3). He also says: *“But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation.”* (1 Thessalonians 5:8). The two apostles here ask us to fix our eyes on the grace of God, the lover of mankind without carelessness or laziness, but with constant watchfulness and firmness, so that we may always be ready for spiritual warfare.

It was said of Saint Macarius the Great that while he was outside his cell, he saw an old man wearing strange clothes, and his dress was filled with flasks, and he asked him: “What are these flasks?” He replied: It is war monk! I have flasks for you and for every monk, so that everyone falls. I present to a person the sin of pride, and if he does not fall into pride, I present him with despair. And for another, the sin of extravagance and if he does not fall, I offer him the love of money. I will not stop fighting everyone.

That is why it is appropriate for us, through our hope in the grace of God, not to slacken. On our part, we will not cease to work with the Divine grace and by the Lord's help until we enjoy the heavenly crown. By grace, we strive to return to the Lord, the grantor of victory. It has been said: *“Thus says the Lord of hosts: “Return to Me,” says the Lord of hosts, “and I will return to you,” says the Lord of hosts.”* (Zechariah 1:3). As we return to Him with a few steps, we find Him descending to us as from His heavens to our earth. In the old Testament, when the Israelites were entering the promised land, Joshua was leading them, and the priests were wearing clean white clothes while carrying the ark of the covenant. The priests stood on the shore of the Jordan River, as its waters were filled with mud, and were heading towards the land of Canaan. As soon as they dipped their feet in the edge of the waters, the waters which came down from upstream stood still (Joshua 3: 15-17). The priests took a step, and their feet touched the water, so a divine command was issued to stop the waterflow so that all the priests and people would cross over on dry land in the middle of the river.

We need to begin with the first step of faith, so that we can see the infinite and immeasurable help of God, and we feel that we are in His divine bosom. This is what we experience practically in our life, when we feel we are unable to pray, once we start the first psalm, our heart is filled with vitality and joy. This is the meaning of “*Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.*” (James 4:8)

We need to feel the closeness of our God to us in our lives. If we approached Him without fear of pandemics, the Lord will support us and take us to where we thought was impossible.

Our spiritual Father, Fr. Mikhail Ibrahim, told us a story that happened with him in the thirties or forties of the last century, when an employee with a salary of hundred pounds a month approached him (this number was a very large one at that time) as some families lived with only three pounds a month. This person told Abouna in his confession that it is very difficult for him to pay 10 pounds a month as a tithes, asking what should he do?

So Abouna told him: ‘I’ll give you the name of a poor family, provide for them as you see necessary.’ Indeed, he started offering the family two or three pounds. And when he saw the children in torn clothes, he bought them clothes, and sometimes began to buy them food and pay them their school fees. His giving developed until he almost paid the tithes to this family, and he was rejoicing for God’s work with him and His blessings for him. After a while, he returned to Abouna asking him to name another poor family. His heart was filled with joy and the blessing of the Lord came into his house, so he asked for a third family. After some time, he started to keep for himself only 10 pounds and give the poor 90 pounds every month. And he used to tell his father of confession, Fr. Mikhail that he was incapable of describing his inner joy.

Thus, instead of being annoyed by the troubles caused by the pandemic, work with the spirit and the grace of God, so that you and your family may rejoice and help others to rejoice with you as well.

When you love and give, gates of heaven open before you, and you will feel God’s providence for you.

When we take our first step with faith, hope and love (1 Corinthians 13:13) we walk in the light of day as the apostle says: “*But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation.*” (1 Thessalonians 5:8), We are living in continuous victories. This is how we determine in our hearts to draw close to God in everything. By the work of His grace in prayer and fasting with Metanoias, enjoying the word of God, and exercising our love for our brothers, even those who oppose us, our life will turn into permanent watchfulness and constant vigilance. Thus we never worry no matter what happens!

## Prayer

Glory be to You, O Grantor of marvelous blessings,  
You dwell in our hearts and set up a holy temple for Yourself in  
us.

Your Holy Spirit engraves Your icon within us,  
So that we may be pleased with your divine blessings  
And The enemy of good can never sneak into us.



