

Rector's Letter, February, 2022

Dear brothers and sisters:

We are nearing the second-year mark in our parish's response to COVID-19, and it is time to adapt further to our current circumstances. The surge from the Omicron variant was large but now is receding according to careful reports. Those same reports also note that vaccines massively reduced the risk from all COVID variants. Except for the seriously immuno-compromised, driving now represents a distinctly greater danger, statistically speaking. At the same time, we must acknowledge that the virus is not going to be wiped out. We must, as households and as a church, consider how to live and act with courage and grace under the shadow of this virus, as we live with the many other diseases that surround us.

With this in mind, we turn to the practice of Holy Communion. His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon, very reluctantly permitted the distribution of Communion with multiple spoons as a temporary emergency measure. He made clear to the clergy that he was never personally in favor of the practice, and admitted it as a concession to our worries at the height of a deadly pandemic. Given that in many other ways we are resuming normal activity, I am planning to resume the normative Orthodox use of one spoon for Communion starting on Sunday, March 6.

First and most importantly, we need to be aware that the traditional distribution of Communion with a single spoon is the only method approved by the Canons of the Church. There is no scenario where we can faithfully disregard this ancient rule indefinitely. This is especially true while we are otherwise assembling freely: no limits on our attendance, the choir singing as usual, and coffee hour hosted each week.

We also know much more about COVID than we did a year and a half ago when our communion practice was first changed. The focus of concern has long shifted to minimizing the risk of inhaling the virus, and of course promoting vaccination. Our parish responded long ago by purchasing an ozone generator to disinfect the nave of our church between services. In this context, the brief encounter to partake of Holy Communion does not meaningfully increase one's risk—certainly not compared to getting in our cars and driving to church!

To take this discussion down to a more personal level, consider who in this scenario would encounter the greatest risk, if Communion were such a dangerous practice. Each layperson partakes in a single moment. The priest shares with every single one of them, consuming all the Gifts that remain after the Liturgy concludes. If the chalice were a highly risky point of transmission, the priest would reliably fall ill. I think I can safely observe that my record of illness in all these years—from colds, flu or COVID—is better than average. But even if we consider the wider population of priests in our area, many of whom are not models of general health, we still do

not find them suffering from flu season or COVID more than the average American.

Above all, remember that participation in Holy Communion is the central act of our Christian Faith. That Faith does not seek to eliminate all risk—it is founded on our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who not merely risked but freely gave his life for our salvation. “What shall I render to the Lord for all he has rendered to me?” (Psalm 115:3)

I have been gently advising all of you since the summer that we would be returning to the norm of using a single spoon for Communion. I plan to spend these next few weeks preparing our community for the change and return to normal Communion practice on Forgiveness Sunday, March 6. If you have any questions or concerns, I am glad to listen to you. And, as always, I will make special pastoral provision for those with major health challenges.

As we approach Great Lent, we need to set aside earthly anxieties and “in the fear of God, and with faith and love, draw near!”

Yours in Christ,



Around the Parish

The feast of the **Meeting of the Lord in the Temple** is on Feb. 2. This is the day when our Lord Jesus Christ was brought into the temple as a forty-day-old child by his parents. There the Righteous Simeon testified that he saw the promised salvation of Israel

fulfilled: “Lord, now let your servant depart in peace, for my eyes have seen your salvation....” We sing his prayer of thanksgiving at every service of Vespers.

This month, we prepare for the Great Fast, which begins March 7. On Meatfare Sunday, Feb. 27, we say farewell to meat until Pascha. **The Parish Council has committed to observing Meatfare Sunday** in as celebratory a manner as we can—more details will be announced in coming days.

Our last preparation before Great Lent begins is the **Rite of Forgiveness** on Sunday, March 6. Each of us has the responsibility to ask and offer forgiveness before Lent starts. Unless we are homebound, we shouldn’t be anywhere but in church that day.

In the first week of **Great Lent**, we will have services most of the week, to enter into the spirit of repentance and spiritual effort which makes the time of fasting fruitful. In addition to the Rite of Forgiveness, we will celebrate the **Canon of St. Andrew and the first Presanctified Liturgy** and Lenten Supper on Wednesday. These services begin at 6 PM, Monday through Thursday of the first week of Lent, March 7 through March 10.

Our services in the temple are streamed via Facebook and Youtube. You can most easily find them on our website: <https://sspeterpaul.org/media>.

Please remember that, if severe weather conditions force **church service or event cancellations**, announcements will be posted on WFSB (channel 3) and WNBC/WVIT (channel 30), as well as on our own parish website: <www.sspeterpaul.org>.