

Letter to Prisoners

Impatience, Anger, Prayer

Dear ...

I am writing this Sat, 7/18. I will be headed to summer camp in Illinois next week and will miss my visit to the unit (4th Wed of July) I regret this, but I also was asked to serve as camp chaplain. This is a camp I was at over 20 years ago. I am looking forward to it. I will be gone until next Sat, and hope to have no travel that interferes with prison for a while. I hope you are able to come the next time I come, which will be the 2nd Wednesday of August. I plan to serve liturgy.

Thank you for your letter. I have tried, with failure until today, to write back to you. I am sorry about your troubles. I cannot say I completely understand them because I do not experience the daily privations of prison life. I am connected with these things however, because I pray for you and everyone. Although my prayers are poor because I am poor, they serve as a powerful connection. Many times a day I think about you all and I try to pray in those odd moments, and they add to the formal times that I pray for you each day.

I know that you pray, and I am glad. I also covet your prayers. I often feel like I am in a very big ocean, in a very little boat. I do a lot of things that are beyond my abilities. I love to pray in the early morning when it is still too. I am glad you have those times.

You did not ask me to comment, but I will venture forth anyway. I think the hardest passions in life are anger, impatience, pride, and lust. As we get older, struggles with the flesh subside somewhat (as long as we were struggling to live a virtuous life), but anger and impatience are very tenacious. Pride is the most tenacious passion of all the rest, and is the mother of most passions.

In my experience, the only way to gain humility is to be humiliated. The only way to gain patience is for God to cause or allow us to be in situations that severely try our patience. I suppose I wish it was not this way, but this is like wishing that the wind would not blow cold in the winter!

I have found that the only solution to things that vex me, and especially make me angry or impatient, is prayer. I concentrate mostly on saying the Psalms and the Jesus prayer. I have ordered prayer ropes, and you will be getting one soon. the prayer we usually say with the prayer rope is: "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me (a sinner*)". *Some people add "a sinner" at the end.) Reading the morning prayers and evening prayers is good too, and necessary like the foundation of a house in necessary, but the real work gets done on top of the foundation.

When I pray the Jesus prayer over and over with attention, it is very hard, but somehow I am refreshed more than with any other prayer. It is hard because I feel the smallest and weakest when I say this prayer, and part of me wants to quit because I do not like to feel small and weak, but the larger part of me know that this is what I must feel, because it is

true, and God does not listen to liars. So I tell the truth to Him, and best I can, and am comforted, like the publican, who bowed down his head and beat his breast and cried "God be merciful to me a sinner", and went away from his prayer justified.

I have found that the more I read Scripture the more my mind changes. I am more peaceful, and have a more set direction. I especially favor the Gospels, but also love the Wisdom of Solomon, Proverbs, Wisdom of Sirach, and the epistles of John, Peter and James.

I hope that it is a comfort to you that I pray for you and it matters to me when you suffer.

I am very comforted that whatever happens in this world, there is no suffering in the next, if we struggle now. I do not think there is honesty of justice anywhere. Very few people live with purpose in their lives. They are like a rudderless boat, being tossed about the waves. I know with all my heart that everything in my life has purpose if I live with purpose. There is nothing random in life. God knows all. There is nothing that fools him, or overpowers him.

Of course you know this, and I know it too, but if I may be bold, I am sure that you and I also forget this sometimes. I have read many of the lives of the saints, and they did not lose their purpose when terrible things happened to them. I am assured that if we are always striving for God, the difficulties of life will be like flies, easy to brush away.

May God help us all to live with purpose.

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