



**Holy Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East** | ܩܘܪܕܝܢܐ ܕܩܘܪܕܝܢܐ ܕܩܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܩܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܩܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܩܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܩܘܪܝܢܐ  
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To the faithful members of the Assyrian Church of the East, Archdiocese of Australia, New Zealand and Lebanon,  
Blessings of the Lord with you all,

Above all, I ask that you offer prayers for my brother bishops and me as we convene the synod of the Holy Church. As you well know, we have been tasked with electing the 122<sup>nd</sup> Catholicos-Patriarch of the apostolic and primatial see of Seleucia-Ctesiphon. During this Synod's proceeding, His Holiness Mar Gewargis III will formally step down from the patriarchal throne for reasons of health, at which point the hierarchs will proceed to elect his successor.

Though I am separated from you by oceans, my heart is with the flock entrusted to my care, in particular my children who are currently living under locked down conditions in Australia.

It pains me greatly to hear that some of the faithful are brought into dispute with one another over matters relating to the corona virus. Naturally, during these difficult times many faithful have raised differences in opinion regarding the Coronavirus and the many different measures introduced by both Federal and State governments to minimise risk and transmission including lockdowns and vaccination.

It is understandable that there be differences of opinion on these matters and in particular the Covid-19 vaccines. After all, there have always existed diverse attitudes between individuals' viewpoints on many matters, including political and religious concerns. In fact, differences exist even among Christian churches over politics, doctrine, moral issues, and practices. To disagree on important matters is nothing new; it is part of the human experience. However, our attitude towards one another should always be like that of Christ. Whatever our differences of opinion, we must have respect for anyone who sincerely honours the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

When it comes to the vaccine it is vital to make an informed decision based on an understanding of the medical risks and benefits of the Covid-19 vaccine. Therefore, we need to exercise good judgment and ask the Lord to grant us discernment when we make choices pertaining to the health and wellbeing of ourselves and our loved ones.

At the heart of the issue of the Covid-19 vaccine is choice. No person should be forced to make a decision he or she is uncomfortable with, neither should there be any undue pressure placed on people through coercion or manipulation. In other words, an individual's decision in this matter needs to be autonomous.

Some of the faithful have raised questions regarding the spiritual implications of the vaccine. Let me be abundantly clear, the Covid-19 vaccine is not the mark described in the book of Revelation. One's salvation and inheritance of eternal life will not be hindered by the Covid-19 vaccine. We implore you to be very careful of such false teachings.

Finally, I want to assure you that the Church will never discriminate between its children on the basis of vaccination status. The doors of the Church will be open to all without partiality. The Church proclaims that man is more than flesh and blood; he consists of body, soul and spirit and is therefore in need of spiritual sustenance as well as and if not more than physical nourishment. Believing correctly as our Lord taught ***“Man shall not live by bread alone...” Matthew 4:4***

The Church is the dispenser of God’s grace on earth. The Fathers of the Church like Mar Narsai, Mar Babai the Great and Mar Timotheus the Great speak of the Mystery of the remission of sins dispensed to believers by God through the Priesthood. On this, Mar Abdisho writes ***“Our Lord has committed the medicine of repentance to learned physicians, the priests of the Church. Whomsoever, therefore Satan has cast into disease of sin, let him come and show his wounds to the disciples of the wise physicians who will heal him with spiritual medicine.”***

Therefore, let us pray and beseech our Lord God to give wisdom to our government as we draw nearer to the easing of restrictions and reopen the doors of our churches without preference and prejudice. Our prayers are with the government in this difficult time of decision-making.

In the meantime, we ask the beloved children of the church to adhere to the health guidelines and be respectful and mindful of the restrictions that are set in place for the safety and well-being of our nation.

In closing, I believe we are all in agreeance that these last couple of years and more so these last several months, has brought into focus what is truly important in our lives. Thankfully, many have developed a deeper regard and yearning for eternal matters during these trying times. Let us refocus our minds with an eternal perspective rather than a temporal. Rather than seeing ourselves as vaccinated or unvaccinated, let us look at ourselves with an eternal perspective. Let us view ourselves in light of the reality of the truth; in heaven and hell; in knowing God or not knowing God; in being a child of God or not being a child of God; in possessing eternal life or not possessing eternal life. And may this internal perspective spur us on to live a life of repentance, good deeds and love for one another as we have been called to in Jesus Christ.

***Ephesians 4***

***I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.***

Again, I implore you to keep the prelates of the Church in your prayers in this most crucial time of Church history. I look forward to receiving our new Patriarch together with you all.

May Christ bless you and guard you and make you glorious.

In Christ,



Mar Meelis Zaia AM, Metropolitan

Assyrian Church of the East, Archdioceses of Australia, NZ and Lebanon