## Covid-19 and the Holy life

### The Lord Asks for our Holiness

In a meeting with a married couple (a doctor, and his wife) I asked them about their lives and how things were going with them, so they responded: “We are fine, successful in our jobs, and the Lord gave us a child. And when she grew up, she joined the school of Medicine and she is excelling at her studies. We always ask God to bless her life and help her take over our clinic and be successful in her job.”

God created us according to His image and gave us the spirit of sonship and He asks us to be holy, for He is our holy Father. Saint John the beloved says: *“Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”* (1 John 3:2-3).

As He is holy, it is befitting for us as His children to be holy like Him, and as He is pure, we have to be pure. This is what the word of God affirms: *“For I am the Lord your God. You shall therefore consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy. Neither shall you defile yourselves with any creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”* (Leviticus 11:44). *“And you shall be holy to Me, for I the Lord am holy, and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be Mine.”* (Leviticus 20:26). *“You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.”* (Leviticus 19:2). *“But as He who called you is holy you also be holy in all your conduct.”* (1 Peter 1:15).

It is good for us to struggle in our study of the scripture, our prayers, fasts, obedience, and our giving to others, asking for the work of the grace of God in us. The righteousness that touches our depths is a gift that we cannot acquire without the grace of God.

I asked an old brother in America: “Do you read the Bible regularly?” He answered me, “I read the Old Testament twenty times and memorized many of its stories and events. As for the New Testament, I read it countless times.” This man began to feel that he does not need to read the Bible and that he became righteous. I told him that there was someone who uttered one verse from the Bible and remained about eighty years asking God to grant him grace to fulfill this verse because he felt the need to be sanctified by the grace of the Holy One to comprehend the depths of this verse. The old man was astonished and asked me: “Who is this person? What is the verse that he was asking God

to enter into its depths?” I told him: “Saint Anthony! He heard the words of Christ: *‘If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor; and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.’* (Matthew 19:21)’ St. Anthony was a young man who was touched by the words of Christ and began to ask Him to sanctify him in order to fulfill this verse in its depths, and he remained watchful in his request, realizing that there are things that he had not completely sold, asking God to support him in order to fulfill this divine commandment.

We are often unable to sell all our thoughts and surrender them to God. The main theme of our constant prayers until the last breath must be to live the life of holiness in its very depths.

Saint John Cassian mentioned in one of his conferences that one of the fathers categorized people into three categories, namely:

1- Carnal people who are concerned only with their temporal worldly matters.

2- Those walking according to nature who justify themselves even in their weaknesses.

3- Spiritual people who do not cease to seek the grace of God so that their bodies also may become in harmony with their souls. The more they enjoy holiness, the more they seek to experience it at a deeper level. That is why God sometimes allows us to face hardships in order for us to feel our weakness so that we do not stop in our struggle. The gospel asked for the grace of God to work in us always. Our good God allows us these hardships, as we are in the era of this pandemic, so that we may never stop seeking God's grace to work in us.

Our good God has allowed the current pandemic to spread rapidly so that we do not stop seeking God's grace for all mankind, so that we may always enter into new depths in the life of holiness.

## **Prayer**

**Who is justified before you, O Holy One?!**

**We are all burdened with sins, but Your grace covers us.**

**Lift our hearts, minds, emotions, and all our feelings up to You.**

**Your Holy Spirit renews us, sanctifies us, and leads us as to  
heaven,**

**So that we may not go astray to the left or to the right,**

**Without You, we will never be sanctified.**

## 8

# Covid-19 and Our Departure to Heaven

We have previously talked about the rapid spread of the Coronavirus, and how it pushes us towards having hope in the divine grace (2 Thessalonians 2:16). Thus, by tasting heaven here on earth, we ask the Holy One to sanctify us and prepare us for eternal life. A man of God realizes every morning that he is starting the happiest day of his life, when his heart is lifted up and is blessed with overflowing gifts from heaven. He chants the saying of the apostle: *“Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace.”* (2 Thessalonians 2:16). He gave us and will give us to put on our resurrected body and to rest in His bosom. This pandemic that made many fall into despair, inspires the people of God with hope and joy in their continuous seeking of heaven.

