

Letter to a prisoner:

The widow and the unjust judge, how to increase our faith, prayer.

http://www.orthodox.net/prison-ministry/prison-ministry-letters_2019-05-17+widow-and-unjust-judge+increase-our-faith.doc

http://www.orthodox.net/prison-ministry/prison-ministry-letters_2019-05-17+widow-and-unjust-judge+increase-our-faith.pdf

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

May 17, 2019 ns

Dear in Christ ____:

You owe me a letter, young man. When we last visited, I mentioned treating me like the unjust judge, and nobody understood what that meant. We must have biblical literacy! It's very important. I was referring to a parable. I asked you to do the research and find out about this parable and write to me about it. I've not received a letter from you yet, but I'm hoping that I will receive one tomorrow so I'm sending this by mail and not by Jpay so that you will not see my letter before you write your letter (that is the hope!). I also talked about my monster man, and my axe-man, and then I take care of them each week. I thought I would include two gratuitous pictures since I am a ridiculously proud papa. ***It's okay to be proud of grandchildren. That's in the Bible.*** I will expect you to look up that reference also! Here are pictures, taken on Pascha afternoon, of Papa and Monster man (I, Noah) and Papa and Axe man (r, Owen)



I love the parable about the widow and the unjust judge.

“And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; (2) Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: (3) And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. (4) And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; (5) Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. (6) And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. (7) And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bears long with them? (8) I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?” Luke 18:1-8 KJV

It is a story teaching us how we should pray, but it is not just about prayer. It is about our entire attitude to life and our persistence in struggling for good, all the time. Of course, it is not a story that tells us that God is unjust or that He does not listen to us. The story actually tells us that if we can get someone who is unjust to listen to us by being persistent, how much more will God listen to us if we are persistent? Of course, God is perfectly just. His justice is not like the world “justice” which really involves punishment and sometimes is not just at all. His justice is that He is good, always good, all the time. And He loves us, perfectly, all the time. And He listens to us, perfectly, all the time. Since we don’t listen to Him very well, we do not hear His responses all the time.

This parable is a story that teaches us to be patient and to not complain but to continue to struggle. That can be very hard sometimes. My experience, both personal and among the many people I have known, is that when we become cynical or we lose our faith by believing something cannot happen, or when we don’t pray so much because we are tired, or depressed, or perhaps just lazy, we are a *little bit dead inside*. God expects us to be patient, and be full of prayer, to struggle to follow the commandments, and to believe His promises.

When Scripture asks questions, *they are not rhetorical*. At the end of the parable the Lord asks: “When the Son of man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?” This is a question that we must answer, every day, and even every moment in our life. I think a good way to rephrase this question would be something like this: “Most people have no faith. Most people do not endure. Will you endure? Do you love Me enough to endure? Do you have faith, or you do you just say that you have faith?”

Another important question that is related to this one is: “How can I keep and increase my faith?” When the apostles asked the Lord to increase their faith, he answered them by telling them that their faith should be as a mustard seed, which is a very tiny seed, but it grows into a great tree. That means when it is put in the ground, a fertile place for it to grow, it grows. It works, it labors, it is full of activity, and all of these things are in order to fulfill its purpose, which is to grow into a great tree and bear fruit. We are to be like that mustard seed.

Immediately after this example, the Lord told us the mentality that we should have about serving others versus being served by others. He also told us that we should never consider ourselves worthy servants, but that to do good, to love, to forgive, to follow the virtues – that’s just doing what we are told.

We keep and increase our faith by acting on it. Faith is not just belief, but it *is action based on belief*. It is a struggle to become like Christ, since we were born become like Him. It is activity, and prayer, and forgiveness, and repentance. It is measuring everything in the world by a simple standard – is this thing which I wish to do, or say, or

be, or believe: is it life or is it death? Is it pleasing to God are displeasing to Him? Will it help me obtain my purpose, or put it help to cast my soul into hell?

“And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith. (6) And the Lord said, if ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you. (7) But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? (8) And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? (9) Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow (think) not. (10) So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.” (Luke 17:5-10 KJV)

Too many times, people, as the King James version says: “faint”, that is, they don’t endure. When things are difficult, they stop trying. Maybe they stop praying, or they stop reading, or they stop struggling for virtue because it’s hard and it doesn’t seem like there is a reward. Those who experience the love of God because they struggle will understand the apostle Peter’s words here: “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” (2 Peter 3:9)

Every day, almost every moment, I am more convinced that the only thing we need to really do is to pray, with warm prayer, with intense prayer, with believing prayer. It is not enough to just pray a little bit for a couple minutes, but to attempt to pray without ceasing, as the apostle Paul teaches in First Thessalonians 5. If we consider prayer to be more important than breathing or food, then we indeed will find happiness, and see evidence that God is answering our prayers.

Since it is very hard to pray for a long time in our own words or using a book, I think everyone must learn to pray the Jesus prayer, as often as possible in as many circumstances as possible. We should not only pray during the day when we are engaged in activities, but also find time in the morning or at night to pray when we are alone, and things are as quiet as possible. I love use a prayer rope for this. The prayer that is used on Mount Athos is usually “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.” Some people say a longer prayer “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me, a sinner.” It really doesn’t matter exactly how many words are in the prayer as long as it is from the heart and with our blood.

I find that most the time I say the prayer by saying: “Jesus have mercy on me”, or even just: “Jesus, have mercy”. Of course, I also would say “Jesus have mercy on Ambrose” or “Jesus have mercy on all of those in prison” or “Jesus have mercy on all those who are suffering”, and many other things. But the I also use the prayer to pray for those who are reposed. To God, all are living, since the Scripture says “all live to Him”, so I just say the Jesus prayer as if they are alive: “Jesus have mercy upon +Daniel”.

Sometimes, for some people, my heart particularly feels some pain for them or feels a great desire for their well-being, and I say a longer prayer, which I found in a prayer book and slightly modified. It goes like this:

To pray for someone more diligently:

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]*. *From the Old Believer Prayer Book, with line 4 added*