



***St. George's Orthodox Church***

745 South Keyser Ave.

Taylor, PA 18517

570-562-1170

Very Rev. Protopresbyter Mark Leasure, Pastor

May 26, 2020

Dear Faithful:

Since Wednesday, March 18, 2020, the doors of our churches have been locked in response to the spread of the dreaded Coronavirus. For over two months our community of faith has been separated. We have seen multitudes of people contract this illness, many of whom have died – may their memory be eternal! There has been so much fear and uncertainty, and there still is. Everyone and everything has tasted the bitter reality of COVID-19. We have all inherited the aftermath of global shutdown, and together we will face the inevitable challenges that lie ahead. Hopefully, through all of this we have gleaned some insight into our relationship with God, our inner life of communion with Him, and our sense of priorities and values. We rest our hope in the fact that our Lord has been and will continue to be with us (*“I will never leave you nor forsake you”*) as we move from the shadows back into the light. “Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:57).

After consultation with His Eminence, Metropolitan Gregory, I am overjoyed to inform you that after 81 days, the doors of St. George's will once again be open. Our first Liturgy will be on Sunday, June 7, the Feast of Pentecost, beginning at 9:00 a.m. Everyone is reminded that social distancing guidelines will remain in effect and will be implemented during all church services and gatherings. Families will be able to sit together during services, but all others must maintain a distance of at least 6 feet according to federal guidelines. In order to facilitate proper distancing, only every other pew will be utilized for seating. Please be understanding if you do not get your “usual seat.” The seating capacity of St. George's is about 300. However, seating in the church will be limited to 125.

After everything that has transpired over the last couple of months, it should go without saying that anyone feeling ill should stay home. Faithful are encouraged to wear masks, at least until they are seated, though they are not required. Personally, I will not be wearing a mask. There will be no

changes in the way the Eucharist is distributed. As we have been taught and as we pray, the Eucharist is the true Body and Blood of Christ, the source of life and immortality, given for the healing of our bodies and the salvation of our souls. This being true, it cannot be the source of sickness, disease and death. This is what we believe! Faithful are reminded to open their mouths wide when receiving Communion.

Hand sanitizer dispensers will be installed in the narthex. Please utilize them when entering the church. Pews and surfaces will be wiped down and sanitized prior to each service. Veneration of icons and the hand cross is usually with a kiss. At this time it might be prudent to reduce these activities. It is very difficult to tell a faithful individual who for many years has kissed these religious items to stop. It is a personal choice. If you wish to kiss an icon and/or the cross, go ahead. If you choose not to, just bow. Be informed and make wise personal choices.

The Wednesday evening Moleben to the Mother of God will continue to be celebrated as usual. However, only local faithful should plan to attend at this time. People from out of state are encouraged NOT to attend until the end of the summer, at the earliest.

These are trying times, but we must get on with the business of living. Some of us may not feel the tremendous pressure to return to our “normal lives.” But many others know all too well the devastation of losing their livelihood, not being able to feed their families, pay their rent or mortgage, losing everything they have worked for. So we will move ahead with faith and without fear. As our Lord reminds us, “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.”

I have personally missed all of you far beyond what words can express. You have all remained in my prayers and in my heart. With great anticipation I look forward to welcoming all of you back to our family of faith under the patronage of the Great Martyr George. May the words of our Lord be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path: “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

With my prayers and love in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Photopass by Fr. Mark Leasure".

Fr. Mark Leasure, Pastor