

A FOLLOWUP LETTER FROM FR. ZELJKO

I will start this letter by summarizing how I see our situation with the lockdown and this whole over mentioned sickness right now. There are two aspects of the situation – One is material that is the sickness itself. The other one is spiritual, which I have addressed most of the time by trying to speak against the fear. Both aspects are important but until now, we did not have any bad consequences on the material level - on the other hand, the fear is destroying our community. The fear has two effects on us. One is to narrow our thinking to only one thing which we are afraid of (I gave several examples in a previous letter). Second is that fear prevents us from seeing our brother in the church as a person to be loved, but as a source of possible danger to me.

So on Wednesday, I had a brief time to decide what to do about the letter from Bishop Hurley in which he emphasizes the need for social distancing and wearing a mask. So if you read my last letter from June 28th (one about over, over mentioned disease), there I showed that fear is spreading by speaking about the thing we are supposed to be afraid of. You will understand what I wanted to do – my idea was let's not speak much about this. Bishop asks as to wear a mask so that is what we will do. Now after I reread the letter, I see that I did not say this part very clearly but I assumed that was a given. I may have overemphasized the other part of what to do with the people who cannot wear a mask. The reason for overemphasizing it was that same day I received a phone call from Empire from a couple who felt put down from the altar when the priest there spoke, as I recall the conversation now, about people who do not wear a mask as someone who basically does not care for others (this is second effect of the fear). When I was writing this letter, this is what I had in mind. I did not want people in Manistee who cannot wear a mask to feel unwelcomed, put down or judged. Because you know what whole society is screaming: if you do not wear a mask you are at least selfish, or you are potentially a murderer, and people who cannot wear a mask most of the time will not even dare to say anything. So while everybody around us is shouting one side of the story, I wanted to point out that there is also another part of truth which almost nobody mentions.

To summarize all of this, I did not want to undermine instruction of wearing a mask but to find a way that both people may feel free to come in the church without looking down on each other. The reason that I write now is that Bishop Hurley has called me to voice his concern with the way I interpreted his letter. So after speaking with him, I will quote him (from memory): “the phrase everybody is expected to wear a mask” means just this, we expect everybody to wear a mask, but if somebody refuses to wear it, we will not fight it.” And if I can add to his words, we will not judge that person or look down on that person.

In his letter bishop used the words that “the singing of the congregation should not be robust, if at all.” With that I assumed that the low key singing as we have in our parish (certainly not robust) is allowed.

Peace of the Lord be with you,

Fr Zeljko