

## Streaming the Reality of Shadows: The Pros and Cons of Livestreaming our Services

by Father John Memorich

There once was a man who had a mouse in his house. He had a mousetrap, but no cheese to use as bait. As the man sat in his kitchen reading a magazine, he noticed an advertisement with a picture of cheese. Chuckling to himself, he cut out the cheese and placed it in the mousetrap under the sink hoping that the mouse might think it real. The next day the man got up, went into the kitchen, and checked the mousetrap. Low and behold he had caught something: a picture of a mouse!

These are certainly extraordinary times for Christians of all denominations, with everyone being forced to stay away from their churches because gathering together in the Name of Christ is such an important element to our Christian ethos: *“For where two or three are gathered in my Name, there I am also”* (Matt. 18:20). Yet churches have found a way to gather, albeit in a virtual realm.

Since this pandemic began, most churches scrambled to meet the needs of parishioners by livestreaming said services, even if only a mere handful could be in the church to perform them. Although this is in no way ideal, it was considered by many to be the best way maintain continuity, to keep in touch, share the faith, and at least seemingly worship together as a congregation.

The use of this technology does have positive merits, even outside this quarantine situation. It allows those unable to attend regularly to view the services, such as those who are in nursing homes, are shut-ins, or who are homebound because they no longer drive, etc. Thus, to them, the livestreaming of service is their only means of participating in corporate services.

For the most part, this effort has worked well under these extreme, extenuating circumstances. Yet somewhere deep inside, livestreaming our services is still somewhat unsettling to me. Not to the point of wanting this practice to cease (most parishioners are now asking that we continue streaming even after the fact, for the sake of those who are at home or sick), nor would I ever criticize any parish for doing it as part of their

ministry. Heck, Archangel Michael is leading the OCA in streaming technology by having eight cameras situated throughout the church! Even a friend of mine who works for NBC Sports wrote to thank us for all our efforts and the “fine quality of our production;” and you can’t get any greater praise than from someone who is in the business!

And as an interesting aside, since we have three cameras situated behind the altar, this has allowed everyone the opportunity to witness what before they could not, offering them a much greater appreciation and understanding of the liturgics of the liturgy by “seeing” what the priest does as the liturgy unfolds at the altar.

However, I do feel that there is a downside to this tact; a darkness, like the back corner behind stoves where demons lurk in Russian Fairy Tales. Obviously, live-streaming our services is perhaps the best we can do under the circumstances – and it is certainly being done with the purest of intentions, but I wonder how this is and/or will affect our sense of worship...if we’re not catching a “picture” of worship instead of the real thing.

Since I cannot visit anyone in person, I am being forced to make pastoral visitations with parishioners over the phone. Almost all of them who have the technology and wherewithal are viewing our services. Yet it is in “how” they are viewing them that concerns me. Everyone is certainly happy to see the church, watch the service, listen to sermon, and be “soothed and comforted” by my voice; but when asked what they are doing during the service, I receive answers which literally run the gamut of conduct.

Some families dress up for the live-streaming, others stay in pajamas or sweat-clothes. Some light candles and incense by their television and surround it with icons, others do not. Some families fast, others watch with a cup of coffee in their hand. Some families stand and try to “participate” as they would in church, others simply sit on the couch and watch; a few even admitting they just view services while in bed!

Perhaps the worst element to come out of this situation is what I have coined as, **“Services Surfing.”** For in talking with parishioners throughout Great Lent and Bright Week, many admit to watching some of our service, **Con’t Pg 10**

## Streaming Con't

then click on to so and so's services, and then over to another parish's service, and so on. Upon first hearing this I was immediately taken aback and realized those parishioners, although good-minded, were viewing Sunday and Holy Week services as if they were watching the Browns play the Steelers; and then wanted to check on the Vikings-Green Bay game, before switching to see how the Bears were doing against the Lions!

