

Letter to a prisoner

Why do I succumb to impurity?

How to fight impurity.

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Priest Seraphim Holland PO 37 McKinney, TX 75070 To: ...; March 16/29 2020 4th week of Great Lent

Dear in Christ ...: Chuck Norris was exposed to the coronavirus. It is now under quarantine for two weeks. You mentioned my visit. It was the last one I made before the world as we know it changed. I have no idea when I will be allowed to get back to prison. My prediction is if the quarantine is lifted by June, we will be very fortunate. Please tell everybody that when the quarantine is lifted, write to the chaplain an I-60 asking to be in the service. It doesn't matter if a person was on the list or not, you know how stuff happens when there's a change in routine.

You mentioned the faith-based dorm. So many people from so many units have not liked them. I tell you the truth, I think you really know about a man's religion when he gets out of prison. It is pretty easy to be religious in prison. When you get out, do anything you want with anybody you want. Except, of course, get a job. Or housing. The pressures are high, and the temptations are more readily available. Relationships have changed. Plus, when a person is depressed or is angry or is anxious, unless they develop the habit, church is not the first thing they think of nor prayer nor fasting. I think a whole lot of people in faith-based storms don't have much faith. At least that's my anecdotal experience speaking with people live in them and have faith.

Why do you choose impurity over God? That's a complex question. We are weak, we can do nothing without God. A person can have some dysfunction in their personality that makes it very hard for them to overcome an addiction. Or they can have some other sin that God is trying to teach them about, maybe even a sin that they don't know about. In the case of sexual impurity, exposure to certain things (trauma, abuse, pornography) at the wrong age imprints on person. Our personal history, including things that we had no power over sometimes predisposes us to impurity problems. It's very difficult to extricate oneself. It is not impossible, but it is hard, and it takes a lot of effort.

You are a man who has some energy. You try to read the word, and try to love your neighbor, and you do it with a lot of energy. Sexual impurity robs us of energy. So basically, it's not just the sexual impurity that's bad, but the repercussions of it. The big picture is that your sexual impurity serves as a major weapon to rob you of energy which robs you of prayer, peace of mind, and a collected mind.

I think I sent you stuff about the prayer of St. Ephrem. In it, the saint asks for four things. The first is chastity, which actually should be translated *whole mindedness*. Any habitual sin robs us of whole mindedness. Chastity is associated with sexual purity but really it is any kind of purity: Purity of thoughts, purity of actions, purity of desires, and ambitions. Perhaps if you think of the sexual impurity that you indulge in as something that is robbing you of your energy and not allowing you to commune with God, you would have more anger against it, and anger is

energy! Anger against sin is not a sin, but on the other hand, God praises such anger. That's what Jesus meant when he talked about the violent taking the kingdom of heaven by force. That force is anger, directed against sin.

You must cultivate this anger! *You must also always react to an episode of impurity.* Don't just hang your head, and be listless, mope around, and feel ashamed. None of those responses is really repentance. You must react! In our tradition, we value doing prostrations and asking God have mercy on us very much. You know that you are a man who does not have the energy change certain things about yourself, so you beg for mercy, that is, you ask God to help you, and ask with intensity. God will hear intense prayers. Probably in your tradition there's not a whole lot of prostrations, but I recommend them highly for you. I also recommend highly that you say the Jesus prayer, "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy me a sinner". The prayer is said with a great number of repetitions, and with intensity. We are supposed to pray without ceasing, so how are you going to pray without ceasing if you're always making up words? That is not possible. And even if it were possible for a person, they would be doing more thinking than they would be doing praying.

If there are people that are temptations, or things that tempt you, get rid of both! Anything that is an occasion of sin, that you can remove from your life, you should. Of course, you must have discretion in this, since you are in an enclosed environment, so being far away from occasions of sin might not always be an option for you. Guard your humility. Pride is an entrance for many sins. If you become very humble, God will give you victory over your impurity. So, even though your pride may not be for reason for your impurity, if you become humble, it will be the core reason why God gives you the grace to overcome it.

There is generally a latency period to an episode of impurity. There might be triggers, such as feeling lonely, angry, misunderstood, anxious. Other triggers might be talking in the wrong way and thinking in the wrong way. Obviously, impurity begins with thoughts. When the thought is pleasing to us and we do not reject it right away, then we entertain the thought. And when we start to entertain the thought, we desire. When desire gets to a certain point, it is impossible to withstand it. I think of it as a stick of dynamite, with fuse. As the fuse is burning, it is possible to put it out and there will be no explosion. But once the fuse gets to the very end it's impossible to put out, then the dynamite blows up. You have time! You must recognize the things that lead you to impurity, and stop doing them, thinking them, feeling them, going to the place that they suggest you, and you will very likely be able to endure that temptation.

