

Letter to a Prisoner.

How to pray the Prayer of St Ephrem

Concerning the sign of the Cross.

Priest Seraphim Holland, PO 37, McKinney, TX, 75070. Date: 2/26/2020 ns, Wednesday, the week before Great Lent begins, the day I visited the unit

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Dear Brothers: I was very glad I came today. ... was very happy also. It was cute to see how he had trouble figuring out where he was, since he never had gone into the unit from the front. To be honest with you, it was with some trepidation that I came today, because I feared that very few people would be there, as we discussed, I've gotten pretty down about this. But I feel very up now and more hopeful. So, I'm writing a letter to try to reinforce things, because the more communication we have the better. Our communication is not just from me but also from you. So, if you are able to drop me a line, either in a letter yourself, or just a word or two that you might say to ... or somebody else that is writing me. ... is pretty good at writing me.

I will not be able to come ... because I will be traveling to Chicago. Every Great Lent, our entire diocese gets together in our bishop's Cathedral and celebrates the services together. That trip will be Monday through and including Wednesday. So, my target to come is Wednesday, .... I think I should be able to make that. It would be a good idea for all of you to write a I-60 to chaplain ... just asking them to check to make sure that you are on the lay-in list, and that you have been informed by me that I cannot come ... because of church business travel, but that I plan to come .... I will write a letter to chaplain ... telling him this also. I think you well know that the more times you tell somebody in prison something, the slim possibility that it will happen becomes a slightly less slim possibility. I suppose that's nasty way to say it, after all, we've been talking about in the Prayer of St Ephrem, and about "patience, and soundness of mind" (chastity). It is never chaste him to have cynical or angry or fatalistic thoughts. It's something we need to work on. I guess it's better just to say that the more we keep people informed, the more likely the things we want to happen will happen. How's that? See! It's not that hard to say things in the right way.

We were talking about the Prayer of St Ephrem, and my instruction to you is that you say it every day, twice a day in the following manner:

1. Get somewhere where you can do a prostration.

**A prostration** is when you make the **sign of the cross** with your right hand, by putting the first two fingers and the thumb are pressed together, and the little finger and the ring finger are pressed down into your palm, and you move your hand first your forehead, then on your forehead, then on your belly, then on your right shoulder, then on your left shoulder, and as you are doing the sign of the cross or just

slightly after, get down to the floor on your knees and bring your head down as low as you are able to bring it. If you're not able to do a prostration then you do a bow.

Notice that when you make the sign of the cross and the way I described, you are literally putting a cross on yourself. The Russians actually talk about it this way. They talk about "putting on the cross". You are tracing the cross on your body. Try to do this carefully and without haste. Don't just wave in the air, and don't be sloppy. You'll find that if you make it carefully, with some concentration, it will assist your prayer.

In mystical way, when we put the sign of the cross on ourselves, we are obeying our Lord's words when He said "anyone who will let him take up his cross, and deny himself and follow me." What the Lord means by this instruction is that we try to live as He lived, emulating Him, imitating Him, and being willing to do what God wills us to do whether it is difficult or it is easy. Some people talk about taking up the cross as something only where we anticipate punishment or difficulties. It's not only that at all. It is that in all things we give thanks to God and we follow Him. The only way of life is to follow God. If we are in following God and life is difficult externally, our hearts can be at peace. This is really possible! If we are following God and life is easier for us externally then things are easier for us, in our heart may take some rest. That's one of the reasons by the way, that during the church year we have periods where we don't fast or we fast less. We must do everything with giving thanks to the Lord, whether it is fasting or feasting, whether it is suffering or it is rejoicing.

2. There are basically five parts to the most common form of the prayer of St Ephrem. The first three parts are saying one sentence of the prayer, and then doing a prostration. The next part is to do 12 bows, while we say "O God cleanse me a sinner and a mercy upon me", and the last part is when we say the entire prayer of St. Ephrem in its entirety and then do a prostration.
3. This prayer is in your book, and if you do not have it in your book, then here it is for your reference. I know that the J pay letter is not too neat and clean, but you can at least have this for your reference, and then after you've done it many times, you'll have it memorized.
4. Please be willing to take me up on this. Try doing this every day. If you cannot do prostrations, do something less, but do the prayer at least twice a day. If you do it every day for all of Great Lent, you will notice that you are thinking differently, acting differently, and feeling different. You will improve!

### The Prayer of St Ephrem.

**Part 1:** "O Lord and Master of my life, a spirit of idleness, despondency, ambition and idle-talking give me not". Do a prostration.

**Part 2:** "But rather, a spirit of chastity, humble-mindedness, patience, and love, bestow upon me Thy servant." Do a prostration.

**Part 3:** “Yea O Lord and King, grant me to see my own sins, and judge not my brother, for blessed art Thou, unto the ages of ages, amen”. Do a prostration.

**Part 4:** Do 12 bows, and with each bow, while making the sign of the cross and, while remaining standing, bowing low to the floor, say the following prayer: “O God cleanse me a sinner and a mercy upon me”.

**Part 5:** “O Lord and Master my life, spirit of idleness, despondency, ambition, and idle-talking give me not. But, rather a spirit of chastity, humble-mindedness, patience, and love, bestow upon me Thy servant. Yea O Lord and King, grant me to see my own sins, and judge not my brother, for blessed art Thou, unto the ages of ages amen.” Do a prostration.

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

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When someone is cursing, blaspheming or being impudent, is better to pretend to be busy and not listening and say the Jesus prayer. St Paisios of Mount Athos.

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It is impossible to keep spiritual peace if we do not take care of the mind, that is, if we do not drive out thoughts that are displeasing to God and, on the contrary, keep thoughts which are pleasing to God.

It is necessary to look into the heart with the mind and see what is done there. Is it peaceful or not? If not, then find out in what you have sinned. St. Silouan the Athonite, writings, XIV.8