This is where the livestreaming of worship starts to merge into the shadows of darkness. This is where I realized that people were NOT experiencing virtual Liturgical Worship as real worship; for even by that very definition there needs to be a physical synaxis (gathering) of the people; a "one-mindedness," if you will. Thus, we are back to Plato's Cave, watching the shadows of divine reality rather than experiencing the reality of the Divine!

I have no real answers to this unique [problem] as it came upon us so suddenly, nor do I have any hard, fast rules. As stated, we are all just trying to do the best we can do under forced circumstances. Still, I would like to see our hierarchy discuss this important issue and offer their own sage council and advice. However, in the meantime, I would like to make the following pastoral suggestions to my own flock entrusted to my care:

That although we are forced to be at home and merely watch services remotely, we should still treat this time as "God's time" by preparing adequately and participating properly.

That persons should dress for the occasion as if they were normally attending church. Perhaps one need not go to extremes to dress formally, put on make-up, worry about jewelry, matching handbags and shoes, yet there is something to be said about "setting apart" that time of worship from the rest of the week and giving God your best – even in how you dress and act.

That you follow the guidelines of posture during services just as you would in church: standing, sitting, bowing your head, blessing yourself, etc. This promotes continuity to you and especially your children, as well as reminding us of the important times and components that make up our liturgical worship.

I feel utter sorrow and pain in my inability to minister to my flock fully and physically, and to spiritually feed them from the chalice. However, during this time I think it advisable for parishioners to try and fast as you normally would prior to services. Even if you cannot receive the Eucharist, your fasting becomes a *podvig* – a kind of ascetical effort and sacrifice during these trying times of separation from the church. Obviously, there are exceptions due to age, illness, and medications, but one should follow the routine set between them and their Father Confessor.

Please note that there is a vast, precarious cavern between "worship and entertainment;" one that can unknowingly become a great temptation. Therefore, everyone watching the live-streaming of liturgies, etc., should watch ONE service at a time and participate fully in THAT service (and hopefully it is your own home parish you are watching if they have that ability). **Service Surfing** and/or trying to catch three or four sermons while missing out on the rest of the liturgy utterly defeats the purpose of these extreme efforts. Give all your attention to that one service and then, afterwards, you may virtually visit, watch, and participate in as many services as you wish.

XB!

### Facing our (Worst) Fears By Fr. Steven Kostoff

*"For I am sure that neither death, nor life, not angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, not height, nor depth, not anything else will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."* (Rom. 8:38-39)

I cannot find the exact citation at the moment, but I recall that St. John Chrysostom once said/wrote that, as human beings, we have three major fears: 1) poverty; 2) illness; and 3) death. And what we fear we do our utmost to avoid. We are surrounded by this fearful triad in such a way that we cannot ignore, try as we might, the dangers to our well-being that they persistently threaten us with. Poverty and illness can be thoroughly debilitating, but both can be overcome. **Con't Pg 11**

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Yet the finality of death is inescapable, and for this reason it remains the greatest of our fears, with only its postponement as our most realistic goal. For this reason, we all maximize our capabilities and strategies so as to hold these three fears at bay. Now, as a Christian pastor, preacher and theologian, St. John went on to say that through our faith in Christ, we need to always remember that none of these three fears - or perhaps we should say "realities" - can keep us from God. The poor person can still believe in and trust God. The one who is ill can turn to God with patience and prayer. Even death itself is not a barrier between ourselves and God because the death and resurrection of Christ have removed the "sting of death," and transformed death into a passage to God. All this leads St. John to the conclusion that there is only one thing to actually fear - and that would be sin! And for this reason: it is sin that creates the barrier that keeps us away from God. If, therefore, you come to the realization that the supreme good in life is closeness with God, then you realize that there is nothing in this world that can undermine that relationship but sin itself, that "missing of the mark" that frustrates our relationship with God. Poverty, illness and death itself cannot keep us from God, but sin can and will. Ultimately, a profoundly encouraging insight by a deep Christian thinker and pastor.