Learn to recognize the times that you are tempted, and the things that tempt you. Then if you are tempted, attack that temptation as hard as you can. Sometimes you can attack something for only a few minutes, and then it goes away. Perhaps something I would be with you for the whole day. In that case, if you fall, it is better that you fall after a long struggle, and with no struggle at all. That long struggle strengthens you for the next struggle.

Our memory also helps us with temptations. You know that if you give into this temptation of impurity, you will feel terrible afterwards. You always feel terrible afterwards. If you are allergic to peanuts, but you love peanut brittle, will you eat it? No! Because you will remember that if you eat peanuts you will have an allergic reaction and your throat will close up, and you'll die. I suppose we can stretch these words into a bit of a metaphor, since when we sin, it's like a piece of us dying. We don't want to die! We want to live! Learn to evaluate what your actions will

do, and what they will cause you to feel. Many times, if we remember this, we will reject the thought, even if it is very tempting to us, because we don't want the aftermath.

After an episode of impurity, it is absolutely critical to pray with repentance, not just be feeling bad about yourself. I'm going to send you the "Prayers for Purity". I understand they're not quite in a format that you're accustomed to, I recommend to say them as they are. Perhaps you're not comfortable with the prayers to Mary, the Theotokos. Leave those then. But do everything else.

At one point the prayers suggest 50 bows. That's when we make the sign of the cross and we bow from our waist. I recommend that you do a prostration instead. 50 of those is quite a workout. You will find that they humble you, and they actually make you feel better.

I recommend very strongly that you make the sign of the cross. You put your first three fingers together and the last two fingers on your hand pressed against your palm and you touch your forehead and your belly and then your right and then your left shoulder. As you do this, you say almost any prayer, and there are ones that are specified in the "Prayers for Purity", and then you go all the way down to the ground on your knees and touch your forehead to the ground or near it, and then stand back up.

I might be telling you things that are strange to you, but certainly, you believe in the cross, you believe in the Trinity, you know that you need God's mercy, and you know that humility is absolutely necessary to feel the grace of God. So, with all these things you agree, except that this method of prayer is probably something you have not experienced. I have experienced it, and it is significant part of our tradition.

You asked that question why do you do these things? I understand it's a rhetorical question. We do such awful things, but we don't want to do and yet we do them. We don't have enough power in us. Of course, God's grace gives us power, but he gives power to those are struggling. If you say the "Prayers for Purity" every time you have an episode of impurity, or even a temptation of impurity, you will not only become very strong and very physically fit, but you also have a certain power and you will have a greater confidence that you can overcome these temptations. I hope you will try the prayers.

As one more thing. Modern-day Christianity does not like think about our unworthiness. Jesus is basically a nice guy. Jesus is not a "nice guy". You know this, but we must continually remind ourselves that we are worthy of hell. We must remind ourselves that if we live life without repentance we will go to hell. There must be humility and there must be compunction. There must be fear. Fear of God is not that we are afraid God is going to destroy us. The fear of God is that we fear doing anything which displeases Him, because we are already not worthy of His love, and there's something in our hearts that wants to act properly because of His love, and to please Him. We must very much fear our sins. We must fear that if we continue in a sin, we will become incorrigible, and unrecognizable, and eventually abandon God. I tell my flock many times that we must fear that we may stop repenting. We should fear that we will not repent even more than sin. God will forgive any sin, but He will not forgive sins that we don't repent of. The quality of sin is such that if we continue in it, we change in ways that are imperceptible and unrecognizable to ourselves, and eventually we are no longer even able to repent of a sin. We must fear that!

What you have asked for I already do. I pray for you every day my poor prayers. I'm committed to do that for the rest of my life. I heard that this new chaplain is a good one. That is a welcome change. I've come to the end of my letter. There's so much that I need to do, and I'm not doing enough stuff. I'm busy from morning to night and not getting enough stuff done. I've written some general letters and you should have received some, but am trying very hard to write personal letters also.

I'm praying at the church every day because of this Covid-19 pandemic. Obviously, the loss of life is large and will get larger, but the loss of livelihood will cause much suffering also. Those who have not always have more taken away from them. You see those kinds of people every day.

May God preserve you may God help you; may God give you strength to fight your temptations. You won't win right away but you will begin to make headway and you will eventually destroy any traces of impurity in you. I've seen it happen, many times. You must really want to change. Sometimes there's a part of us that doesn't want to change. You must to dig deep and tear that part out of you. You don't have the strength to do it, but if you react with violence against your temptation, before it causes you to sin, even when you are sinning, and certainly after the sin, God will give you victory.

