



Faith and Hope

a newsletter of the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church

March 2020



Peace to you, dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ!

Bishop Vsevolod arrived in Yekaterinburg and celebrated the Annunciation festival (transferred from March 25) in the parish of Saint Peter and Saint Paul. At the beginning of his sermon, the Bishop said:

We still don't know much about coronavirus. As a result, there is a lot of panic and chaos around us. Universities and schools are closed now. In the grocery stores crowds run to grab as much food as they can. We are told to put on masks and walk more than two meters from each other. And that we must not gather in groups of more than fifty people.

In Moscow, the Roman-Catholic Archbishop called on his parishioners to stop going to church services. I quote from his decree: "We urge the faithful to abstain (fast) from physical participation in the liturgies, as a way to strengthen faith, to trust in God, and to show solidarity with those who, due to the epidemic or distances, are deprived of the opportunity to participate in the Mass."

You know, after all, we have many such parishioners who are also "fasting" in this way. Almost all year they are abstaining "from physical participation in the liturgies." More precisely, they are those who forget about the Church and do not go to services -- but it never leads to any strengthening of their faith. Because nothing can lead to the strengthening of faith, except for the ways that God himself has established. These ways are; the Word and the Sacraments.

Honestly, I was surprised by this decree; I am glad that I am not a Roman-Catholic. (Although during normal times I am quite open to ecumenical contacts between traditional denominations).

The problem is when we declare that we stop celebrating the liturgy due to sanitary reasons, we hereby declare that our sacraments are "unsanitary" and can "harm people." Can you say that about the Eucharist? The Eucharist is, as the ancients said, "a medicine of immortality." It is a medicine. The most beneficial medicine of all medicines that exist in our world.

All other medicines in this world can only facilitate your temporary existence on this earth. They can only delay your death. But the Eucharist gives life -- abundant life, eternal life -- regardless of what happens to you in this life.

So, thank you for joining the liturgy today. Actually, today I was supposed to be in Moscow, to celebrate the Annunciation, there, together with Father Ivan. It is a parish festival, there. The Moscow parish is called, The Parish of Annunciation. But we do own our own space there, we rent it. The owners of the building closed it due to the quarantine in Moscow. So, presently, there are no regular services conducted at the congregation in Moscow. The priest will go to give Holy Communion to the parishioners in their homes.

How long will all this continue? We do not know. Six months? A year? No one can say, for how long, we will hide from the coronavirus.

There are two options; two approaches to the situation. A common way: to hide everyone. This is done almost everywhere, all over the world. The problem is that the virus is not going to leave, and people do not have (and will not have) the corresponding immunity. Therefore, sooner or later, when we will leave our homes, in six months or in a year, the virus will be waiting for us, and we will become infected.

(There is also the possibility that scientists will be able to create a vaccine; they promise to do that, it seems, in a year).

Another (risky) option: not to hide, and get sick. The positive side is that we will then develop an immunity. The disadvantage: everyone with poor health could die.

So, here is such the problem in our world now. This is unexpected; even back in February, we planned trips and vacations, and all sorts of entertainment. And now, we don't know how, not, to "die" of boredom with a bunch of children in our tiny apartments, and "yet our eyes failed, looking for help was useless," and the coronavirus "hunted our steps so that we could not walk in our streets" (from Lament. 4:17-18).

The world is increasingly filled with anxiety. There is an ever-growing "dismay among nations and perplexity" on earth, and people "fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world" (Luke 21:25-26).

But even more, we cannot stay outside of the Church. Those who leave Her, sooner or later, forget about Her. And the Church cannot be "virtual" or "online," because no one will offer you the Eucharist from a TV screen or from a laptop monitor.



If we hide, how will it be then, "if one falls, and there is no one who lifts him" (from Eccl. 4:10).

Our Lord came into this world to "lift those who fell." Not just to lift us up, but to raise us to eternal life in Heaven. "The Son of Man has come to save that which was lost" (Matt. 18:11). Not some abstract "lost," but to save you and me who were lost. In Christ, we will stand, we will go through all the hardships of this world, and finally enter into Heaven. Without Christ, no matter how much we hide from evil viruses, we will be captured; if not by this one, then by another. Maybe it will not be a coronavirus, but some other plague. Maybe, we will even be able, to hide from every danger, and live our short life without any extraordinary illnesses. But what will happen next? After all, sooner or later our earthly path will end anyway.

The most important thing is that when a Christian closes his (her) eyes on this earth, he (she) immediately opens them in the Kingdom of Heaven. For this purpose, the Church exists: to lift you when you fall, and to nourish you with the Eucharist, so that you might not "faint on the way" (Matt. 15:32); so that you reach Heaven.

So, try to attend the church services. And if it is difficult, call the priest, he will come and give the Holy Communion to you at your home. Your priest exists for you; God has put us in service to you; we have no other purpose in life than to save you.

Please pray for the Siberian Lutheran clergymen who travel to visit remote parishes during this difficult time. Please be healthy, and pray with us that this difficult time soon end. ☒☒

This "Faith and Hope" newsletter is published by: The Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church (SELC). Her bishop, Vsevolod Lytkin, serves St. Andrew congregation in Novosibirsk where the SELC continues to grow and be a place where the Gospel of Jesus Christ is preached, and the Holy Sacraments provided for sinners seeking forgiveness and healing of body and soul. This edition of the Faith and Hope newsletter is edited, reformatted and distributed by [The Siberian Lutheran Mission Society \(SLMS\)](#), a Recognized Service Organization (RSO) of The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod (LC-MS).

In this newsletter, the members of the SELC reveal their faith and hopes. They are Siberian Russians seeking an answer to challenges and problems in their lives. They are a people who have been called by Christ in the healing waters of Holy Baptism and fed by the holy precious food of His body and blood. They may speak a different language, but they are all baptized in the name of the same LORD and eat and drink the same Jesus. These are a people who know the mission of the Church – a mission which begins and finds its conclusion in the Word and Sacraments properly administered. We invite you to read this newsletter with a prayer of divine grace for our Lutheran brothers and sisters in Siberia. Their challenges in a land of pagan Buddhism, shamanism, and atheism is great. Your prayers and continuing support is appreciated.

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