

THE DOMESTIC CHURCH: A PLACE OF PRAYER AND BLESSING

Food for thought in a time of pandemic

As we are confronted with the reality of our churches being closed to the general public, we have been given a unique opportunity to build up and strengthen **our Christian home as domestic church**. In the Vibrant Parish program, we encouraged our parishes to fulfil their mission as “a place to encounter the living Christ.” Today we have an opportunity to extend that same understanding of encounter with Christ to the place where we live, be it with our immediate family or community, or by ourselves. In order for this to happen, we need to remind ourselves of the priestly vocation we all share by virtue of our Baptism.

Fundamental to **our Christian understanding of the priesthood** is the notion that in reality we have only ONE PRIEST, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the perfect mediator between God and mankind. When a bishop or priest celebrates the Divine Liturgy, it is Christ who is mystically present HERE, TODAY, FOR US. Indeed, during the Cherubic Hymn, the priest literally says: “For it is You Who offer and You Who are offered; it is You who receive and You who are given, O Christ our God.” And while the ministerial priesthood when celebrating the Holy Mysteries shares in the High Priesthood of Christ in a special way, all of us as baptized Christians have a priestly vocation. We are called to be a community of priests, as foreseen in the Old Testament: “You shall be a kingdom of priests, a holy nation” (Exodus 19:6). So, what does a priest actually do and how is that reflected in our domestic church as a place of prayer, blessing and holiness? All of us are:

Called to PRAY for ourselves and for others. In this time of pandemic, let us pray for our family members, our Bishop and eparchial clergy, our fellow parishioners, our health care providers, our government authorities, all those throughout the world who are suffering. Let us take this opportunity to restore family prayer in our homes and find new ways to connect with one another in prayer as a Christian community, especially united with our parish priest, as he celebrates the Eucharist and other services on our behalf.

Called to BLESS God, to bless others and be a blessing for them. When we bless, we re-dedicate that which was created by God so that it is used for its original purpose, for God’s glory. Parents in particular should bless their children every day, especially after evening prayers as they lie down for the night. When we bless one another, we call on God to bestow all his grace and goodness on us. When we bless God, we thank Him for all the love He shows us, even now, in the midst of these global tribulations.

Called to SACRIFICE by joining our sacrifices to those of Christ. Whether we suffer due to the temporary inconvenience that has been thrust upon us, have become sick or must care for a sick loved one, or have lost someone in recent days, we can take up our crosses willingly and joyfully, mindful of our Lord’s sacrifice on the Cross.

Called to FORGIVENESS by asking God for forgiveness and forgiving one another. In the solitude of our homes, we have an opportunity to examine our conscience, to reflect on our faults and offenses, to ask God for forgiveness, and to forgive others for their offenses, for each one of us is a work in progress. If God has never withheld forgiveness from us or those who ask for it, what reason could we have to withhold forgiveness from others? When the time comes, we will be able to approach the Holy Mystery of Repentance, fully prepared to do so.

Called to HOLINESS as befits children of God. Let us live a life that reflects the presence of the Holy Spirit in each and every one of us. In order to approach the majesty of God, even in the privacy of our homes, we must practice virtue and avoid sin of thought, word, or deed. St. Paul reminds us that we are all made “temples of the Holy Spirit” (see 1 Cor. 6:19). Let us be worthy of that calling!

*For You are our sanctification, and we give glory to You,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now and for ever and ever. Amen*