### **Are We Getting a Taste of Heaven on Earth?**

It is appropriate for the believer to ask himself this question, and to realize that whenever he tastes a token from the riches of heaven, he should always long for more even when he is preparing himself to sleep, he feels as though he sleeps in the bosom of Christ, as it may be the last hour (1 John 2:18). The depths of the believer always praise the Lord, saying: *“Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!”* (Rev. 22:20). The world is full of people who taste heaven, while being anonymous just as the Lord told Elijah the Prophet that there were seven thousand whose knees have not bowed to Baal and were not known even to the great prophet Elijah (1 Kings 19:18), because they live as though they were in heaven.

### **The Anonymous People of God!**

Do not be surprised if the spread of the Coronavirus pandemic has prompted many to get a taste of heaven. It is appropriate for us here to mention what happened with the great Abba Anthony, for he thought that there was no one like him. He asked the Lord about this matter and the answer came to him that there is a man living in solitude in the wilderness who has not seen a human for decades. Saint Anthony was astonished. Where is this hermit? How did he not see a man for decades? Who was feeding him all this time? The answer came that the Lord himself sends him food by means of a crow which brings him half a loaf every day and that God listens to his prayer for the world and his prayers protects many people, especially in Egypt, from storms and

troubles.

We should imitate this hermit (Saint Paul) and live without worry as the Lord Himself provides for us daily in unexpected ways. During the outbreak of the pandemic, we pray for all of humanity, and that we may be sanctified and prepare ourselves for our departure to heaven, as we seek the work of the Holy Spirit in all humanity.

A believer should not be concerned if he lives in a certain city or in a simple poor village. Rather, he awaits the day he departs to heaven, praying for his brothers to sanctify their hearts and minds and be prepared for an eternal encounter with God. This is what our Christ called us for as He asked us to begin our prayers by saying: “Our Father who art in heaven,” as we declare that God is our Heavenly Father who wants all people to seek Him and enjoy the heavenly glory.

One lady asked me to pray for the quick end of this pandemic and she set a specific day. I answered her: “This is not our job. God alone knows what is for the edification of humanity. What we should ask is to give us faith and hope to taste heaven and seriousness in our relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ.

### **How do I Take My Spiritual Life Seriously?**

St. Peter says: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” (1 Peter 1:3) This flesh from which we groan because of diseases and plagues, will take the form of the body of the risen Christ. Instead of worrying about the pandemic, let us fix our eyes on the body of Christ, so that our faith may be steadfast in Him. By this, our hearts, thoughts, emotions, feelings, and our members will enjoy the joy of His resurrection.

### **Prayer**

O You who sent Your Holy Spirit to grant us fellowship with You  
And to sanctify us in the divine truth.

We ask you to inflame our hearts and the hearts of all humanity with love,  
To lift our hearts up to Your heavens, that we may enjoy it.

Let our weak body be shaped day by day through your divine work within us,  
That we may be prepared for the day of Your coming on the clouds.

Glory be to You who came down to us to carry us to your heavenly dwelling.  
Through the intercessions of Saint Mary, the martyrs, the saints and all the  
heavenly hosts.

Let us cry out with the Lord's Prayer and say: Our Father who art in heaven

## 9

# Since God allowed this virus to spread, is that a sign of God's wrath?

### What is our understanding of God's wrath?

The expression: “God's wrath” is used in the Bible not to mean that God has feelings of hatred of whom it is said, “God is love.” (1 John 4:8,16) and also “*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*” (John 3:16)

The expression “wrath of God” is the use of a human expression that reveals God’s non-acceptance of evil and sin. He who commits evil is destroyed by the corruption of sin as he declares his rejection of God’s righteousness and delivers himself up to the bondage of the devil who desires to destroy humanity. God, because of His love for us, allows hardships that we may realize the fruit of sin and return to Him for our salvation.

