

Letter to a prisoner.

What do we do when we feel separated, abandoned, lonely? The Prayer of the Trisagion (Liturgy of Saint James), Prayer of St Silouan of Mount Athos:, To pray for someone more diligently:, Prayer is a painful and bloody struggle. By Elder Ephraim of Katounakia. ,Elder Ephraim of Katounakia on the Priesthood, Two Kinds of Gladness, stuff from Elder Porphyrios, From the Talmud, Misc memes with NB quotes.

The following contains parts of a personal letter to a prisoner, and also a general letter sent out to 35 prisoners.

http://www.orthodox.net/full-voice/prison-ministry-letters_2016-09-06+what-to-do-when-we-feel-separated.doc

http://www.orthodox.net/full-voice/prison-ministry-letters_2016-09-06+what-to-do-when-we-feel-separated.pdf

Priest Seraphim Holland PO Box 37, McKinney, TX 75070 Sep 6, 2016

Dear Brother in Christ _____:

I am replying to your letter Postmarked _____. I just got it today. I will try to reply to everything, in chronological order. I have 12 Orthodox study bibles now, and will be bringing some to the unit. You are welcome to have one.

Regarding your legal situation, if you believe you can be exonerated, and are ready for the long haul, and all the difficulties and stress, there is no reason that “as a Christian” you should not do this. I think you should count the cost. It will be a hard road. It will be hard not to take it personally when you have setbacks. May God help you.

The news about your mom and dad is very sad. I think the greatest punishment of prison, for the guilty and the non-guilty is the separation that prison causes. I have lots of separation from people too, but this is because of choices they made, and not something imposed upon me. The void between prison and regular life is something that even I, a man who can enter and leave a prison in the same day, feels acutely.

I will give you some advice about the separation you feel. This is a common human condition, and it is one of the most painful things we experience. I think that, other than an actual prisoner, a pastor understands this feeling very well. The sadness can easily become hopelessness, feelings of abandonment, anger, depression, cynicism. All those things are ugly thoughts, and they eat at the soul. They always make things worse. I know of only one solution for separation from people that does not change, over long periods of time. That one thing is prayer. When I pray for the people I am separated from – because of distance, or a misunderstanding, or from being “thrown under the bus” – I am connected to them. I am not kidding or being trite. My sadness seems to be a little less, and I am not angry about my situation or how I have been treated.

I have long lists of people I pray for. You are in there! On a personal level, between you and me – we are not able to see each other very often, but I remain connected to you. This is because I pray for you every day. I do not pray well, and my prayers are not those mentioned in James, because I am not a righteous man, but I definitely am helped by my prayers. My soul feels connected, and I have great hope that, even though I am a sinner, God will choose to hear my poor prayers and help the person I am praying for.

I recommend with all my heart that you make a list of all people that are significant in your life. It does not matter if they are alive or dead. Those who are most significant are those we love, and those who have hurt us. Pray for all of them, every day. Do not listen to the cynical voice, that is like that of the servant of Jairus, who came to Christ while his master was with Him, as they were walking to the ruler’s house to heal his little girl of a deadly illness. The servant can to them and said: “Thy daughter is dead: why troublest thou the Master any further?” This was the outcome Jairus expected, and feared. He probably thought all was lost, but the Lord Jesus said to him: “Be not afraid, only believe.”. They then went to the house, and Jesus raised the dead girl to life. I doubt very much that Jairus fully believed the Lord would raise his beloved child, as they walked that long walk to his house. His belief was partial, imperfect, but it was enough so that he continued to walk! In our life, this walking is our prayer and

continued reliance on God. WE try our best to not listen to the little voices inside our heads that say “Do not trouble the Master”. (See Matthew 5:21-43, & Luke 8:40-57)

This is what you must do. You must pray even though you feel hopelessness, and despondency and depression. God will deliver you. He does things in His own time. We are commanded to endure to the end. God will always deliver.

You should pray for your mother, who suffered very much. It does not matter that she is dead. The scripture tells us “(God) is not a God of the dead, but of the living: for all live unto him.” (Luke 20:38)

We have always prayed for the dead. We place our hope in God, and upon his inestimable mercy. Praying for your mother will help with the pain. I pray for my dead parents.

