

Letter to a Prisoner

What are you going to do with bad news?

Commitment

Praying for others.

From: Priest Seraphim Holland PO 37, McKinney, TX 75070.

Feb 27. 2017. Clean Monday



Cactus does not complain about adverse conditions! It just survives and thrives.

Dear:

I was glad to receive your letter. I got it this past weekend. A better address is above. I tried calling you many times (I got 2 numbers from ... – the first one was incorrect!) and texting. One time, I got a text back from ..., that said you were asleep and to call back at another, specified time. I missed the time, and when I called there was no answer. Then you finally responded to a text, but we were never able to speak. I was under the impression that you were having addiction problems. I was in your area at one time, and very much wanted to see you in order to encourage you, but this was not allowed by Providence.

Now, your letter tells very bad news. You must decide what you are going to do with this news. You are still a young man, and will not be in jail forever. You can make changes. I will help you as best as I can. I need you to show commitment, and write to me after I write to you. I will be in ... several times this year, most likely. If there is commitment, I will be happy to see you.

I wrote this to you in a text 12/23/16, and it still applies:

Dear ...: I was in ... this week. ... and ... always remember you and pray for you. They are worried about you. From one of them, I found out that my letter reached you. They are as unhappy as I am that you will not return my calls. ... thinks you are ashamed and this is the reason. They told me, what I have always told them – I am glad they know this, and I hope you will know it too – the only thing that disappoints me when I try to help someone is

when they hide things because of shame. Especially with addictions, hiding things because of shame never makes anything better.

I have a lot of experience with this, and those who do not hide their falls get better. I myself am a sinner, and do not think myself better than any man, and when I hear things, I think within myself that “I have done this, or could do this if I am not careful.” I ask you again to talk to me. I am able, sometimes to continue South from ... on some Wednesday and come down and see you. I also know people in that area, particularly a man, ..., who is much better than I and would be of great help to you. Nobody gets better alone. We all need help. God bless you.

Some news. (A person he knows) is some kind of required treatment in ..., as planned. He looked really good before he left. I have not looked up his address yet, but will write him. ... (I baptized him as ...) is doing great, in Abilene. He has a good job, and a second job, and will be buying a truck soon, His attitude is good, he is strong, and praying and going to church. I am very proud of him.

Son, I deal with problems every day. We always have “enough in us” to fight. You say you do not know if you have any fight left in you. This is not an option. The alternative to fighting is giving up, having a useless life, and being filled with sadness, depression, despondency, and, likely, drug addiction, poverty, and more prison time. Do not give yourself a choice! You must fight! You have a purpose, it is God given, and nobody can take away that purpose from you except you.

BTW, one of my favorite questions is “What is your purpose? Why are you alive? What are you supposed to do?” Please write with an answer. I cannot remember if we discussed this before.

I will help you; I will go to the wall for you – but only if you are committed and do not give up. I do not care too much about failure. Failure can be overcome. Quitting cannot be overcome.

I would like to hear directly from you what is going on. You can be as honest as you want to be. People with problems who are not honest generally do not get better, but the level of honesty is your choice. I will consider whatever you say here to be private. Do you have a drug problem? How much do you want to fix it? That is not a stupid question – sometimes we want to fix things, but not enough. Do you pray?

Do you pray for your wife? Are you still married? You MUST pray for her. If you are bitter or hateful, your prayer will be hindered, and God’s grace will not enter you. The best way to fight bitterness, bad thoughts, hatred, anger, etc. – against another person – is to pray for them.

Are you considering seriously the Orthodox faith? I need to know this to know how to write to you. Of course, I want everyone to be in the church, but I do not predicate my relationship with a person based on whether they are in the church, or even want to be.

There are a lot of questions there. Please get a letter started. Tell me of your expected release date, and whatever else you care about. Tell me the name of your wife so I can pray for her. Hearts can change. God can change hearts. We must pray for God’s mercy upon here, the same prayer as for you, and me.

I will send a letter you may not have received. It is from a long time ago! I will send you some prayers. I will try to keep it simple, and I expect to hear from you if you are praying, reading, etc. If we have an open relationship, we can edify each other.

I do not remember other letters from you, and if you sent them, I am sorry for my poor memory. My filing system is poor too. Let’s ignore all that and send me a little bit about your life, your ambitions, your religious experience, whatever.

I will pray about your court date (...), and also send this letter to Fr ...and Fr

You ask for prayer. I have prayed for you every day since we met. I will continue to pray. You must pray. Read the Gospels too. Start with Matthew, and write to me SOMETHING about every chapter you read. Read every day.

