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Serbian Orthodox Church Australia and New Zealand – His Grace Bishop Siluan's Pastoral Epistle to his spiritual children in Victoria



Most Venerable monastics, God-loving clergy and beloved faithful, my dear spiritual children of our St Sava (Svetosavska) Church in Melbourne and throughout the state of Victoria,

Following with great attention, and partaking as archpastor in spirit and prayer the trials you have been going through in recent weeks and months in isolation from your Holy churches, from your families and loved ones, deprived of much-needed support in combating the challenges you are faced with, it is my intention as spiritual father, to my abilities, by way of this pastoral epistle, to offer my support, to encourage and strengthen you, to share with you the burden of the cross you carry.

Life on earth, as the great Vladika Rade asserts, is often a bitter glass of bile that seeks a glass of honey, which is somehow easiest to drink when it is mixed.

The current year will most probably be remembered as the year that brought with it tremendous social changes. The year which revealed the inner spirit of the society we live in, which brought to the surface the most noble and the ugliest in humanity.

From the clear sky of our hectic "certainty" of everyday work and obligations, a

dark cloud appeared bringing with it not rain, but fear, uncertainty and panic; a world of face masks, isolation, restricted movement and curfew; fines and arrests. Churches were shut down by state decree as being “non-essential institutions”, schools were closed, jobs lost, mental illnesses skyrocketed, and many lives were lost. In this darkness, more spiritual than material, in which a paralysis of the spirit occurred in a greater part of the population for a deeper perspective and analysis of things, as Orthodox Christians we found ourselves before a test of faith. Our regular life rhythm, including the liturgical one, has changed abruptly, everything has stopped without announcement and time for preparation.

Faced with these challenges, we hurried to where the Holy Apostles, Church Fathers and Holy Martyrs, as well as our Holy Ancestors led us by way of their example, towards Christ, with our knees on the ground and our gaze lifted up towards Heaven. Even today, although only the state of Victoria, among other states and territories of Australia is under such severe (never before seen) restrictive measures and circumstances, we should not lose hope and weaken in spirit, but hold fast to Christ, to our Only True support, consolation, hope, Way and Life.

Physically separated from our Holy Churches, not by our decree or will, but by the ‘laws of the mighty of this world’, we should remember the words of the Holy Apostle Paul that call us to persevere in prayer, addressing the Lord at all times (Eph. 6:18), remembering that we are temples of the Spirit Holy (1 Cor. 6:19), to put on the whole armor of God so that we may be able to sustain ourselves in the fight against the cunning of the devil, for our war is not against blood and flesh, but against the principalities and authorities of the lord of darkness in this world, against the spirits of wickedness in heaven (Eph. 6: 11-12).

The Holy Apostles of Christ bore many wounds on their bodies for the sake of Christ (2 Cor. 5: 8-12), however, they left us an example to have every joy when we fall into various temptations, knowing that the temptation of our faith builds patience, cleanses and perfects us (James 2-4).

As Christians through all ages, we are likewise today called to be a light in this fallen world, a world that is spiraling into a great darkness of hopelessness. This is because ungodliness (antitheism) logically leads to hopelessness. The world has all but ceased to look towards the heavens, it has fixed its gaze to the earth. For a long time now, modern man has been living a horizontal life, having lost his vertical relationship with Heaven – with God. In his wanderings he continues to look for solutions to his problems exclusively in his own abilities and strengths, resulting in dissatisfaction and despondency of the spirit.

We need to remember that Christ is our Victory, our joy in every sorrow, even this one. He is our Way through the stormy sea of this life, our Truth and Life. Being in isolation, it is important to remember that we are never alone. Christ, along with His Most Holy Mother, our Patron Saints, our Guardian Angels and all the Saints of

the Church are with us. Likewise, as members of the One Body of Christ – the Holy Church, we are always united with one another through the grace of the Holy Spirit working in us, through prayer, the holy Virtues and Sacraments and the Most Holy Liturgical Oblation. It is now, in the midst of all these trials, that we as Orthodox Christians are called to witness to those around us, to show the world, that we have a firm foothold and unshakable hope in the One who has overcome the infernal triad of death, sin, and the devil – to manifest the salvific and victorious life in Christ our God and Saviour.

Whenever it is difficult for us, we should kneel before our icons and open our hearts in tearful prayer to God. In this way all our burdens will be removed, and we will be refreshed in spirit, strengthening our faith and hope. God is the source of all consolation, it is for us to cry out to Him, entreating Him on our behalf and on behalf of those many enslaved around us – Lord God forgive us and help us! Have mercy on us! O Lord, do not look upon our weaknesses and sins, but come to our aid, for you are our hope, our refuge and consolation!

The temptation we are faced with will eventually come to an end. The important thing is how will we come out from it. This 'cloud' – the crisis that has overshadowed the world, has been given to us as an opportunity to re-examine ourselves, to deeply evaluate our lives, our actions, our relationship with God and our neighbors, with our faith and the Holy Church.

Concluding my humble epistle addressed to you, the beloved Church of God in Victoria, I want to praise and thank all the clergy of our Melbourne Deanery for their tireless work, solicitude and unreserved self-giving for their flock in these days of great tribulation for the Church of Christ.

May the Lord accept this sacrifice that you have made as a most fragrant offering.

I also greet and praise all our Church committees and auxiliary organizations of our Church communities and Missionary parishes across Victoria, who continue faithfully and diligently, in these extraordinary circumstances, to do everything in their power for the preservation of our Holy Sanctuaries. May the Lord bless you all abundantly for your love and sacrifices made for His Holy Church.

I also greet our most venerable monastics, thanking you for your prayers for the deliverance and salvation of the Flock of Christ and the good of the world. May God grant you the strength to faithfully and honourably live out your Angelic calling to the very end.

I greet all of you my beloved faithful, my eparchiots in Christ our Lord. May Christ grant you His consolation, may He bless you abundantly with strength and joy, that you may faithfully and fervently serve him to the very end.

Regretting that I am not able to visit you in person and share with you the burden you carry because of the closed borders and restrictive measures that are in force, although physically separated, I am always with you in prayer and thought.

With Christ’s blessings and much love,
+ Bp. Siluan

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