

We know that every illness and human sickness is a cause of our fallen and sinful human nature. Since the moment that sin entered into God's blessed creation—contrary to His holy will—humanity has suffered and continues to suffer from the effects of the Fall of our first parents. This, however, was not God's design. For, the Lord God desired that our progenitors—and their progeny—should continue to live and remain in that blessedness which they first enjoyed at the moment of their creation. By being obedient to Satan, the 'father of lies', our first parents fell from God's grace, and in their fall we too have all fallen into sin and mortality, which continue to distress the human race. St. Paul indicates when he says, "*...through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, for all have sinned...*" (Romans 6:12). However, it is through the incarnation of the 'Second Adam'—who is the Lord from heaven—that we have been given hope, for he took on our infirmities and our death. Christ suffered our maladies, mortality and sufferings in His human body, and by this He shows us his continued solicitude and proximity to our human race, which is ever in need of the salvation and eternal life which only Christ can give us. Though we suffer sickness and death, yet we firmly believe that Christ has conquered both by His death and resurrection, and when He comes again He shall 'wipe away every tear' from our eyes.

At present, the Church too is suffering during this present pandemic of the coronavirus. I am informed by the various dioceses of the local governmental precautions and orders that are put in place, in different countries, in order to contain and limit the spread of the virus. We ask that every diocese and parish obey the ordinances of their local government and health agencies with respect to the gathering of the faithful in the churches. It pains us deeply to learn that a number of parishes of our Church have had to suspend the public celebration of the Holy Eucharistic Liturgy (Qurbana Qaddisha) and the public prayers of the Church—particularly in Australia, California, Canada and Europe—but we know that obedience to the secular government in matters pertaining to the general health of the citizens is incumbent upon us as Christians (cf. Romans 13:1-2). As archpastors and the faithful alike, we suffer greatly because the Holy Sacraments are temporarily suspended in many places because of these ordinances, but this is a special season of a multifarious fast that we must suffer and that the Lord is allowing us to suffer, in His infinite wisdom. I ask that all of our faithful be obedient to their local diocesan bishop in these matters and in their pastoral instructions to the faithful who are under their pastoral care, and who also care about their bodily and physical health. In such cases, we ask parents to keep the faith with families at home, and to foster the ‘domestic Church.’

I ask that all of the parish priests remain especially attentive during this period to the pastoral needs of the individual faithful who are confined to their homes, or who are bedridden, and request urgent pastoral care. Also, it is important that the various parishes be cognizant of the urgent needs of the faithful of that parish, particularly the elderly and the sick who have need of their daily necessities.

At this time, I especially offer my solace to those who have contracted the virus, to those who are chronically ill, the young and the vulnerable. May the Lord, who is the Good Physician, give them every bodily healing. We must also pray for and offer our gratitude to all of the physicians and healthcare professionals and providers who are directly dealing with those who are infected, and trying to treat them back to good health. May the Lord bless all of them and protect them from every harm.

In conclusion, our prayers and solace are extended to all men, without distinction, beseeching Almighty God to have mercy upon His creation, and to save all men from this illness presently plaguing the Lord’s creation. May the prayers of the blessed saints of Our Lord accompany us always especially at this difficult time, as they continually stand before our minds and hearts as living models of Christian living and holiness. Let us remain steadfast in our hope and faith in our Life-Giver and Savior Jesus Christ, that in His abundant mercy He may save us from every trial and temptation.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit with all of us, forever and ever; Amen.

Given from our Patriarchal Cell, Erbil, Iraq, on this 19th day of March, in the year of our Lord 2020.

G. Sliwa

✠ **Gewargis III Sliwa**

*By Grace: Catholicos-Patriarch
of the Assyrian Church of the East*