### The Righteous Job and the hardships that befell him

Satan complained about Job that he worshiped God because of the abundance God gave him and thus he told God: “Does Job fear God for nothing? Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land.” (Job 1:9-10). And the Lord said to Satan, “Behold, all that he has is in your power; only do not lay a hand on his person.” (Job 1:12). After this, hardships afflicted him on all aspects.

Then Job arose, tore his robe, shaved his head, fell to the ground, worshiped, and said: “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, And naked shall I return there, The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; Blessed be the name of the Lord. In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong.” (Job 1:20-22). But his wife said: “Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die!” Job responded, ““You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?’ In all this Job did not sin with his lips.” (Job 2:9-10).

God defended Job before Satan and when Job lost everything, his friends viewed him as being tried because of his hidden sins. Then we were surprised that everything that happened to Job was in his favor, and for his good as he said: “I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, But now my eye sees You.” (Job 42:5). Then, God asked Job's friends to ask him to pray on their behalf

(Job 42: 8-10).

Indeed, Abraham saw the Lord and the Lord ate with him even though He did not need food, but Job saw the inexpressible splendor of God. I think that God revealed to him that this splendor is because Job endured his trials and he realized that what he will see on the great day of the Lord, when he is clothed in the resurrected body. On that day, there will be a greater splendor, since the resurrected body can see God's glory better.

This is why God allowed the pandemic so that we may return to Him by encountering Him through repentance. Whoever repents in the same way straw burns and turns to ashes, cannot enjoy the new life except through sincere repentance. However, whoever is gold, silver, or copper will gain more and more glory in the Lord.

During the difficult time of the pandemic, many returned to the Lord and some of them departed to heaven and joined the processions of those praising God.

### **The Procession of Those Praising God**

At the birth of Christ, Herod killed the infants of Bethlehem and Jeremiah the prophet had previously seen these children and said: "*A voice was heard in Ramah, Lamentation and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children, Refusing to be comforted for her children, Because they are no more.*" (Jeremiah 31:15)

When the Lord died on the Cross and His soul descended to hades to demolish its walls and carry the souls of the saints to heaven, there was at the forefront of those receiving Him a procession of the children of Bethlehem praising Him without anyone teaching them.

Undoubtedly, many are wondering about the huge number of those who died because of this pandemic. Many of them were surely received by the heavenly multitudes together with the saints who had preceded them.

### **What is our role during this difficult time?**

It is befitting for us to ask God that we should not be like the burning straw or wood but rather like gold, silver and copper, so that we may be more glorified. Let us focus our attention not on the number of people who died because of the virus, but rather on the number of repentant and thankful people. It is fitting for us now to offer sincere repentance as well as submission and thanksgiving to God, the lover of mankind who brings out of the eater something to eat and out of the strong something sweet.

While saying this, we do not deny all the efforts made to prevent the spread

of this pandemic and the research for a vaccine against it without frustration or complaint.

## Prayer

Our good God the lover of mankind, We praise You, we bless You,  
We glorify You, and we thank you.

We cling to Job who praised You in the midst of his trials,  
as he advised his wife not to speak in ignorance.

Let us realize Your wisdom and love in the midst of the furnace of  
trials.

Accept us unto Yourself when we cry saying: 'Our Father who art  
in heaven...



## 10

# Why did God Allow the Church Worship to be Restricted?

A lot of times when we contemplate the spread of the Coronavirus and its consequences such as the restrictions imposed on the church worship, we feel saddened. But when we contemplate the events that occurred to Job after his bitter temptations among which was the sickness that struck his flesh as well as the loss of his sons and daughters, we see him coming out of all these hardships joyful with God's glorious appearance to him. We also see God asking his friends to ask Job to offer prayers and sacrifices on their behalf. Thus, Job came out of these temptations victorious and he also gained a great experience, knowledge, and wisdom that he offered to all humanity and still offers it to us to this day.

Job became a source of comfort for all generations as he opened the gates of hope in front of many. What Job did in his hardships, priests and apostles could not do in this beautiful manner after their bitter temptations. We are filled with hope as we suffer what has impacted many people around the world as a result of this contemporary pandemic. We will come out of this temptation full of wisdom, heavenly mentality, a true vision, and great glory that we will all be reflecting.

