

To Our Beloved Clergy, Faithful and Monastics
March 24, 2020
Eve of the Annunciation

“Today, the good tidings of joy are proclaimed; today is the festival of the Virgin; things below are joined together with things on high. Adam is made new; Eve is freed from the primal grief; and by the deification of the human nature that the Lord assumed, the tabernacle of our substance has become a temple of God.” ---- “Glory” of the Aposticha of the Feast

Beloved in the Incarnate Lord Jesus Christ,

“Things below are joined together with things on high,” informs us that, although we are “made from earth and shall return to earth”, by God’s plan, we are also made for Heaven, and we shall be received into the heavenly, eternal kingdom. We have this hope today in the face of the coronavirus and in all the years of our lives!

“The tabernacle of our substance has become a temple of God,” that is, the stuff of our human body has been elevated to the heavenly, because Christ has taken it onto himself.

He has elevated it to be a temple, a body for himself, a sign of His promise to us. Christ Jesus, the second person of the Holy Trinity, through the cooperation of the holy ever-virgin Mary, has become visible, tangible; he was born in Bethlehem, preached among men, nailed to the cross; he died, was buried, rose and ascended in his glorified human body.

Today, across the world, human beings are looking for “good news.” We are looking for an end, a closure to the unprepared-for ravages of the coronavirus which has brought widespread suffering, and to some, death. In our holy petitions, we pray for “...an ending to our life, painless, blameless and peaceful.” This part refers to the condition of our “temple,” our “substance,” our body. The petition continues to say, “...and for a good account at the dread judgment seat of Christ,” which refers to our actions, our decisions, our life in Christ. Are we prepared for the uncertainty of this day; are we prepared for the judgment which is to come?

Whenever dread enters into human history, we look for “good news,” for the speedy end to that which we cannot control, in this case to the devastating effects of the coronavirus. What we can control are the decisions we make. Basing our lives on the true and only Good News, that God has stooped down to us, taken on our frail

existence, elevated it to an unending new life with Him -- this moves us to live in Christ as a member of His body, the Church.

Today, we celebrate the Good News, that God became man, so that man can become as God (St. Athanasius). This is the good news that should strengthen us in this hour of concern and dread. It is also a time in which, as much as is allowed by civil and medical directives, we have the opportunity to serve one another. This is why we made the decision to close our churches, even though it means there are no services to gather together as the Body of Christ. It is an action by which we expressed our concern for one another, because we do not know who, unwillingly and unwittingly, may be carrying the virus even into the area of our prayer services, into our edifices, our sacred, beautiful, adorned temples.

The Body of Christ, the Church, is not a building made by human hands; it is the unity we have with Christ who "assumed the tabernacle of our substance." Nothing and no one can prevent us from praying, from personal communion with God, expressing to him in the sanctity of our home, before our holy icons which we venerate, our thanks for the Great and Good News of his conception in the womb of the most obedient and trusting of our race, Mary, Virgin and Mother, and for "... Eve's freedom from grief."

Therefore, let us celebrate in our homes as the early Christians did. Turn off the TV and the "distorted news," and celebrate the True News! Come together as a family to read the account from the Gospel of Luke and hear the words of the Holy Virgin herself (Lk 1:24-38). When you sit down to eat, give thanks to God, and when you finish, give thanks to God. When you are ready to lay your head down and sleep, first ask forgiveness from one another, and kiss one another with the kiss of peace. Let us make of our own home a temporary tabernacle, as the Hebrews did in the desert, so that when this "angel of death" has passed over the world, we may then come together in our churches to celebrate "the good tidings of joy," the Good News that "...Adam is made new," that God is, that God Loves, that God gives us the gift of eternal life.

With paternal concern and blessing for a life in Christ now and in the ages to come,

+ NATHANIEL, Archbishop

P.S. Here are other Scripture Readings to enjoy!

Isaiah 26:21-27:9; Genesis 9:18-10:1; Proverbs 12:23-13:9; Exodus 3:1-8; Proverbs 8:22-30; Luke 1:39-49, 56; Hebrews 2:11-18; Luke 1:24-38.