12/03/2020

Ecumenical Patriarchate: ‘We maintain our belief in God, and we trust science’; Orthodox Churches issue announcements



Global concerns over a massive outbreak of the coronavirus have brought much of southern Europe to a standstill, after the virus spread from south-central China. Outdoor activities in several parts of the Middle East have also been drastically affected.

Amid this public health crisis, the world’s Orthodox Churches have coalesced around a common principle, namely, “We maintain our belief in God, and we trust science”.

On Wednesday, the Sacred Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople issued the following announcement: “The Church has shown and continues to show respect to medical science. Thus, the Church encourages all the faithful to adhere to the official directives of both the World Health Organization, and the pertinent pronouncements and legal regulations issued by the civil authorities of their respective countries.”

Regarding the partaking of the Holy Communion by the faithful, the Ecumenical Patriarchate echoed previous statements by other ancient and junior Orthodox Churches, stressing that: "… The Holy Great Church of Christ knows from the experience of its 2,000-year-old journey that Holy Communion is 'the antidote to death', and remains firm in the Orthodox teaching regarding the Holy Eucharist."

At the same time, the Holy Synod of the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Greece this week again reiterated that it fully supports all decisions taken, and all precautions recommended by state health authorities, while also underlining its decision to continue ecclesiastical services and the offering of the sacraments, including the Holy Communion.

In the Holy Land, the Patriarchate of Jerusalem has issued an announcement calling on the faithful to adhere to directions by public health authorities — in the wake of confirmed Covid-19 infections amongst visitors and pilgrims to the Holy Land, including a group Greek nationals from the northwest Peloponnese.

Similar guidelines and precautions were issued by the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church for parishes, monasteries and affiliated institutions around the vast country. Church services will, nevertheless, continue.

In similar fashion, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church urged all to follow guidelines and precautions, but also stressed that the Church's sacraments cannot be a source of transmission for any disease.

The Patriarchate of Georgia announced that no debate has taken place on temporarily not conducting the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist .

On Cyprus, the Autocephalous Orthodox Church on the island republic stressed that 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."