May God bless you and help you in all things.

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The fast isn't hard. Sin is hard. Disease is hard. Being broken is hard. All those things are hard. Fasting is what helps us to be healed. How could it be hard? You see, the things that you are make fasting seem hard to you because fasting is helping you to be healed of those things. And yet we think fasting is hard. Don't think that. (Priest Seraphim)

"Bodily purity is primarily attained through fasting, and through bodily purity comes spiritual purity. Abstinence from food, according to the words of that son of grace, St. Ephraim the Syrian, means: 'Not to desire or demand much food, either sweet or costly; to eat nothing outside the stated times; not to give oneself over to gratification of the appetite; not to stir up hunger in oneself by looking at good food; and not to desire one or another sort of food.'" - The Prologue from Ochrid - by St. Nikolai Velimirovic (Volume 4, p 338)

"Fasting appears gloomy until one steps into its arena. But begin and you will see what light it brings after darkness, what freedom from bonds, what release after a burdensome life..." - St. Theophan the Recluse

"Fasting is absolutely indispensable for man. From the external aspect, it is a struggle of filial obedience to God, Who has given us the rules of fasting through His Holy Spirit. From the inner aspect, fasting is a struggle of restraint and self-limitation. In this lies the great value and sense of fasting, since a strict observance of fasts tempers one's will and perfects the character of one who is firm in his religious convictions and actions. Let us not forget that Christ Himself fasted, and foretold that His apostles would also fast. " - Metropolitan Philaret of blessed memory - On God's Law - Missionary Leaflet # E37b - Holy Protection Russian Orthodox Church

"Fasting is wonderful, because it tramples our sins like a dirty weed, while it cultivates and raises truth like a flower." - St. John Chrysostom

"Fasting was ordained in Paradise. The first injunction was delivered to Adam, 'Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat.' 'You shall not eat' is a law of fasting and abstinence." The general argument is rather against excess than in support of ceremonial abstinence. In Paradise there was no wine, no butchery of beasts, no eating of flesh. Wine came in after the flood. Noah became drunk because wine was new to him. So, fasting is older than drunkenness. Esau was defiled, and made his brother's slave, for the sake of a single meal. It was fasting and prayer which gave Samuel to Hannah. Fasting brought forth Samson. Fasting begets prophets, strengthens strong men. Fasting makes lawgivers wise, is the soul's safeguard, the body's trusty comrade, the armor of the champion, the training of the athlete." - St. Basil, in his homilies on the Holy Spirit

"The reason that fasting has an effect on the spirits of evil rests in its powerful effect on our own spirit. A body subdued by fasting brings the human spirit freedom, strength, sobriety, purity, and keen discernment." - St. Ignaty Brianchaninov

"And finally, did not the Lord Jesus Himself begin His divine ministry of the salvation of mankind with a long, forty day fast? And did not He, in this way, clearly show that we must make a serious beginning to our life as Christians with fasting? First, the fast, and then all the rest comes together with, and through, the fast.

By His own example, the Lord showed us how great a weapon fasting is. With this weapon, He vanquished Satan in the wilderness, and with it was victorious over the three chief satanic passions with which Satan tempted Him: love of ease love of praise and love of money. These are three destructive greeds, the three greatest traps into which the evil enemy of the human race lures Christ's soldiers." - St. Nikolai Velimirovic

I. M. Andreyev, when reading an article in the NY paper about a woman who beat her son in a fit of rage, nearly killing him. So, I. M. Andreyev wrote an article called "Weep" in response to his Orthodox readers.

"All for one and one for all are guilty: this is the essence of the social ethic of Christianity....We are all guilty, for we are sinful; we do evil, contribute our own evil to the universal 'storehouse of evil.' And this evil accumulates into an immense universal energy of evil and seeks for its incarnation the vessels of bodies without grace, and when it finds them, it becomes incarnate in them and they perform great evil deeds...Let each one think of himself.....What were you doing on that evening when this unbelievable but authentic evil deed was performed? Perhaps it was your sin, your immoral deed, your malice, which turned to be the last little drop which caused the vessels to overflow. This is the way we must reflect if we are Christians. Weep, brothers and sisters! Do not be ashamed of these tears! ... Weep! And let these tears be a fount in which the lord will baptize the child-martyr, who was probably unbaptized, being chrismated - in place of oil - with his innocent blood. Weep! Let your tears also be a fount of different energy, an energy of good that fights the energy of evil, which by its power will save at least one child from innocent tortures and at least one criminal mother from an unforgivable sin. Let these tears also awaken many of the indifferent.....Do not be ashamed to weep with tears of grief, compassion, and *repentance*."

