



METROPOLITAN ARCHEPARCHY OF PHILADELPHIA
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June 19, 2020

An Invitation to Remember and Pray
throughout our Metropolia on Sunday June 28
in Solidarity with Victims of COVID-19 and Racism
as We Return to our Churches

Glory be to Jesus Christ!

Reverend Clergy, Venerable Monastics and our Beloved Faithful!

The last four months have been tumultuous and tragic, shocking our country and the world. The COVID-19 virus spread globally. Millions who got infected were hospitalized and suffered physical and psychological torment before a thankful recovery. Many corona victims have lasting, debilitating after-effects. Despite the heroic efforts and dedicated care of doctors and nurses, family members, parishioners, friends, and acquaintances succumbed to the pandemic —over 120,000 in the US and one half million globally, not counting unconfirmed cases. Among them was our Metropolitan Emeritus, Archbishop Stephen Sulyk, of blessed memory. Painfully, many persons passed away in isolation from their loved ones who could not be at their bedside, while clergy could not administer the Sacraments. Funeral rites were abridged, and those attending were limited in number. Among the deceased are medical martyrs who put their lives on the line helping their patients. Their sacrificial service and love will always be admired and remembered. Indeed, “no one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (Jn 15:13). Before the Lord we remember all the victims of the pandemic and pray for the sick and their caregivers.

American society was equally shocked by the tragic and appalling killing of George Floyd. The gut-wrenching white and black image of the suffocating knee on the neck and the desperate plea “I can’t breathe” outraged the nation and world, prompting an unprecedented wave of civil rights protest against racism and police brutality. Many Americans are seeing what we did not see before, recognizing responsibilities that we can no longer ignore. Many have come together to manifest solidarity with Black Americans and with all victims of racism. Many are praying in a new way for a new world, a renewed nation. Some demonstrations, heartbreakingly, turned violent. Innocent people, including police officers carrying out the essential mission of protecting society from criminals, were hurt or even killed. Large and family-owned businesses were torched and robbed, including those owned by or serving Afro-Americans. The Lord calls our nation to a deep examination of conscience— to see and purge persistent patterns of bigotry and hatred, to acknowledge injustice, to cleanse our hearts of evil passions. The Lord calls us to face our future with prayer. Through prayer we will move to authentic solidarity with our discriminated-against brothers and sisters. Only with the Lord, in Him, and through Him can we overcome the sinfulness of our human nature. We pray and remember, so that we can grow in authentic integrity since “from one ancestor He (God) made all nations to inhabit the whole earth” (Acts 17:26).

Week by week, we have been returning to regular Sunday services. Most of our parishes are now open. We rejoice that we can finally be together in prayer. Thus, as we begin again, carrying with us the experience of the last months we call all to a deep spiritual reflection on the signs of the times.

On Sunday June 28 we invite all the clergy, religious, and faithful together to remember all the victims of the COVID-19 virus, those who died as a result of racism or acts of police brutality, and the victims of recent protests, in all our parishes throughout the country by celebrating a *Panakhida* requiem service at the end of the Divine Liturgy.

Let us pray for our deceased loved ones, friends, relatives, neighbors, doctors, nurses, first responders and medical personnel who have died of the virus.

Let us also pray for Mr. George Floyd and others like him who died as a result of injustice, let us pray for those who died in the bonds of slavery or other expressions of racism.

Let us pray for the victims of riots and unbridled passions.

Let us pray that the Lord grant peace, physical and psychological healing, reconciliation, and tolerance and true justice!

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