

## Psalm 91: A Meditation on God as the Protector of the Faithful in light of the Corona Virus

“Because you have made the Lord your refuge, the Most High your habitation, No evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent.” (Psalm 91:9-10)

Recently, we have been utterly inundated with concerns about the Corona Virus, so much that that sweeping precautions are being taken to curtail its spread. Sporting events have been cancelled. Universities, colleges, and schools have been closed. Public gatherings were postponed. And a ban on travel is in effect. Within this mindset parishioners are also asking, “What is the Church going to do? What steps and/or precautions are we taking, to deter the spread of this flu?”

My first response to these questions would be, “Please let’s don’t panic.” Fear breeds fear and as FDR so aptly said, “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.” The church should be a place of refuge and solace against the world, a safe harbor.



Secondly, I would say, use common sense. The church has been in this same predicament many times over and has weathered outbreaks of Typhoid, Diphtheria, Whooping Cough, Scarlet Fever, Small-Pox, the Plague, the Spanish Flu of 1919, and more recently Pollio, Junta Virus, West Nile Virus, Zika Virus, Ebola Virus, SARs, and AIDS; even the non-clinical Y2K scare! Therefore, use precautions. Wash your hands frequently. Use a germicide. If you are sick or not feeling well, stay home and don’t go out in public. If

you are overly fearful or anxiety-ridden, stay home and pray there.

If you do come to church but feel uncomfortable about kissing, hugging, or shaking hands, then don’t do it; relating your concerns so as not to offend others. If you feel uncomfortable about venerating an icon, kissing the cross or the chalice, then don’t. If you have worries about the cleanliness of our facilities, please know that the janitorial staff at St. Michael’s works hard to maintain, clean, and sanitize our temple, its basement, the classrooms, and bathrooms on a regular basis.

Please remember that for over 2,000 years Orthodox Christian theology teaches that when believers receive Holy Communion, they are partaking of the actual Body and Blood of Christ, and not ordinary bread and wine. St. Justin, an early Christian martyr wrote, "For we do not receive these things as common bread or common drink." Although the Church has resisted all temptation to define the Mystery of Holy Communion in rational terms, Orthodoxy has steadfastly upheld its belief that the bread and wine become the Sacred Body and Blood of Christ. According to St. John of Damascus the bread does not become merely the Body of Christ, but the "deified Body of the Lord, itself." Being the deified Body of Christ, it would not be subject to corruption or bearing deadly disease. Thus, no faithful Orthodox Christian should fear the spread of illness through Holy Communion.

Although the Orthodox Church has not always used the common spoon in the administration of the Mystery, it has always used a common cup. Christ Himself used a common cup when instituting the

Eucharist. During the Jewish "chaburah" or fellowship meal, the probable source of the Sacrament, each participant drank from their own cup during most of the meal. However, at the end the person presiding blessed a special "cup of thanksgiving," which he then passed around the table for all to drink. It is this common cup that Christ used when he established the Mystery of Holy Communion. The use of the common spoon spread throughout the Orthodox world, sometime after the council of Trullo in 692. Therefore, one could well ask, would God have allowed the Church to use the common cup or common spoon for centuries if the possibility existed that the faithful would be subjected to serious infection through Holy Communion?

In addition, the fact that God directed His Church to use specific "noble vessels" of gold and silver (2nd Timothy 2:20) in its Eucharistic practices is also interesting. Long before science even understood germs, modern research indicates that gold and silver inhibit the spread of bacteria – especially when combined with wine!

A study of a culture taken from a cup used in a Communion Service conducted at the University of Chicago found no communicable bacteria. Other research has concluded that the chances of infection through communion were insignificant because there are very few pathogens (disease causing bacteria) on the lips. Finally, William Burrows and Elizabeth S. Hemmers reported in a study published in *The Journal of Infectious Diseases* that "Experiments on the transmission of test organisms from one person to another by common use of the chalice show that approximately 0.001% of organisms are transferred even under the most favorable conditions, and when conditions approximated those of actual use, no transmission could be detected." Although these studies concern the common cup used by Roman Catholics, Episcopalians and some Lutherans, it is reasonable to assume that a study of the common spoon used by Orthodox would produce similar if not identical results.



Thus, both the doctrine of the Church concerning the Mystery of the Eucharist and the findings of scientific research provide enough evidence to quell the fears of even the most concerned Orthodox Christian that they risk infection when receiving Holy Communion. Scientific evidence shows that there is no cause for concern that any infectious disease could be transmitted through the common spoon. Thus, Orthodox Christians can continue to receive the Sacred Body and Blood of Christ from the common spoon confident that they are receiving the food of immortality and not any other infectious disease.

“In the Fear of God, with faith and love draw near!”

Fr. John Memorich