

# St. Stephen Protomartyr Ukrainian Church

VIEWS FROM THE PEWS 08/11/20

## **Quickly COVID – A Personal Experience**

*By Fr. Greg Faryna*

How quickly illness occurs. I wanted to write this short note to all parishioners of St. Stephen's and to those who have reached out to me with their prayers and notes of support. First off let me assure you that by the grace of God I am doing fine. Apart from several side effects I am symptom free and back at work, sort of.

Many have asked what living through COVID has been like so I thought I would share my experience with all of you. Over the course of the year we have had several parishioners suffer the effects of the virus to varying degrees. In a couple of instances hospitalization was required and I was even called in to offer the Sacrament of the Sick as their illnesses were very serious. Thankfully, all have returned to health. I want to stress that although studies find that most who contract COVID-19 will experience mild to medium symptoms, and thankfully I was one of them, for others the virus can be life-altering or even deadly. So please be aware and cautious at all times!

So here is my story. My symptoms started on Friday, October 23. I started the day feeling perfectly fine. In the afternoon as I was finalizing my homily for the weekend, I noticed I was getting unusually tired. Within a couple of hours I started feeling achy as though I was catching the flu and it also felt like I was getting a bit of a head cold. Remembering parish protocol I quickly contacted Fr. Michael to let him know of my symptoms so that he could

prepare to serve the weekend Liturgies on his own and I went into self-isolation.

By mid evening I was shivering and my head-cold turned into a nasty headache and my chest started to feel heavy. The only meds I had available was Tylenol and Neocitrin so I took both and turned in for the evening. All symptoms (fever, sinus congestion, a dry cough, muscle aches, headache, chest discomfort) remained but got lighter as the weekend passed. I've had the flu or a head-cold before and to a much higher severity than what I was experiencing. I didn't eat anything all weekend and wasn't hungry but was constantly thirsty.

To be safe I booked a COVID test Saturday afternoon after I did the self-evaluation on the Alberta Health Services website and found I had 2/3's of all the probable symptoms for the virus and I was booked in for Monday morning. I was finally a little hungry for the first time since Friday so after the test I thought I would pick something up at a drive-through and take it home for lunch. While I was eating I noticed that everything was tasteless. That was the first time that I noticed that I pretty much lost my sense of taste and smell.

I received my results from AHS by text at 3:00am Tuesday morning (they work fast here in Calgary) confirming I was indeed positive for COVID and I waited for a call from Alberta Health. I was informed that the recognized period that I was contagious was the 48 hour period previous to the start of my symptoms. So I passed on the names of all I was in contact with for those two days and what degree of

contact it was (social distancing, use of masks, etc.).

My biggest worry was my attendance at the virtual fundraiser for the Ukrainian Catholic University that Thursday evening. I want to commend the organizers and the participants who attended the St. Stephen's component of that event for their preparation and adherence to our Pandemic protocols. Thank you all!

Everyone that I was in contact with over those two days were contacted by phone, text or email and those considered most at risk received a call directly from Alberta Health. Those most at risk, as well as others who wanted to be sure, were themselves tested for COVID and thankfully all tests came back negative and I understand no one showed any symptoms whatsoever.

So what about the longer period previous to the start of being symptomatic? Obviously as a priest I am in contact with many persons through our liturgical services and within my ministry. Please do not worry. Alberta Health was made aware of all contacts within a fourteen-day period. If you did not get a phone call from them then you had nothing to worry about.

I want to reassure all of you that I have been very cautious ever since the beginning of the Pandemic and follow social distancing and mask procedures closely. And yet somewhere within those two weeks I was exposed to the virus. Whether it was from someone within my personal cohort who was asymptomatic and to this day are unaware that they were positive or somewhere at sometime I touched an infected door handle or item and didn't sanitize my hands properly I do not know. All I can say is that I fully respect and encourage the practice of washing hands often and the use of hand sanitizer if out in public. Thankfully by the end of the first weekend my symptoms disappeared one by one. By Halloween weekend the only

symptom I had left was some light sinus congestion. By the end of the weekend all symptoms were gone.

Unfortunately I am left with some side-effects that AHS tells me will last several more weeks and that most people will recover from. At this writing I do not have a sense of taste or smell. It is a very strange sensation because I can feel the food, the texture and the temperature, but there is no other sensation. Maybe now is the time that I should try the foods that I never liked before? The other side-effect is a decrease in lung capacity. For that reason I've chosen not to celebrate the Divine Liturgy at the Altar this weekend and will instead be in a support role.

The Good Lord works in mysterious ways. It happens that my vacation was booked a number of months ago to start November 9<sup>th</sup> until the end of the month. So it looks like I'll have time to work through the side-effects and start getting prepared for the Christmas season.

I would like to commend everyone who has taken a role in keeping our parish a safe for prayer and worship. For those who have volunteered to help sanitize the church after liturgical services, for our cleaning staff who deep clean the whole building every week, for our maintenance and office staff who are on top of all COVID related issues, to all of you, thank you!

Infections in Alberta are growing exponentially, and more and more people are at risk. If you are young, please do not take your health for granted. If you are elderly or have pre-diagnosed health conditions please be cautious and take care of yourself. Most importantly, take care of each other!

Please know that my prayers are with all of you!

*Fr. Greg*