

Our Covid-19 Sojourn

March 8, the Sunday of Orthodoxy, was the last time our parish gathered for the Divine Liturgy. The Covid pandemic has deprived us from celebrating the new and eternal covenant manifested to us and offered to us in the Eucharist.

On the one hand we recognize that the sacrament of communion – the sacrament that unites us to the crucified and risen Lord and to each other – has been temporarily suspended. Because of this there can be no denying that the integrity of the parish as a gathering of Christ's disciples united in his body and blood has been compromised. Our coming together around the one High Priest who is both the offerer and the offered of his new covenant currently exists for us as a memory. The words of the Anaphora of Saint Basil's Liturgy, "unite all of us to one another who become partakers of the one Bread and Cup in the communion of the Holy Spirit," evoke memories of coming together in the Cathedral nave where the gathered body of Christians is transformed by the Holy Spirit into the living body of Christ which joyously anticipates approaching the chalice to receive the food of immortality.

On the other hand while the integrity of the parish has been impaired by the Covid pandemic it still continues to hold itself together. Thanks to fiber optics the Cathedral community has been gathering in cyberspace, which, while not ideal, has allowed us to continue a liturgical cycle that forms the basis of our communal prayer as well as a venue for religious education, catechetical instruction and a modicum of socializing. Our life has been restricted but our ongoing outreach to the Fenway neighborhood continues.

The Acts of the Apostles describes the earliest disciples of the crucified and risen Christ as devoting themselves "to the apostles teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." (2:42) The apostles teaching which eventually became the letters and gospels comprising the New Testament along with the Hebrew scriptures form an inseparable bond with the breaking of the one bread and drinking from the one cup.

Yes, the pandemic has for the time being deprived us from con-celebrating the Divine Liturgy. Yet we continue to be nourished through our con-celebration of the Liturgy of the Word. Hearing, receiving and entering the *mysterion* of the word are *indispensible* acts for approaching the chalice. Together with the consecrated bread and wine, the scriptural word and its exposition are intended to be food for both soul and body. Together with the consecrated bread and wine, the word of scripture is medicine for the healing of soul and body. And together with the consecrated bread and wine, the word of scripture solemnly processed from the altar into the center of the nave, read and expounded upon is the presence of Christ among us. Even the often taken for granted act of venerating the Gospel book signifies our unity with each other which is secured and nourished by our common love for the Word.

The Corona pandemic provides us with a learning opportunity. Our cyberspace gatherings for the Liturgy of the Word can help us recover and cultivate an appreciation for the unitive and transforming power of sacred scripture and the need to be present when it is proclaimed. Through a deeper understanding of the Liturgy of the Word we can restore its rightful and essential place within the Divine Liturgy where it and the Eucharist form a dual sacrament of inexhaustible communion with the crucified and risen Lord and each other.

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