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This pandemic is not a chance occurrence allowed by God, but a sign of the times; it is a fruit of Divine indignation, as man is doing not what is natural, what is reasonable, but what is absurd and abnormal. Imagine how dismayed the Holy Spirit is, and how God the Father, again in His paternal role – because we should never forget that any tribulation allowed by God is not as executioner, or as an avenger, but allowed as a didactic motivated by love, precisely in order to bring man – the wanderer, the obscured – to bring him, through affliction and misfortune, through this lesson, closer to Him; and for him (man) to comprehend, not through the study of volumes, but in practice, to comprehend he is nothing.

Because, as our Christ said, "…apart from me you can do nothing".

Truly, today we are afraid to shake hands with another person, lest he transmit the coronavirus. And truly, these fears are reasonable, so we attempt, as much as possible, to remain freed from this scourge. Our Panaghia (the Blessed Virgin Mary), and, in fact, the Holy Cincture – which we keep here, and which we placed in the hymnology of our vigil as the first canon – as we very well know from experience, beyond the 30 years here at the Vatopedi Monastery, but also from the

archives which our colleagues, our predecessors, our keepers of the Holy Cincture elders held and preserved in order to bestow to us, and for us to have the knowledge of what occurred, the wonderful facts of the past, so that the Holy Cincture remains ever present with its miraculous presence amid the plague, the cholera epidemic, through the various illnesses that were always pandemics; when, truly, the entire world was, as we said, in desperation and knew not what to do, how to combat it.

Alas, the older world had more faith.

Today, the devil has achieved a major success.

How?

By harming the faith of people; and because modern man pursues intellectualism and meditation, he pushes them to study there; to study, and study again – not that study is a bad thing – however, people acquire a humanist nature, and a human-centered perception of all things and events.

This is why today I hear various people speak and lend courage to the world; whether scientists or other sorts of people. Yet, I see in their directives, in their addresses, a secular humanism. They disregard the presence of God; they forget that the center of life is Christ. We must deal and assess all with an approach revolving around Christ, because as St. Paisios said, with Christ obstacles are lifted; we are provided with a path leading away from temptation. Without Christ all is barred, grey. This is why they moan and wail, why they are impatient and despair, because our hope, our strength and our light is Christ.

This is why they told me St. Nikephoros the Leper was seen, and he said “invoke me, and I will help you”.

Indeed, he said something quoted by the Church, he said “…do not be afraid, you will not receive the virus from the Church. This is why you should partake in the Holy Communion,” the saint added “do not fear the Holy Communion”, for the Holy Eucharist can never be polluted, my brothers.

Alas, unfortunately, today various people – out of ignorance, of course – behave in a manner that is disrespectful of the Divine; towards the Holy Communion. I am not saying that people should not recognize the law of the state – if one reads a bit of history – Ioannis Kapodistrias, then a respected governor of Greece for a time also closed the churches due to an outbreak of the plague, which was an infectious disease. And despite his deep reverence, he was obliged to close the churches for a

certain period.

The state is not shutting churches because it scorns the faith or tramples upon it. No.

Yet we, faithful Christians, will find ways, with private prayer, with supplications and mystic prayer, to express the aspiration “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on us”, to attempt to come into communion with our Christ.

There are not enough keystrokes, alas, that one may strike in order to ignite the light of Grace. One that wants to love Christ, who feels that the center of his life is Christ, does not disremember Christ because the Church will be closed for a time. He must proceed, he must have spiritual confidence; he must hope; he must augment his faith, given that he requests from Christ to “add to our faith”, so we may proceed and squash temptation. And to always proceed in peace for the salvation of our eternal soul.

Amen.