

## Letter to a prisoner.

### Grief is an opportunity, not a temptation.

#### The immortality of the soul. Forgiving, and forgiveness through prayer.

[http://www.orthodox.net/prison-ministry/prison-ministry-letters\\_2020-07-18+the-immortality-of-the-soul-grief-prayer-forgiveness.html](http://www.orthodox.net/prison-ministry/prison-ministry-letters_2020-07-18+the-immortality-of-the-soul-grief-prayer-forgiveness.html)

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From: Priest Seraphim Holland, PO 37, McKinney TX 75070 TO: ... Date: July 5/18 2020, 6<sup>th</sup> Saturday after Pentecost.

Dear ...: I am replying to your letter dated ... Life is full of coincidences. I suppose there really are no coincidences. I'm sure that many things remind you of .... It just so happens that yesterday was +Daniel's birthday. He would've been 23 years old ... **I think sometimes thinking about past trauma is worse than the trauma itself.** That's why every day, I pray for those who have died suddenly, those who have lost loved ones suddenly, and those who pray for +Daniel. It is my way of remembering him without trauma.

I added +... to the diptychs today. I used to call +Daniel "D man". I have to tell you, ... that it is impossible for the soul to be dead. Man is created in the image of God, and God is immortal, or more properly eternal, or a better term would be everlasting. We use that term to differentiate between God who is uncreated and always is and always will be, and mankind who have been created, therefore there was a time when they did not exist, but from the time of their creation they will continue to exist forever. We are not eternal, but from the time of our creation, body and soul, in the womb, we are destined to be everlasting. Our body will die for a time and even decay, but in the end when Christ comes again all souls and bodies will be reunited, and everyone will live eternally. Those who have lived for Christ, according to His judgment and not ours, will be with Jesus Christ forever, and behold the face of God. Of course, by "face of God", I mean to be in His energies and His light. No one can see the face of God since only God is uncreated, and only the uncreated can understand Himself. We are trying to live in such a way, and praying for others so that we and they would also be able to behold the face of God without shame.

The Scripture says that we should comfort ourselves with words about the resurrection. I find that the greatest comfort I can have regarding the death of my son, which still seems inexplicable to me, is to pray for him and to await the day when we are reunited. Of course, I am only a man, and unable to see the future, but God knows all things and God is merciful. Therefore, I pray. I take comfort in my prayer and I take comfort in the words of Scripture which describe things that cannot be understood. For instance:

But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. (14) For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. (15) For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. (16) For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: (17) Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds,

to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. (18) Wherefore comfort one another with these words. (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)

Please understand that +...’s soul is very much alive, in a way that we do not understand. ... is awaiting the common resurrection, as you and I are. When the Scripture talks about the death of the soul, it means a soul that is not in communion with God. It does not mean a soul that blinks out of existence. Now, before you wonder what +...’s state is right now, all you need to do is pray for .... Your love for ... is no less than it was then when ... was alive, so your prayer for ... should be as if ... is alive. ... is just alive in a different way and awaiting the common resurrection.

You told me that you could not function after the death of .... I understand that, but only because you were not an Orthodox Christian. An Orthodox Christian with any kind of prayer life, must be able to function. There will be dark times and dark thoughts, but with prayer, and with spiritual effort, we function. We turn the energy of grief into positive energy. I wrote a paper about that. Or actually I gave a presentation and transcribed it<sup>1</sup>. Grief is an energy, just like fire is an energy. Fire can warm us and help us to create, or it can destroy. It will do one or the other. I always hated when people asked me anything like “are you over his death” or say “you will get over it soon”. That’s stupid. **We don’t get over the death of our loved ones. We change because of the death of our loved ones.** As a Christian, I must change positively. I have changed my life because of +Daniel’s death, in positive ways. There been in intermittent times and I negative changes, but they were transient.

**I think grief is an opportunity but people treat it like a temptation.**

As part of your healing, of course you must pray for “that ...”. ...’s made in the image of God too, and God wants ... to obtain to His likeness also. This may be the most difficult thing you can do, but it is even more necessary than praying for +... or your journey to baptism in the Orthodox Church.

You wrote that you worry over +...’s soul. Worry is a very hard thing. It is a distracting thing. We are human beings, and therefore we have anxieties, but we must channel those anxieties to positive action. You will gain nothing by worrying for +..., and you know that with your mind, but it is still very hard. Therefore, you should school yourself to pray for +... every day. If you have a prayer rope, or even if you do not, you should pray the Jesus prayer set number of times for him every day. I can remember what I told you about this. You can say: “Lord Jesus Christ have mercy upon ....”. Say it 100 times in a session, or perhaps for five or 10 minutes.

I say the prayer of St. Varus for those who are reposed who are not Orthodox, every day. I will send you a story unless I already have. Please tell me.



*A Prayer to Martyr Varus<sup>2</sup>*

O Holy, wondrous Martyr Varus, who, burning with zeal for the Heavenly King, didst confess Him before thy torturers and didst greatly suffer for Him!

Now the Church doth venerate thee, as one glorified with the glory of heaven by Christ the Lord, Who granted thee the abundant grace to approach Him boldly.

And now, standing before Him together with the Angels, rejoicing on high, beholding the Most Holy Trinity clearly, and enjoying the Uncreated Light, remember the suffering of our relatives (*and those we remember, and those we hold in our hearts*) who have died outside the Faith, and accept our pleas, and as thou

*Troparion of St Varus the Martyr tone 5*

Thou didst follow in the steps of the martyrs/ and contend for the glory of Christ./ Thou wast tied to a beam and restored by the Tree of Life,/ and thine intercessions gladden our souls.

I will keep your family and my prayers, and I also want to pray for the person that you call "...". Of course, "... " has a name, and is still human being, although without a body. It's a classic thing for us to dehumanize people or to put distance between ourselves and someone by not referring them by name. I hope this is not too painful for you, but my suggestion is that you refer to ... by name. ... May God help you in all things. I hope I got all the typos. I transcribe my letters by voice, and I am a terrible proofreader. That's why want to fire my secretary. Please write back soon.

didst intercede for the unbelieving ancestors of Cleopatra and didst free them from eternal suffering,

remember those who have died unbaptized or have been buried in an ungodly manner, *or died suddenly, or unjustly, or by their own hand*

*N.N.*

*(Continuation of Prayer to Martyr Varus)*

... and pray earnestly that they may be delivered from eternal darkness, that we may all, with one mouth and one heart, praise the Most Merciful Creator unto the ages of ages. Amen.

*Kontakion, in Tone IV*

Following Christ, O martyr Varus, and draining His cup, thou wast crowned with the wreath of martyrdom and joinest chorus with the angels. Pray thou without ceasing for our souls.

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<sup>1</sup> Using the energy in grief.

Talk given at the St Herman Youth Conference, December, 2017, Kansas City

Sources:

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.orthodox.net/trebnic/to-martyr-varus-for-the-reposed-outside-the-church.doc>

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Life: <http://codexjustinianus.blogspot.com/2010/10/he-holy-martyr-varus-and-seven-teachers.html> <http://www.johnsanidopoulos.com/2015/10/saint-varus-martyr-and-blessed-cleopatra.html>

See also <http://www.orthodox.net/daniel/dyptichs-daniels-list.doc> , go to A Prayer to Martyr Varus 25. There are many other prayers from his services there also. I use these prayers every day.