

How do we find purpose in suffering?

Letter to a prisoner.

7/14/2018 (7/27 ns) Saint Aquila, Disciple from the Seventy

From: Priest Seraphim Holland, PO 37, McKinney, Texas 75070 To: Date:7/14/2018 (7/27 ns) Saint Aquila, Disciple from the Seventy

Dear N...: I was very happy to see you this week, after not seeing you the previous week. I had intended to write you a letter when I didn't see you the previous time, but of course sometimes it's hard for me to get things done. I'm always very happy to see that you are changing. Of course, right now is a very difficult time in the prison, because of the heat and the indifference. You have the additional problem of the problems with food. I can understand these things in my head but of course I have not experienced them.

What you write about regarding the power going out his blows my mind. You are put into a very dangerous situation, but I am sure that the indifference about your discomfort and even your danger is even more distressing than the heat. I think people can endure anything if they know that other people care for them. I am sure of this. I think people more people die from indifference than almost any other sin.

I'm really mad about the mail. I write a lot of letters, and it's very frustrating when I find out that people of not receive them. I have copies of the letters, because I write them all on the computer. It's just hard to know who got what, and whether or not I need to send it again.

You ask about your blood pressure: ... The pulse is fine, but the blood pressure is high. Of course, there can be medications, but those are hard to get in the prison, and blood pressure medications need to be monitored very carefully. The two things that I can think of that you can do are the following. One is to use less salt or no salt. Of course, if the food is almost tasteless, you're gonna want to use salt. The salt makes you retain water which will cause your blood pressure to be higher.

I think the most important thing is for you to pray more and to try to be more peace. Of course, that's easier said than done, but absolutely positively, if we are more peaceful, even our body understands this piece, and is less tense. If you are unhappy about something or disturbed about something or aggravated then your body will secrete hormones that will actually make your blood pressure go up. I know I am asking you to do something hard like "sit in the corner and don't think of a big white bear". It's really hard not to think of the big white bear when you're sitting in a corner try not to think of the big white bear. It's really hard to be peaceful when you don't feel peaceful. That's why I keep telling you and everyone else and myself that the most important thing to do to pray.

If you pray for others, and especially if you pray for those that are your enemies or that have hurt you, God will see your efforts and will bring you more peace. It's a mystery to me how we become peaceful, but I know that part of the process is to pray for others and to try to interact with the world in a spiritual way. That's why tell you guys all the time you read the Bible. Of course, you and I know people who read the Bible and do not act spiritual and all. So, it's not a magic bullet or anything. We have to read the Bible in a spiritual way with the intention of following what we read.

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N..., right now I am having a hard time. I'm really tired of feeling really terrible about Daniel's death, and sometimes I just feel absolutely exhausted spiritually. Even in the midst of all these problems I really do believe the things that I tell you. I really do believe that "the real test of the soul is if we can be happy when things are difficult". I'm grieved when I see things from you such as the following: "I pray fervently all week in search of sanity or purpose in life but cannot find any opportunity or happiness. It's hard to find purpose in suffering." But then you say something which makes me very happy. You asked the question: "Maybe I am not faithful enough?" Now that is something that I can actually work with, and you can too. You and I are not faithful enough. We do not believe enough nor do we practice what we believe enough. This is our problem. We should blame ourselves for our unhappiness. This is the great secret to living a triumphant spiritual life. We blame ourselves, and we hope in God. It's very simple, but not easy.

You said that **“it is hard to find purpose in suffering”**. Most people do not find purpose in suffering, because they do not suffer in a spiritual way. If we suffer a spiritual way then there is definitely purpose in suffering. I hope this is not a riddle to you. I keep telling myself every day that in the next life we struggle, regardless what happens in this life, there will be no sickness nor sorrow nor suffering but only life everlasting. I think there is meaning to suffering if we suffering a spiritual way. The trick is to learn what spiritual way of suffering is. I think part of knowing that is knowing that everything in this life is temporary whether it's bad or good. I think part of knowing that is been able to listen to our heart and do what makes our heart expand and feel warm.

N..., I really do believe that **“everything is an opportunity”**. I've missed a lot of opportunities, I don't want to miss anymore. I've had a slow day today, so I've actually missed some opportunities. But that's because of human weakness, and I'm tired of human weakness. They got help us. At least I said my prayers and I've written my letters.

Imagine the power in our life if we actually think that everything is an opportunity! The mind boggles. Instead of considering something to be terrible or onerous or difficult we consider it to be an opportunity! That's amazing! Of course, it's hard to do, but with God's help we can do it. I am not asking you to do anything that I do not try to do myself.

You are correct that if you were baptized and it was hot outside and you had very little soap you would still smell and you would still have dirty clothes, and the prison is often going to lose your mail. You can't do anything about the temperatures. I have noticed however that the temperatures have been substantially lower lately. What are you doing wrong? You asked me that question. So, I will give you an answer. What you are doing wrong is not thinking of everything spiritually. I'm not judging you. I unfortunately do the same thing. When I think of something spiritually I am at peace even if it is difficult and hard. If I think of something on spiritually, I am not at peace. I am aggravated or distressed or depressed or despondent or any of hundred other terrible feelings.

Of course, I went with all my heart for you to be baptized. But I'm not going to hit you on the head with a hammer and do it to you while you are unconscious. I try to cultivate what St. Paisios of the Holy Mountain calls “good indifference”. Sure, I want you to be baptized, but I'm indifferent about it. I'm not can it change my relationship with you based upon whether your baptizer not baptized. That's what I call good indifference. You are not going to be able to get rid of me easily.

I hope you say the Jesus prayer regularly and I hope that you do many Jesus prayers for This is good for them, and good for you. Of course, it's invisible help. We don't see the results many times. Perhaps, God forgive us, we even think all God is not hearing our prayers because things are getting worse. If we think spiritually we will never think that.

Yes, my friend, you are correct, absolutely: “I have to trust God that will allow change. I have no choice!” Yup. Knowing we should trust God is easy. Actually, trusting Him is hard. We cannot trust it just by trying to make our mind to trust Him. We trust about becoming more like Him.

You told me that you “cannot get any simpler” than you are. I think for you and for me, that is always false. Sin is always complex. Virtue is always simple. God is simple, and we characterize God by saying that He is love. That is very simple. We on the other hand, think many things and say many things and do many things and we are very complex. So, respectfully I would disagree with you that you cannot get any simpler.

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