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Archbishop Makarios of Australia cautions for Easter: the churches must not become hotspots for the spread of COVID-19



“The people have shown great understanding during this trying period of COVID-19 and I thank them for that”, said Greek-Orthodox Archbishop of Australia, Mr Makarios in an exclusive interview to SBS Greek.

«The message I want to give is that we belong to the Church of joy. We belong to the Church of the Resurrection and it does not teach us a moral way to be good or bad. The Church teaches us how to overcome death. This trial we are going through, is a challenge aiming to test our faith and our love for Christ and the Church» his Eminence said.

The Archbishop noted that COVID-19 has impacted the functions of the Archdiocese and that he doesn’t foresee any changes to the restrictions regarding the Easter

holiday.

He called to the faithful to show understanding, not only because gatherings during Easter, will be a violation of the restrictions that the Australian government has imposed nation-wide, but also because he does not wish for the Churches to become places were the virus can spread in the community.

«I have no fear for my life or my health. But if someone with the virus kisses the hand of the Archbishop, then another and another, then this hand of blessing will become a hand that spreads sorrow», he stressed.

Asked about the rhetoric that has been witnessed from some other Bishops/Metropolitans in other mainly Orthodox countries, including Greece, his Eminence said: «We Greek-Orthodox, have this trait: In matters of medicine or astrophysics, the ones who have a say are the experts. But when it comes to theology, everyone thinks they are an expert, and feel the need to share their opinions with the media. We need to be mindful of that, as in certain cases we may touch sensitive threads of a person's being or conscience» he said, while stressing that the faithful and the clergy should be united during this period.

The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia has not been left untouched by the spread of the virus.

«These affects our Parishes, our priests and their families but also the staff who work in our schools, institutions, offices, or district offices of the Archdiocese» said his Eminence.

As a result, the Archdiocese has decided on a number of measures, soon to be officially announced by Mr. Makarios, to adapt to the current crisis.

Firstly, for the year 2020, parishes who are not able to afford to pay their 7% contribution to the Archdiocese will be relieved of this financial responsibility. «This is hard, but I do not want to be distant from the parishes that are going through hardships» said Archbishop Makarios.

The Archbishop also was eager to stress that there will be no lay offs. «We will fire none of our employees from the Archdiocese, our regional offices, our schools, foundations, at St. Basil's, or the welfare centres. No one will get fired».

The third major issue is the wage of the clergy, as many parishes are unable to pay their priests. «We are in communication with the authorities, I have assurances from the state that our priests will be able to be included in the welfare programs

and receive the weekly alliance of $750 per week» said his Eminence. According to the Archbishop, the priests and their families will be able at the very least to secure a basic income from their families until the crisis subsides.

Source