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Church of Greece announcement on coronavirus measures



In Greece on Wednesday, a statement by the Holy Synod of the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Greece reiterated that the Holy Communion cannot be the source of transmission of diseases, while stressing that debate in the country over the past few days, with some extreme voices even calling for a prohibition on the partaking of the Holy Communion, "…begins from a different starting point and has a different approach".

The statement adds: ".. the Holy Communion does not symbolize, but is the very Body and Blood of Christ; it would be blasphemous to think that the Body and Blood of Christ could transmit whatever illness or virus. The experience of centuries of Christianity has shown no such instance of transmission."

At the same time, the Holy Synod announced that Sunday school classes and various Church-run educational and social programs would be temporarily closed.

The same measure is extended to Church-run day and nursery schools. Additionally, fields trips and pilgrimage tours have been cancelled, while administrative services of the Holy Synod, the Athens Archdiocese and individual Metropolises will be open to the public for one hour each day. Finally, soup kitchens run by the Church will deliver meals to residences.

The same position was enunciated by the Patriarchate of Georgia, calling on the faithful to follow instructions and guidelines by public health authorities, but at the same reiterating that it will not cancel Church services or in the partaking in the Holy Communion.

In another part of Europe, the Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain issued an encyclical on the coronavirus outbreak, noting that ".. as Orthodox Christians we believe that the Holy Eucharist is the Body and Blood of the Resurrected Christ. We also believe that germs, viruses and other diseases are not transmitted through the Eucharist. The 2,000-year history of the Church affirms this".

In a related development, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis was expected to announce a comprehensive set of measures by his government on Wednesday evening.

More than 90 cases of Covid-19 infection have been confirmed in the country so far, although, thankfully, no fatalities. One patient, however, a 67-year-old man was in critical condition.

European and EU leaders held a teleconference on Tuesday over the coronavirus crisis, agreeing that adherence of preventative measures is imperative.

A day earlier, the Greek education ministry announced that schools in the country, from pre-kindergarten to universities, would be closed for the next 14 days.