



GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF CHICAGO

ΙΕΡΑ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ ΣΙΚΑΓΟΥ

He whom nothing can contain has been contained in a womb. He is in the Father's bosom and His Mother's embrace. Fleshless as He was, He willingly took flesh. And *He Who Is* became what He was not, for us (3rd *Kathisma* from the Matins of the Nativity)

Beloved clergy and dear sisters and brothers in Christ, cherished family and friends of the Holy Metropolis of Chicago:

Several months have passed since my last letter to you. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we have moved away from traditional means of communications and have become more comfortable with and reliant on video messaging. After much reflection and prayer, the blessed period of Advent provides a unique opportunity for me to communicate some thoughts with you through this more traditional medium—the written word.

In prior years, much of our time and attention during this season would have been drawn to transient and materialistic things. In the past, we were likely to gaze at beautifully decorated storefronts; today, we shake our heads in dismay as neighborhood stores are boarded up. In the past, we spent hours considering what gifts to buy our friends and loved ones; today, many of our friends and neighbors worry about their ability to provide food and shelter for their loved ones. In the past, many of us looked forward to Christmas and holiday parties; today, we brace ourselves as we enter yet another “shut-down” due to the spike in COVID-19 cases.

To say that 2020 has posed numerous challenges that none of us could have predicted is an understatement. No one anticipated a global pandemic and very few ever considered the delicate nature of our social fabric. Not only have our friends and families experienced great distress, but our parishes and cities have also been affected by the rise in civil unrest and the spread of the pandemic. And yet, the love of God continues to inspire the best in us.

Your spirit of charity and your love for others are moving. Certainly, your philanthropic gestures are a reminder that the outpouring of love for neighbor comes naturally to disciples of Christ because *He has first loved us*. As we begin the blessed Christmas Fast, I urge you to keep this truth close to your heart and steer away from self-serving exercises

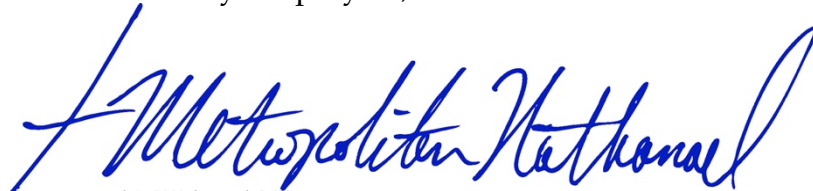
of self-denial. During this blessed period, I encourage you to set aside time each day to reflect on the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. Prayerfully consider how the Lord's Nativity transforms our very being and how it invites us to express our new internal reality through tangible expressions of love and charity.

As our leaders extend or issue new measures to address the COVID-19 pandemic, do not become overwhelmed by limitations placed on our movements; celebrate, instead, our liberation from death. As people debate the results of our elections, steer away from divisive controversies and ideologies; embrace, instead, Christ, Who is the truth, the life and the way, and Who is not the author of confusion (1 Cor. 14:33). As you continue to provide for your loved ones, do not worry *about what you will eat or drink, or what you will wear* (Matt. 6:25); give charitably, instead, to those who barely have food to eat or a warm and safe place to lay their head.

In so doing, my beloved sisters and brothers, we imitate Christ, Who, despite *walking on the wings of the winds*, does not hesitate to empty Himself taking the form of a servant, becoming *what He was not*, for our salvation.

Conveying to you and those most dear to you my heartfelt love, I remain

In need of your prayers,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Metropolitan Nathanael". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'M'.

+NATHANAEL

Metropolitan of Chicago