

Saint Mary's Romanian Orthodox Church



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April 26th 2020 - Bulletin

Christ is Risen!

*Sunday, April 26th -Hieromartyr Vasilefs, bishop of Amasea; St. Glaphira;
Martyrs Cyril, Kindeas and Dasius of Axiopolis. 2nd Sunday after Pascha (St.
Thomas). Epis. Acts 5:12-20. Gos. John 20:19-31. Tone 1. Mat. Gos. 1.*

Matthew 28:16-20 (1st Matins Gospel)

Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen."

Acts 5:12-20 (Epistle)

And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch. Yet none of the rest dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly. And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, so that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them. Also a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed. Then the high priest rose up, and all those who were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with indignation, and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison. But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, "Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life."

Holy Liturgy Gospel,

John 20:19-31 (Gospel)

Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, "Peace be with you." When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord." So he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!" Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing." And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples,

which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

Sermon by Father Lawrence Farley

Covid Catechesis

As I write these words, we are under effective lockdown because of the spread of the Corona Virus, often referred to as “Covid 19”. In the current absence of a vaccine, the health departments of the various governments here in Canada have determined that the only way to slow the spread of the disease is by “social distancing”—i.e. by staying away from others by a distance of several feet. This obviously presents a problem for those assembling in public, such as those at sports events, movie theatres, and restaurants—and churches. Therefore, our bishops have decided most reluctantly to close the churches for now to cooperate with the authorities in being good citizens, since even when one sanitizes walls, tables, chairs, and icons, one cannot keep a sufficient distance from the other worshippers. The issue, of course, is one of charity: even if one does not care for one’s own health, one wants to avoid giving the disease to another. Simply saying, “Trust God” is not an answer. We are repeatedly commanded to obey the secular authorities God has placed over us (Matthew 22:21, Romans 13:1-2, 1 Peter 2:13-15). We are also taught by divine example not to leap off the pinnacle of a temple, trusting that God will catch us and save us from the consequences of our own stupidity. God gave us all a brain, and He expects us to keep it plugged in and turned on. This present crisis teaches us a number of important lessons, even apart from the lesson that we should obey the secular authorities and our bishops. It teaches us the importance of fervent prayer. It teaches us the virtues of patience and of perseverance. And it teaches us the importance and true nature of the Church, which is that of community.

We have already seen that temporary separation from the church community can be an effective Lenten discipline. Such a separation from the church community is an effective discipline precisely because it is temporary and unusual. It is the same as any other kind of Lenten fasting: abstinence from meat is an effective discipline because generally we do not abstain from meat. (Vegans, presumably, find other forms of Lenten discipline.) And the separation from our fellow parishioners at

worship is a discipline precisely because most Sundays find us together with them. It is the stark difference between our present practice and the norm that makes the practice into a discipline.

We see then that the reception of the holy Eucharist cannot sensibly be separated from this gathering together as a church. Indeed, the very word “church”—ekklesia in Greek—means “gathering”. Individual Christians gather together on Sunday, and the result of this action is a gathering, an assembly, an ekklesia, a church. Christ has promised to be among His people when they gather like this, even if the gathering is a very small one consisting only of two or three (Matthew 18:20). That is why the Church is the Body of Christ—Christ is present in and through this gathering and works through it in the same way as we are present in and work through our own body.

The Eucharist presupposes this gathering, and supports it. St. Paul taught that when individual Christians receive the Eucharistic bread, they are thereby joined afresh to Christ in His body. In this way the Church is reconstituted every week at the Eucharist. In the words of Paul, “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Corinthians 10:17). In other words, we become the one body of Christ because we all share in the same Eucharistic bread. The Eucharist is what Christians do on Sunday when they gather together in the Lord’s Name, and the celebration of the Eucharist presupposes a previous gathering.

That is why the Eucharist cannot be celebrated alone. The priest cannot serve the Eucharist (or “say Mass” in old western terms) all by himself, for the Eucharist presupposes a gathering of all the faithful, even if the gathering comprises no more than two or three people. And for the same reason, one cannot receive Holy Communion at home by oneself with the aid of a television set. I remember in the days of my youth watching Rex Humbard on television, who billed himself as “your T.V. pastor”. He would sometimes hold a Communion service on his television show and invite those at home to have Communion with him by taking a piece of bread and a sip of wine (well, grape juice actually) at the time they all did. The

problem (one of many) was that those at home could not gather together with everyone else having Communion. They were not a part of the church or the assembly because they did not in fact assemble. Viewing television at home is not assembling; it is sitting down and watching. To be part of the morning ekklesia one must leave home and assemble. That is what the word means.

What then of the ancient practice (mentioned by St. Justin Martyr in his Apology chapter 67) of the deacons taking the Eucharist to those who were not present at the Sunday morning assembly? This is the exception that proves the rule. Those to whom the deacons took Holy Communion were the sick and shut-in who were not able to assemble. Those absent did not decide to sleep in or stay away because found assembling inconvenient. And the deacons did not commune them simply to give them the sacrament, as if the Church was simply a kind of sacramental outlet, making available the Eucharist to individuals; it was to preserve their unity with the assembly from which their sickness had temporarily separated them. Their reception of the Eucharist did not only unite them to Christ, as if it were a spiritual vitamin which worked by itself apart from the assembly. The Eucharist they received from the deacons united them to the assembly where it was celebrated. Put another way, it united them to Christ who had manifested Himself in the assembly. The Eucharist therefore reveals the centrality of the assembling Church.

This is one of the lessons that Covid 19 teaches us. During this present crisis we fast from assembling in the same that we fast from certain foods during Great Lent. And the discipline of fasting from food sharpens our appetite for that from which we fast. After forty days of fasting from meat, fish, and dairy, we look forward to feasting on them again at Pascha when the Great Fast is over. We miss eating these foods, and feel the abstinence keenly.

In the same way, we now look forward to assembling again when the crisis has subsided, since we keenly miss the Eucharistic assembly. We miss not only receiving the Eucharist, but also miss seeing our friends. If the rigours of the fast make even (for me anyway) McDonald's hamburgers seem appealing, perhaps the rigours of missing Church will make appealing even the sight of some of our parishioners whom we previously found difficult!

Meanwhile, we continue to fast, abstaining from the Eucharist and from assembling as a church. Let us use this time of abstinence to grow closer to Christ through fervent prayer and to let it sharpen our appetite for the Eucharist. Thanks to Covid 19, we may never again take for granted the Sunday Liturgy.

Stay safe, sane and healthy!

We will overcome these difficult times together!

God Bless you all!

Father Lucian