I should add that in no way did St. John brush aside the terrible effects upon living human beings of poverty, illness and the fear of death. He tirelessly preached to his flock about its responsibility to alleviate the crushing burden of poverty that others are suffering from; or to deeply sympathize and assist those who are struggling with any kind of illness or physical defect. He knew firsthand about the harsh environment of a sprawling cosmopolitan setting and how the well-to-do and healthy members of that society can coldly ignore the sufferings of others - even among his Christian flock. He knew the grip that the fear of death terrorized his same flock with. Poverty, illness and death were daily realities that he contended with when both a presbyter and then bishop in the cities of Antioch and Constantinople. All the more so, then, as a preacher would he exhort and seek to keep the image of Christ alive and burning within the minds and hearts of his flock. For St. John, only faith in Christ could dispel, or at least weaken, those fears.

As to our fears today, the same is true for us as there

is "nothing new under the sun." What *is* different in our immediate present is just how these three fears have been so forcefully - if not brutally - brought to our attention with the spread of the coronavirus. This global pandemic has brought these three realities to the surface in a way that most people have probably not experienced in their lives before today. Life goes on in our homes and families, but our conversations, the news that we hear, and our very thoughts are fixated on the things we are contending with - poverty, illness and death. These fears that we can more-or-less hide from within the quotidian events of "normal life" have been thrust before our troubled and anxious gaze. Unexpected unemployment is afflicting a huge segment of our society, to the point that it is being compared to some of the great recessions of the past. This raises the specter of poverty, even with the social programs and government assistance that are meant to alleviate the pressures of that possibility. We know further of how unemployment undermines self-confidence and self-worth leading to depression over the uncertainty of the future. Hence, the eagerness to re-establish normalcy so as to "get back to work." As over a million Americans have been infected with the coronavirus, and as we hear some of the horrific stories of people who have been ill, we then all the more fear our own exposure so that now our "neighbor" is the very person that must be avoided and kept at a distance. We can no longer invite other persons into our "space." And with over sixty thousand American deaths as of this writing, the reality of death is no longer a remote inevitability postponed for a far-distance future; but something brought to our attention on a daily basis. Thus, as St. John Chrysostom taught centuries ago, we are indeed facing our worst fears today.

There may exist a misplaced piety among Christians that claims that any fear in the face of any danger is somehow indicative of a lack of faith. The person who believes in Christ should be fearless, according to this approach. And there is support for such a position found in the Scriptures: "that through death he (i.e. Christ) might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage" (Heb. 2:14-15). A firm belief in Christ's victory over death is our path to freedom for its fearful grip. And yet, in that same Epistle to the Hebrews, we hear of Christ's agony - and fear - in the Garden of Gethsemane in deeply moving terms: "In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries *Con't Pg 12*

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and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard for his godly fear" (Heb. 5:7). Even the Son of God agonized over his messianic ministry of passing through "the valley of the shadow of death." There is apparently an inevitable tension between a stance of fearlessness before the reality of death; but also of a genuine fear of death while "in the flesh." I would think that most Christians live within that tension. Christians believe that Christ has "trampled down death by death." This is the faith that we live by and which we proclaim in our liturgical assemblies, especially when receiving the Eucharist. But we will face our own "agony" and fear when faced with the prospect of death. Perhaps we all share that poignant cry from the Gospel: "I believe, help my unbelief!" (Mk. 9:24). Those Christians who attempt to intimidate "weaker" Christians into "proving" that they have faith even when fearful, are clearly lacking in charity.

St. John Chrysostom was right: we fear 1) poverty; 2) illness; and 3) death. We can call this (fallen) human nature or the human condition. Any such terms are applicable. If our anxieties and fears have been heightened to a greater or lesser degree during this coronavirus pandemic, it need not cause us further anxiety concerning our faith, or a debilitating discouragement that we are not being faithful enough. To see our weaknesses is not meant to discourage us. In fact, it should encourage us to be honest about ourselves, so as to face and wrestle with our fears. Perhaps like the patriarch Jacob in that mysterious event when he wrestled with an angel, that is how we can overcome them. We know our weaknesses, now we need to avail ourselves of those "tools" from within the Church which, when humbly turned to, can build up our faith - prayer, the Scriptures, Repentance, Confession and the Eucharist (when available again!). Otherwise, our social isolation will only create spiritual fatigue and emptiness. We cannot afford to wait until life returns to normal to then resume our "religious lives" in church. On the contrary, St. Paul exhorts us: "*Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold now is the day of salvation*" (II Cor. 6:2). And elsewhere: "*I can do all things in Christ Who strengthens me*" (Phil. 4:13). I believe being brought face-to-face with our fears is a painful lesson in humility. The French Orthodox theologian, Jean-Claude Larchet says

