

Dear Parents and beloved Children of our parish,

As the battle against COVID-19 is raging, it is important to understand its effects on us, members of the Orthodox Church. For quite a few months we have separated ourselves from each other. This is not good because it runs against how God, our Father, made us. He made us to be together and to talk to each other and to Him about all our problems and all our joys. In short, He made us so we cannot live apart from each other and certainly not apart from Him.

You might think that not being with each other does not mean we don't communicate with each other. How about our computers, our tablets, our phones, our media? Yet, these means only partially address the issue. For a clearer view let us note what St. John Chrysostom mentioned about sixteen hundred years ago!: "Raise up an athlete in Christ! I do not mean by this, hold him/her back from wedlock and send him to desert regions and prepare him/her to assume the monastic life. It is not this that I mean...Raise up an athlete for Christ and teach him/her though he/she is living in the world to be reverent from his/her early youth."

As you can see, St. John does not advocate isolation/monasticism. Instead he favors "to be raised in the world...reverently". Is the isolation we currently experience similar to monasticism? Yes, (as we remain in solitude) and no (because staying informed is not the same to being raised as an athlete). You see, know about an event and participating in it are two completely different experiences. To be an athlete requires physical and spiritual participation in fixed struggles unlike a spectator of a sport event. To be reverent supposes participation in groups with established leadership. Athleticism and reverence cannot be achieved unless there is freedom of movement, friction, contact, disputes and resolutions, something that has been taken away from us. The difference between what we currently experience and how things should be is like the difference between tasting a freshly cooked meal and reading about it somewhere. Reading or watching or hearing about an event never reproduces the actual experience.

I want you all to feel this fundamental difference. I am urging you to turn to our God and ask Him for the speedy resolving of the current separation. Please talk to Him in simple language about the restoration of our health as you would have talked to your parents or your friends, yet, always with the proper reverence. And remember that prayer, the talk to God, is nothing less than the life of your soul which is fed with God's presence every time you speak to Him.

Next time I would like to share some thoughts about prayer.

In Christ

Fr. N. Galanopoulos