

Letter to a Prisoner.

Parable of the Good Samaritan.

Answers to questions: “Why would God want communion with me? I just can’t understand why God would want me to commune with Him. What do I have offer God? My whole life has been a failure.”

Link: http://www.orthodox.net/prison-ministry/prison-ministry-letters_2018+good-samaritan+why-would-god-want-to-have-communion-with-me.doc

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Priest Seraphim Holland, PO 37, McKinney TX 75070 To: ... Date: November 10/23, 2018 Martyr Orestes.

Dear in Christ ...! Of course, I’m way behind in my letters, so I am replying to yours almost immediately. At the end of the letter you can decide whether or not you were the lucky guy. Because of your lockdown, I decided not to go to any prisons on Thursday, and I took care of monster man. He is crawling and is wonderful. He also can eat an entire avocado or banana in a sitting. He keeps me grounded.

The next time I come, I will teach about the Good Samaritan. If a lot of people talked about that. It is all about the incarnation, and should inspire us to try to better people. I have taught the parish about this and from my notes are some questions. You have homework to do.

1. What is the most important teaching in the parable of the good Samaritan?
2. What are some other teachings in the parable of the good Samaritan?
3. Is it important that the teaching about the greatest commandment immediately precedes the parable of the good Samaritan? Why or why not?
4. Who is the “certain man”?
5. What does the trip from Jerusalem to Jericho symbolize?
6. What do the thieves symbolize?
7. What is symbolized by the stripping of the raiment (clothing) from the man?
8. What does being beaten and lay being left half dead (as opposed to all the way dead) teach?
9. What does the man’s bleeding teach us?
10. Why does the Scripture say that the priest and the Levite came to the man by coincidence and not because of their plan?
11. What is the Jewish reason that the priest and the Levite passed by on the other side?
12. What is the spiritual meaning of the priest and Levite passing by on the other side and not attempting to help the man?
13. Who is the Samaritan? Why is a Samaritan mentioned?
14. What is the practical and spiritual meaning of binding the wounds of the man?
15. What do the oil and the wine signify?
16. What does the beast signify, that is that the Samaritan put the man on his own beast in order to bring him to be in?
17. What is the meaning of the inn?
18. What is the meaning of the two coins?
19. Who is the innkeeper?

20. Why did the Samaritan promise to repay the innkeeper when he returned after trip? What is this trip?

21. Why did Jesus answer a simple question with a complicated story and not say something simple like “your neighbor is everyone, every human being who shares your nature”?

22. Why is a story about who our neighbor is much more powerful than a simple declarative statement?

I will do my best during my visits to give you more meat. I feel like I’m kind of operating on six cylinders – in an eight-cylinder engine. I still don’t feel quite right, and I’ve never really been good at organizing. But with God’s help I will do better. Do the best to bring you some teaching that you can, as you say delve into.

You ask an important question: **“why would God want communion with me?”** And you added **“I have nothing to offer God”**. To answer that question, I will basically say that God has decided that he wants communion with you. Who are you to say what he wants and doesn’t want? We know what he wants because of how he made us. He made us in his image in order to obtain his likeness. Of course, we don’t deserve anything that he gives us. Of course, we are terrible sinners. Nonetheless, God is the authority about whom he loves. He loves us. The Scripture makes this very plain, and all of our theology is based upon this.

I think, my friend, your problem is common to man in that you look at yourself and say “I don’t deserve God because of the things I’ve done or even because of the kind of person I am”. God doesn’t care about any of that. He made you to become like Him so you could have union with Him. He has decreed that He wants you to have union with Him. So basically, to put it in a crude way, we should shut up and do what He tells us to do. Of course, what He tells us to do is something we are capable of. We might feel incapable, but with God all things are possible, including the things that are impossible to man. He made us in His image to obtain His likeness, and His son, only begotten, equal to the Father in all things, became man so that we could accomplish this task.

In your letter, you said that: **“Unlike Job, I haven’t lived a productive life for God.”** Well, duh! Surely you know the Scripture that says that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. None of us have lived a productive life for God. None of us should dare to say we are better, or WORSE than anyone else. There are not people that are unredeemable. The devil just whispers in our ear and says that were too much this or too much that.