this with great insight: "Illness is an opportunity for each person to experience his ontological fragility, his dependence, and to turn to God as the one who can help overcome it: if not physically (for there do occur, in response to prayer, miraculous healings), then at least spiritually, and give it a meaning by which one builds oneself up, and without which one only allows oneself to be destroyed." To be humbled is not to be discouraged. To put that another way: I do not believe that God works through discouragement. But I do believe that strengthened by the grace of God, we can work through discouragement in any form that it may assail us. Realizing our dependence on Christ - "*For apart from Me you can do nothing*" (Jn. 15:5) - teaches us to be humble. We therefore cannot judge anyone else - including all of those "unbelievers" who live in our midst.

There is something to learn about ourselves, the world around us, and "life" itself, as we face a multitude of fears during this coronavirus crisis in which we are immersed. The process may be painful, but the results are positive. We are learning to care for and to love each other, to more fully appreciate the "little things" in life, to take nothing for granted - including tomorrow - and to deeply sympathize with the sufferings of others. On the pastoral level I am hoping that this includes a deeper awareness of our dependence on God. St. John Chrysostom knew our fears, but he also knew how liberating it is to believe in Christ. We may realize this today never before: "*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and for ever.*" (Heb. 13:8).

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# Hristos a-înviat ; Adevărat a-înviat

*Romanian*



## Sunday of the Samaritan Woman

Commemorated on [May 17](#)

The Holy Martyr Photina (Svetlana) the Samaritan Woman, her sons Victor (named Photinus) and Joses; and her sisters Anatola, Phota, Photis, Paraskeva, Kyriake; Nero's daughter Domnina; and the Martyr Sebastian: The holy Martyr Photina was the Samaritan Woman, with whom the Savior conversed at Jacob's Well (John. 4:5-42).

During the time of the emperor Nero (54-68), who displayed excessive cruelty against Christians, Saint Photina lived in Carthage with her younger son Joses and fearlessly preached the Gospel there. Her eldest son Victor fought bravely in the Roman army against barbarians, and was appointed military commander in the city of Attalia (Asia Minor). Later, Nero called him to Italy to arrest and punish Christians.

Sebastian, an official in Italy, said to Saint Victor, "I know that you, your mother and your brother, are followers of Christ. As a friend I advise you to submit to the will of the emperor. If you inform on any Christians, you will receive their wealth. I shall write to your mother and brother, asking them not to preach Christ in public. Let them practice their faith in secret."

Saint Victor replied, "I want to be a preacher of Christianity like my mother and brother." Sebastian said, "O Victor, we all know what woes await you, your mother and brother." Then Sebastian suddenly felt a sharp pain in his eyes. He was dumbfounded, and his face was somber.

For three days he lay there blind, without uttering a word. On the fourth day he declared, "The God of the Christians is the only true God." Saint Victor asked why Sebastian had suddenly changed his mind. Sebastian replied, "Because Christ is calling me." Soon he was baptized, and immediately regained his sight. Saint Sebastian's servants, after witnessing the miracle, were also baptized.

Reports of this reached Nero, and he commanded that the Christians be brought to him at Rome. Then the Lord Himself appeared to the confessors and said, "Fear not, for I am with you. Nero, and all who serve him, will be vanquished." The Lord said to Saint Victor, "From this day forward, your name will be Photinus, because through you, many will be

enlightened and will believe in Me." The Lord then told the Christians to strengthen and encourage Saint Sebastian to persevere until the end.

