

## **Letter to a prisoner.**

### **Goals During Great Lent**

### **Thoughts and attitudes**

### **Fasting according to the Spirit**

[http://www.orthodox.net/prison-ministry/prison-ministry-letters\\_2018-02-26+goals-during-great-lent+thoughts-actions-fasting.pdf](http://www.orthodox.net/prison-ministry/prison-ministry-letters_2018-02-26+goals-during-great-lent+thoughts-actions-fasting.pdf)

[http://www.orthodox.net/prison-ministry/prison-ministry-letters\\_2018-02-26+goals-during-great-lent+thoughts-actions-fasting.doc](http://www.orthodox.net/prison-ministry/prison-ministry-letters_2018-02-26+goals-during-great-lent+thoughts-actions-fasting.doc)

Priest Seraphim Holland, PO 37, McKinney Texas 75070 2–26–2018, ns

Dear in Christ Brethren!

May God help you in everything especially during these days of the Holy Fast. May He fulfill your expectations - even the ones that you do not know that you have. May He comfort you in ways that no one else can comfort.

I want you to struggle during this fast, because God's grace is always around us but it is not always apparent to us. We are like a field, unplowed and rocky, and the grace of God, which is like rain, does not penetrate us unless we have carefully prepared our soul with plowing and cleaning. That plowing and cleaning is us attempting even in our feeble way to follow the commandments and to do things because of love.

Everything has to be done because of love. Anything that is done without love is sin and death. Even good things done without love are sin and death - not to the one that receives the benefit, but certainly to the one doing the good thing. Great Lent is a time of reassessing ourselves and trying to struggle just a little bit more. My prayer for you - and that's not just a term that I'm using, it is my prayer for you – is that you would struggle a little bit more this Lent and learn something that is really beneficial to your soul.

For each one of you that something different. Try to change your priorities to be more in line with spiritual priorities. I would say that there are four main ways that you can be trying to change your priorities during the Great Fast, and of course, any day. One is the way you think. Another is the things you do. Another is to increase your praying and reading. Another is to fast.

What are you thinking about? Who are you thinking about? Are you thinking kind thoughts, or angry thoughts or judgmental or unclean or cynical? Are you thinking humbly? Every sin that we commit begins with thought. Most of our sins are only thoughts. It is always been a weakness of human nature that we think that somehow our thoughts are private. The Jews thought this. Jesus disabused them of this notion in the sermon on the Mount when He showed that thoughts are also sins; they are sins, and the basis of every sin.

Attitudes are also thoughts. We don't really think of them as such, because it's not a discrete thought in our head. Our attitudes and our priorities shape everything we do. Your attitude in every day should be to be like the prodigal son, and

the publican, and the centurion, and the woman with an issue of blood, and the Syrophenician women who had a daughter who was possessed. Look those things up and see what I mean. See how they approach God, and what they thought of themselves. You have an advantage that they did not have. You have 2000 years of history to understand that God will help you no matter what your sins or your or your weaknesses.

What are you doing? Of course, you can be trying to increase praying and reading, but I think of that as a separate category. Praying and reading doesn't do anything good for you unless you *do something* because of what you pray and what you read. You should be salt and light to those around you. You should be kind to others, in your actions and your thoughts and your prayers. You should be trying to do everything in a spiritual way. What is that way? If you are thinking spiritually, you will know what that way is. Our lives are complex. The motivation behind what we do in our lives should not be complex. That motivation should be only because of the love of God.

If we are honest with ourselves, we waste a lot of time. We have so much time that we could be praying, or reading, but we fritter it away doing useless things. Great Lent is a time for you to read more and to pray more. I think a good goal for you would be to read "The Field" in its entirety and the book on the creed that I gave you as well. If you have not read the prayer book from cover to cover, try doing that as well. Writing to me would be a pretty good idea as well.

Try to fast as best you can even in your difficult environment. There is certainly a fast according to the spirit if not the letter. If you are serious, you can be creative and find a way. Basically, fasting is saying to God and to yourself that food is not more important than Him. You are saying that you have other priorities, so if you're fixated on food than food is more important than Him. It works the same way with other things. If you're fixated on somebody who did you wrong then your ego or your sense of being slighted is more important than loving Him and therefore loving His creation. If you go to bed without saying any prayers, you are saying that rest for your body is more important than God.

I have my own struggles this Lent. Sometimes I think I'm telling God certain things are more important than Him. I covet your prayers for me. To tell the truth this is a strange period of my life. When Pascha comes my son +Daniel will not be on the earth with me. I'm still not really so sure how I feel about that. I'm generally an early riser but sometimes I'm just not rolling out of bed like I used to. There is lots of activity during this time of year, and I'm doing it but I'm kind of doing it a little bit robotically.

We have a Paschal tradition that I started long ago; it is actually on Holy Friday, when we have the matins for Holy Saturday. There are so many references the resurrection in that service that I think of it is already like Pascha. It has the "Lamentations" in it. These are hymns that are sung interspersed with verses from Psalm 118, all 176 verses. We have the tradition that my children, and now my grandchildren and other children in the parish would read the Psalm verses in between the hymns we sing. Of course, when Daniel was smaller he read too. None of my children read anymore, because this is something for the young children to do – that's why my grandchildren and now other children in the parish do it. I am not generally a sentimental person, but this tradition has always been very important to me, and there are pictures from previous years of Daniel reading and other children reading. I'm sure I will think of him during those moments.

Two weeks ago, I didn't do anything robotically. I chose not to come to your unit because the rain was very bad. It was very near freezing, and I was very fearful that there would be flooding down near .... So, I made the decision to not come. I did make a decision lightly, but sometimes, in my old age, once in a while I even recognize that I have limits.

This Wednesday is the fifth Wednesday, and I've gotten permission from ... to come. I hope that he will give you a lay-in . If you get this letter tonight, Monday, then you can send it I-60 and remind him.

I will hear confessions for those that need confession, and give communion, with a short service and then we will talk about "The Field".

Here are a few things that I jotted down about the field: they're not that organized but they get us started.

The Field Chapter 1.

Discuss slavery, to men, to God, to the devil, to sin

Discuss freedom. What is it and what is it not? According to the world. According to God. How to obtain.

Discuss following Jesus Christ. Why, how, when, what.

Discuss John 10:3 –the sheep know his voice

Discuss how the sheep go in and out in out of pasture John 10:9

discuss whoever desires to save his life must lose it Mark 8:34 – 35

Discuss page 12 rejecting of the soul something we identify is us but it is not us, should not be us

Food that is tainted with poison can be called poison itself – page 12

Define taking up our cross – page 13

Discuss self-love – page 13

Serving one's passions and desires is nothing but self-deception that one living for the pleasures of the body and sin is living without meaning pg. 14

okay, this is enough. I just wanted to send you a one-page J pay, it will be sent at approximately between 9am Monday morning .... Hopefully it will get to you Monday evening or Tuesday. If it gets to you Monday, that I hope you send and I-60.