### **What is the difference between Job and Pharaoh in their temptations?**

They both went through pandemics. Job's flesh was entirely struck with a disease from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head, but he came out of this temptation joyful as he has seen God face to face. He was also filled with inner glory and health to the extent that he became a source of comfort for all generations. On the other hand, Pharaoh was so weak and was always complaining during his temptation. He would declare his repentance but would soon revert back to his wickedness with more violence, becoming even worse than before. Pharaoh was lost because of the impurity of his heart, causing all his armies to drown in the sea. He caused his people to be lost and lost his own dignity in front of the world throughout history and has become a very bad example. Thus, the problem is not in the temptation itself but in the person's character who faces these temptations. We hope we can be like Job so that we should not fear temptations no matter how severe they may be, but wholeheartedly ask for God's support not to fall into despair that would cause the devil to destroy us.

## **Why did God allow a pandemic to occur during David's reign?**

Although David the prophet and king had such a pure heart, every person falls into weaknesses as long as he is in the flesh. David did not allow himself or those with him to harm King Saul who wanted to kill them. He regretted cutting off a small piece from Saul's robe to show him that he capable of killing him. He regretted even cutting off this small piece of his robe! But in a moment of weakness, he asked to count his young men and valiant men who drew the sword without asking for God's counsel. David regretted that and when he was reproached, he asked to fall into the hand of the Lord and not the hand of man. David became a great example for his faith in God's mercies even when God was reproaching him.

I asked myself one time: How does Pope Kyrillos VI, Fr. Mikhail Ibrahim and Fr. Pishoy Kamel feel as they are in heaven looking down at the Coronavirus pandemic? Surely, they realize that this temptation will be transformed to a great blessing, joy, peace, and glory to many. May we share with them their feelings as we are still in the flesh in this world.

### **Prayer**

Our good Lord, we ask You O Lover of mankind to open the  
eyes of our hearts,  
That we may be confident in Your dealings with us.  
We have faith that You are beneficent, turning every temptation  
no matter how severe it may be to a blessing for us and for the  
coming generations.  
May this temptation be a reason for us to long for Your coming  
on the clouds,  
And our encounter with You as children of Yours,  
and a preparation for us to partake in the eternal feast.  
For the sake of Your love and compassion,  
Grant us to cry out to You with thanksgiving saying, Our  
Father...

# 11

## The COVID-19 Pandemic and Criticizing the Weak

### Job's Wife

Often times we criticize Job's wife because she told him, "Curse God and die!" But we should be careful not to fall into the same trap she fell into. At the same time, we should not judge anyone for his weakness in tolerating their temptation for we do not know his capabilities. On one hand, she did not leave him in his hardship like some women who would choose to leave their husbands in their hardships, accusing them of failure. She chose to partake with him in his hardship and did not abandon him. Thus, she also enjoyed the blessings that came after God took away their temptation, and she gave birth to boys and girls who were righteous, beautiful and a blessing to many. The story of Job's wife is significant, especially for the church congregation, priests, and servants. We should never judge the weak but pray for them that they may pass their hardship in peace. Let us say with St. Paul, "*who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?*"

### Job's Friends

We cannot deny the fact that Job's friends were righteous, even if they had their weaknesses. When they saw him in his poor condition, they remained silent, wept with him, and did not leave him for a week. But when they started talking to him, they blamed him because they thought that everything that happened to him was a result of some hidden sins that he had committed. They thought that all these events occurred to him because of God's justice and did not realize that God allowed this that he may be crowned with more blessings. One of his friends even told Job that he is worthy of even more hardships because God is not unjust, which caused Job to respond saying, "Miserable comforters are you all!"

In His love, God allowed Job's wife to enjoy a holy relaxed life after the temptation and He also allowed his friends to ask Job to pray for them. Therefore, the temptation was for the good of everyone.

## Prayer

O You who allowed for these hardships to befall on Job, that he  
may enjoy the great glorious.

You have granted him longsuffering that he may endure them.

You also granted his friends to experience the divine blessings.

Job also did not lose his love for his wife or his friends.