All these things, and even future events, were revealed to Saint Photina. She left Carthage in the company of several Christians and joined the confessors in Rome.

At Rome the emperor ordered the saints to be brought before him and he asked them whether they truly believed in Christ. All the confessors refused to renounce the Savior. Then the emperor gave orders to smash the martyrs' finger joints. During the torments, the confessors felt no pain, and their hands remained unharmed.

Nero ordered that Saints Sebastian, Photinus and Joses be blinded and locked up in prison, and Saint Photina and her five sisters Anatola, Phota, Photis, Paraskeva and Kyriake were sent to the imperial court under the supervision of Nero's daughter Domnina. Saint Photina converted both Domnina and all her servants to Christ. She also converted a sorcerer, who had brought her poisoned food to kill her.

Three years passed, and Nero sent to the prison for one of his servants, who had been locked up. The messengers reported to him that Saints Sebastian, Photinus and Joses, who had been blinded, had completely recovered, and that people were visiting them to hear their preaching, and indeed the whole prison had been transformed into a bright and fragrant place where God was glorified.

Nero then gave orders to crucify the saints, and to beat their naked bodies with straps. On the fourth day the emperor sent servants to see whether the martyrs were still alive. But, approaching the place of the tortures, the servants fell blind. An angel of the Lord freed the martyrs from their crosses and healed them. The saints took pity on the blinded servants, and restored their sight by their prayers to the Lord. Those who were healed came to believe in Christ and were soon baptized.

In an impotent rage Nero gave orders to flay the skin from Saint Photina and to throw the martyr down a well. Sebastian, Photinus and Joses had their legs cut off, and they were thrown to dogs, and then had their skin flayed off. *Con't Pg 14*

## *Samaritan Woman Con't*

The sisters of Saint Photina also suffered terrible torments. Nero gave orders to cut off their breasts and then to flay their skin. An expert in cruelty, the emperor readied the fiercest execution for Saint Photis: they tied her by the feet to the tops of two bent-over trees. When the ropes were cut the trees sprang upright and tore the martyr apart. The emperor ordered the others beheaded. Saint Photina was removed from the well and locked up in prison for twenty days.

After this Nero had her brought to him and asked if she would now relent and offer sacrifice to the idols. Saint Photina spit in the face of the emperor, and laughing at him, said, "O most impious of the blind, you profligate and stupid man! Do you think me so deluded that I would consent to renounce my Lord Christ and instead offer sacrifice to idols as blind as you?"

Hearing such words, Nero gave orders to again throw the martyr down the well, where she surrendered her soul to God (ca. 66).

On the Greek Calendar, Saint Photina is commemorated on February 26.

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### **Acts 11:19-26, 29-30 (Epistle)**

Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only. But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord. Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch. When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord. For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.



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### **PRAY FOR OUR CATECHUMENS**

Rachael Adamcio      Luke Welch  
Lydia Welch          Tristen Welch

**Possible Catechumens:**

Loreen Welch      Cheyenne Welch

May God & the Holy Spirit guide them in their journey in the Orthodox Church and the Orthodox way of Life.



# **Christos Anesti!**

# **Alithós Anésti!**

*Greek*

## John 4:5-42 (Gospel)

So He came to a city of Samaria which is called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied from His journey, sat thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour. A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink." For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. Then the woman of Samaria said to Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water." The woman said to Him, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water? Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, as well as his sons and his livestock?" Jesus answered and said to her, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life." The woman said to Him, "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw." Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." The woman answered and said, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You have well said, 'I have no husband,' for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly." The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." The woman said to Him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When He comes, He will tell us all things." Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am He." And at this point His disciples came, and they marveled that He talked with a woman; yet no one said, "What do You seek?" Or, "Why are You

talking with her?" The woman then left her waterpot, went her way into the city, and said to the men, "Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" Then they went out of the city and came to Him. In the meantime His disciples urged Him, saying, "Rabbi, eat." But He said to them, "I have food to eat of which you do not know." Therefore the disciples said to one another, "Has anyone brought Him anything to eat?" Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work. Do you not say, 'There are still four months and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. For in this the saying is true: 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labors." And many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, "He told me all that I ever did." So when the Samaritans had come to Him, they urged Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days. And many more believed because of His own word. Then they said to the woman, "Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world."