Here is a simple way to pray for your wife, and other significant people in your life. Simply, you can say: “**Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on _____**”. Try to repeat this for, say, ten times, using your fingers to count.

Another very useful way to pray with a little more words and emphasis is this:

To pray for someone more diligently:

From the Old Believer Prayer Book, with line 4 added

Save, O Lord, and have mercy on **Thy servant(s) _____**, *[bow]*

Deliver him (*her, them*) from every tribulation, wrath and need *[bow]*,

From every sickness of soul and body, *[bow]*

Forgive him (*her, them*) every transgression, voluntary and involuntary, *[bow]*

Teach them to pray and to live with purpose. *[bow]*

And do whatever is profitable for our souls. *[bow]*.

Please, also, twice a day, say the Prayer of St Ephrem. It is our most common Lenten prayer. I will send another letter about it. I will inquire about sending you a prayer book. My hope is that Fr David will see you, and bring one. In the meantime, I will mail you something simple.

Also, say this prayer every day. Twice a day would be better. People have harmed you, but you have also harmed other people. We must be humble and contrite about this. I say this prayer every day, and beg God to have mercy on me and not cause my sins to hurt others:

O Lord grant mercy unto them that bear hatred or enmity against me, and also unto them that revile or slander me: That none of them may at all suffer any evil, whether in the present or in the age to come, on account of me, who am impure. But cleanse them all in Thy mercy, and protect them by Thy grace, O Thou who art good. Old Believer Prayer Book, pg 312

Here is something I wrote about one of the readings today. We are in the first day of Great Lent. I will close now, and do my best to craft another letter today also. I expect you to write back. May God help you in all things. Do not forget to struggle against your thoughts! Pray! Pray for yourself, pray for others. Read the Gospel of Matthew, Pray the prayers I have given you, above. God bless you.

Note: This letter is at

http://www.orthodox.net/prison-ministry/prison-ministry-letters_2017-01-27+fight-struggle-commit+prayer-for-others.doc

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The First Week of Great Lent – Clean Monday

An Anthem for Great Lent and all of Life.

Wash yourselves, and ye shall be clean; put away the wicked ways from your souls before mine eyes; cease to do evil; 17. learn to do well; diligently seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, consider the fatherless, and plead for the widow. 18. Come then, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: and though your sins be as scarlet, I will make them white as snow; and though they red like crimson, I will make them white as wool. 19. If then ye be willing, and obedient unto Me, ye shall eat the good of the land; 20. but if ye desire not, nor will obey me, the sword shall devour you, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it. (Is 1:1-20, First Monday of Great Lent, the Sixth Hour)

Everyone needs to frequently wash. The accumulated grime of the day is unsightly, unpleasant and unhealthy. If we wash carefully, and ignore no dirty place, then we will be invigorated, and healthy, but if we ignore some place for a long time, that place will fester and cause us to be ill.

Great Lent is especially a time for careful washing. In us there may be wicked ways: thoughts, feelings, priorities and habits that are not immediately apparent, and are all displeasing to God.

This time is a time to consciously attempt to put away wicked ways from ourselves just as we put away from ourselves certain foods. How to do this? By listening and seeking, with diligence and proper priorities. This will lead to actions accomplished with a merciful heart, that is:

“learn to do well; diligently seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, consider the fatherless, and plead for the widow”.

Why should we make all this effort? Because some stains are so dark and embedded that we cannot of our own effort wash them out, and their ugliness and stench will always be with us, but if the Lord sees our resolve and our effort, He will wash us so that the scarlet and crimson of our sins, and even of our sinful nature and predilections will be annihilated and forgotten, and will not return to infect us again.

18 “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”

And those who struggle, with an honest and good heart, will inherit the good of the land, and know the Lord.

SIXTH HOUR – Clean Monday Isaiah 1:1-20 1 The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. 2 Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. 3 The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. 4 Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward. 5 Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. 6 From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment. 7 Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire: your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers. 8 And the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city. 9 Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah. 10 Hear the word of the LORD, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah. 11 To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. 12 When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? 13 Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. 14 Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. 15 And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. 16 Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; 17 Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. 18 Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. 19 If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: 20 But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.

Priest Seraphim Holland [St Nicholas Orthodox Church, McKinney, Texas](http://www.orthodox.net/greatlent/great-lent-01-01-clean-monday-sixth-hour-meditation.doc)

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