Grant me Lord the heavenly wisdom that our souls may rejoice  
with the salvation of all.



## 12

### **Behold I am Coming Quickly. Amen**

The book of Revelation concludes with Christ's saying, "*Surely I am coming quickly. Amen*" (Revelation 22:20) Job's temptations concluded with him getting a taste of heaven, as the Lord told him, "*Then adorn yourself with majesty and splendor And array yourself with glory and beauty.*" (Job 40:10) And we too have faith that God allowed this pandemic that harms the flesh, that we may implore Him to come quickly and grant our bodies the new risen nature. Since the Lord's ascension to heaven, the believers in every generation feel that it is the last hour and prepare themselves to meet Him on the clouds of heaven.

Indeed, we hear about many scientific achievements to conquer this pandemic. But at the same time, we must remember St. Basil the Great and his parables. He suffered from the Emperor and even from his fellow members of clergy and servants. He also suffered from a certain sickness that paralyzed him and hindered his ability to move. However, this saint was not concerned with these things, but chose to prepare himself for departure by focusing his attention on studying scripture and having a daily conversation with the Lord concerning His second coming and his own departure to Him. May our thoughts also ascend to heaven that we should not concern ourselves with the pandemic nor fear it. Let us remember what the apostles said, "*Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.*" (1 Corinthians 2:9) Let us get to know those whom we will meet and join; the chorus of the heavenly Cherubim and Seraphim, archangels, angels and all the heavenly hosts.

### **Prayer**

Our good Lord Jesus, we bless You and thank You from all our hearts,  
For You descended to us that we may be in your divine bosom.  
You granted us the glad tidings of our salvation  
And also tribulations that we may pray for our joyful departure to You.  
You will grant us Your heavenly kingdom within us,  
And You shall prepare our departure from this world.  
For the sake of Your blood which You shed to cover our sins, and for the  
sake of Your glorious resurrection and ascension to heaven, accept us unto  
Yourself and allow us to joyfully cry out, "Our Father..."

## 13

### Questions about the COVID-19 Era

Bishop Kyrillos (who currently oversees the Christian education in the Diocese of California) once entered a newly built church and asked the congregation during his sermon, “What do you think of this church in which we are gathered today? It is not fully built yet. It still does not have any windows, iconostasis or even church furniture. We even had to clean the pews! It seems not so beautiful but in the mind of the engineer who designed it, it is beautiful. That is how we are now in the world; we pass through many tribulations and hardships that prepare us to enjoy heaven that is specially prepared for the children of God. Who can ever describe what we will enjoy when we depart to heaven?! The Lord of Glory says, *“In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.* (John 14:2-3)”

A little girl asked one time, “Why can’t we hear God’s voice in the way He hears our voices?” The answer to her question was, “When you read the Bible, you will listen to His divine voice because He speaks through His word.”

Another child once asked, “Why did God allow the churches to be closed, depriving us from the liturgy and communion and all the stuff we used to do at church?” There are many hermits who live in the deserts for decades and have not seen anyone. Most of them took communion right before their departure such as St. Mary of Egypt to whom St. Zosima gave communion right before her departure to heaven.

#### **What did we benefit from the spread of the Coronavirus?**

1. We realized the importance of prayer especially when we say, “O Lord keep the gates of the church open for us to the end of the ages.”
2. Many people offered their sincere repentance, because they never realized before the great blessing of praying together at Church.
3. We witnessed many people reconciling with each other, whether individuals or even countries.
4. Many people realized the importance of praying for the whole world and experienced their mutual love within their families. They also experienced what St. Paul said that God, *“desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”* (1 Timothy 2:4)

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# Many questions came up everywhere:

What is behind this difficult phenomenon that the whole world is suffering from?

Why did God allow this bitter tribulation?

Is this pandemic one of the signs that are mentioned in the Bible, especially in the book of Revelation about the end of the world and the second coming of Christ?

Why did God allow it to spread so quickly that places of worship had to shut down in most countries ?

Why did God allow our worship in churches to be restricted?

What did we benefit from the spread of the Coronavirus?