The greatest sin is pride. There are people who are good outwardly who are full of pride inwardly. If your sins because you to be humble, then you have a great advantage. If every day you look at your clothing and you see that it is all white, and you are humbled, it is to your advantage. Use your sins to your advantage. Use your incarceration to your advantage. Don’t use it as a hammer to beat yourself over the head. Use it as a memory device, to remember to be humble.

I want to remind you that I’ve seen terrible people who have done terrible things that are not imprisoned, and none of the things they have done, according to the law, would put them in prison.

You also said: **“Unlike David I can’t practically seek God’s forgiveness. I find it most impossible to form prayers to God. I even find it hard to just talk to God as a friend. It doesn’t stop me from trying.”**

My answer to you: balderdash! If you are humbled, and you are struggling to live the Christian life, and you are practically seeking God’s forgiveness. If you find it hard to pray, then read prayers from the book, and especially read the Psalms, and pray the Jesus prayer. If you can talk to God as a friend, that is wonderful, but not required. It is more important to treat him as a friend – the kind of friend who is saved your life, and one you feel indebted to.

You also said: **“I just can’t understand why God would want me to commune with Him. What do I have offer God? My whole life has been a failure.”**

I’m going to tell you something that contradicts your opinion of yourself. I’ve known you for some time now, and am edified by your kindness and your patience. I don’t say things just to say things. If you know me long enough, you will know that is absolutely true. Your whole life is not been a failure. You have accepted baptism, and you are struggling to live the

Christian life. You certainly have the humility down, but you must understand that this humility must not be something that causes despair, but rather energizes you.

What you have to offer God? I think that is the incorrect question. God has made it very clear that He wants to give Himself to us. He wants to give us the best that there is. The best is of course - Himself. The proper question is more along the lines of: "How can I live so that I can receive what God wants to give me?"

..., as you well know, there is great warfare in prison. It is not physical, it is spiritual. The isolation, and the loneliness, and the dehumanization wound the soul. Make sure to pray a lot. Don't entertain bad thoughts about yourself. All you need believe about yourself is that you are sinner, and that you need God. All the other stuff is whispering in the year from the evil one.

You also said in your letter: **"my name is permanently tarnished"**. I reply: NO! Do you believe that your name can be written in the book of life? If you are Christian, you do. Is there any name of any person who did terrible things, and is in the book of life who is tarnished? St. Mary of Egypt did terrible things. Is her name tarnished? David was an adulterer and a murderer. Is his name tarnished? Moses the Ethiopian killed 72 men. Is his name tarnished? You're listening too much to the world. Your environment tells you all the time that your name is tarnished, that you are a failure. Those are the ravings of a lion who is trying to take your soul, but knows that his time is short. If he is unable to convince you about his lies, you will enter into eternal life, and he will no longer have any access to you.

You wrote another thing, that makes me feel terrible. I guess I can't conjure up energy or competency that I don't have, but nonetheless I felt bad when I saw that you wrote: **"I'm looking for a letter from you. If you've been too busy that's cool."** No, I have not been too busy, just too sinful.

As far as writing to ..., I am frustrated also. I have come to the end of your letter, and I've tried to reply to you as best I can. I will be back the first week of December, God willing. I will talk about the good Samaritan. I will whack you over the head if you are still thinking things like: "my name is permanently tarnished", and: "I am a failure".

May God bless you and help you in all things. Please pray for me as I pray for you.

"Seek God daily. But seek Him in your heart, not outside it. And when you find Him, stand with fear and trembling, like the Cherubim and the Seraphim, for your heart has become a throne of God. But in order to find God, become humble as dust before the Lord, for the Lord abhors the proud, whereas He visits those that are humble in heart, wherefore He says: "To whom will I look, but to him that is meek and humble in heart?" – St Nectarios of Aegina.

"There is no need at all to make long discourses; it is enough to stretch out one's hand and say, "Lord, as you will, and as you know, have mercy." And if the conflict grows fiercer say, "Lord help!" God knows very well what we need and He shows us His mercy." -- Abba Macarius

"God in His goodness has arranged things perfectly, so that with our gifts, we can help each other, and with our faults, we can be humbled by each other. For every person has some gifts; but everyone also has some faults which one must struggle to overcome." – St Paisios of Mount Athos

A brother asked Abba Poemen, "If I see my brother sin, is it right to say nothing about it?" The old man replied, "whenever we cover our brother's sin, God will cover ours; whenever we tell people about our brother's guilt, God will do the same about ours." - Abba Poemen