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### **CATASTROPHIC RELIEF FUND**

Purpose of fund: To provide some small financial assistance to a parishioner, family member or community member who has suffered a catastrophic event.

Funds will be offered at the discretion & blessing of the Rector and the discretion of the Board.

Two parishioners have given a portion of their stimulus checks to this fund. Please feel free to donate as well. Thank you and God bless!

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### **BUILDING / RESTORATION FUND**

Our 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary is coming!

Fund Purpose: To collect funds to pay for the restoration, repair and beautification of the building and parish room. This will avoid using general funds which are earmarked for budgetary items.

Please consider contributing generously to the *Building/Restoration Fund.*

## Keeping Calm in the Midst of a Storm

Last week's post told the wonderful story of a monk who both cursed and praised a tomb of a dead person. The point was to show what it meant to acquire a spirit of dispassion in living the spiritual life. The writer of last week's story said something important:

*"Indeed, I would go even further and say that acquiring dispassion is the most important and urgent challenge of the spiritual life. If we want to mediate true spiritual healing in this world of ours, each of us needs to seek freedom from those forces—biological, psychological, emotional, social, national, ideological and even religious—that would subject us to their wills and ultimately, pit us against one another."*

We need to live an ascetical life (not just for monks) to acquire a spirit of dispassion. As a result, we will not be motivated by outside forces, and we will be at peace whether praised or condemned. This is an important virtue that needs to be formed in us. If we don't by the grace of the Holy Spirit acquire this virtue, we will not be able to sort out the polarities of life we now encounter. We will not be able to help our children, as they get older to navigate them as well.

So as this spirit of dispassion grows in us, I have the following thoughts to offer on the tensions we are now encountering in this world over such things as the virus and ideological differences.

1) The truth can be tested. Any time we read things, we should not be afraid of or immediately react to someone's point of view. We should be able to listen, even if we don't agree, and make sure we understand what the person is saying. The truth will always prevail and can stand the test of scrutiny. We should not be thinking about how we will respond to someone with our own "come back." We aren't really listening if we do. Respond first by seeking clarity: make sure that you understand what the speaker intends to say. This is active listening. If anything, we should then begin asking questions such as, "On what do you base what you are saying? What objective facts do you have to support your views on this issue?"

2) Be wary of any statements on an issue designed to elicit an emotional response. We should not be controlled by our emotions but proceed by a clear thought process. There is a big difference between "I think..." and "I feel..."

3) In cases where someone's presentation is calm and seemingly convincing on the surface (not appealing to one's emotions):

1) What credentials does a person have to speak on the topic at hand? Just because someone is a doctor or a health care professional (and they are speaking on the coronavirus), do they have the necessary expertise to do so?

4) Does a "medical presentation" just present a point of view, whose "facts" are not submitted to the larger medical community for verification? Is there evidence that other sources, through their own research, have been able to support the facts presented?

5) Does a presentation claim exclusivity? In other words: "I am the only one that has the answers, and everyone else has it wrong. Listen to me if you want to know the truth." This is a red flag that should cause us to be concerned.

6) Is there an agenda in the presentation? One may start off with a presentation on Covid-19 and its proper care and treatment. But then the presentation ends up making policy statements on what churches and civil authorities should do based on facts that may be questionable. Or the person has a book that is about to be published. That is why a person may be using social media; he or she seeks to market a story so people will buy the book.

We need to be careful of presentations that claim to be truthful but have been discredited by other reputable sources. The only way this can be done is by doing our own research and learning more about the topic at hand. As our Lord told His disciples, "*Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.*" (Matthew 10:16) I will speak more on this verse from Matthew in next week's note.

The blessing of the Lord be upon you, Christ is risen!

The unworthy +Paul