You may say in your daily prayers, once or more times, something as simple as:

"Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, grant rest to the soul of Thy departed *servant (Name)*"

You may also say this "Troparion" (a short hymn that is usually sung), for all the dead you wish to pray for, or personalizing it by inserting a name or names in the appropriate place:

Kontakion for the departed, Tone VIII, special melody:

With the saints give rest, / O Christ, / to the souls of Thy servants, / where there is neither sickness, nor sorrow, / nor sighing, // but life everlasting.

If you want to say a longer prayer, here is one that is in most Orthodox Psalters, and used by many people:

Prayer for every departed person

Remember, O Lord our God, Thy servant, our *brother/sister, N.*, who has reposed in the Faith and hope of life eternal, and in that Thou art good and the Lover of mankind, Who remittest sins and blottest out iniquities, do Thou loose, remit and pardon all *his/her* sins, voluntary and involuntary.

Deliver *him/her* from eternal torment and the fire of Gehenna, and grant unto *him/her* the communion and delight of Thine eternal good things prepared for them that love Thee.

For though *he/she* hath sinned, yet hath *he/she* not forsaken Thee, and *he/she* undoubtedly believed in the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit; and even until *his/her* last breath did *he/she* confess Thee in Orthodox fashion: God glorified in Trinity, Unity in Trinity and Trinity in Unity.

Wherefore, be Thou merciful unto *him/her* and reckon *his/her* faith in Thee, rather than *his/her* deeds, and in that Thou art compassionate, grant him/her rest with Thy saints; for there is no man that liveth and doth not sin.

But Thou alone art wholly without sin, and Thy truth is forever; and Thou alone art the God of mercies, and compassion, and love for mankind, and unto Thee do we ascribe glory, to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

In the back of the "Boston" Psalter. http://www.synaxis.info/psalter/5_english/b_reading/kath_prayers.html

<http://www.orthodox.net/trebnic/prayer-for-every-departed-person-in-the-psalter.doc>

<http://www.orthodox.net/trebnic/prayer-for-every-departed-person-in-the-psalter.pdf>

<http://www.orthodox.net/trebnic/prayer-for-every-departed-person-in-the-psalter-card.doc>

<http://www.orthodox.net/trebnic/prayer-for-every-departed-person-in-the-psalter-card.pdf>

I am very sad when I see that you do not want eternal life. There is no way to be erased! God made us for eternal life, because he made us in His own image and likeness, and He is eternal. We are born for eternity, and for happiness.

The most compelling aspect of Christianity, for me, is that even though I am a sinner, God wants union with me and will make me capable of union with him. This is something I do not know how to do! The ugliness of the world make it appear that it is impossible to have happiness with no regret. This is a lie of the evil one. We were born to have eternal happiness, without regret. I know this is true – it will happen. I cannot understand how I can live with no regret, but I know that God can do anything. This certainty is reflected in a prayer that the priest says (if you like this pray, you can say it for your loved ones too):

O God of spirits and of all flesh, Who hast trampled down death, and overthrown the devil, and given life to Thy world: Do Thou, Thyself, O Lord give rest to the soul(s) of Thy departed servant(s) _____, **in a place of light**, a place of green pasture, a place of repose,

*** **whence all sickness, sorrow and sighing are fled away** ***.

Pardon every sin committed by *him (her,them)*, in word, deed or thought, in that Thou art a good God, the Lover of mankind; For there is no man that liveth and sinneth not, for Thou alone art without sin, Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and Thy Word is Truth.

For Thou art the Resurrection, and the Life, and the repose of Thy departed *servant(s)* _____, **O Christ our God**, and to Thee we send up glory, together with Thine unoriginate Father, and Thy most holy and good and life-creating Spirit, now and ever, and to the ages of ages

<http://www.orthodox.net/treblic/prayer-for-the-dead-o-god-of-spirits-es.rtf> See other prayers & services at <http://www.orthodox.net/treblic> or <http://www.orthodox.net/services>

We “sigh” in this life because of regret, and remembering traumas, and all the terrible, sad, unjust and violent things that happen to us, or that we have seen in our earthly life. God will take away the sighing, in heaven.

This keeps me going. I hope you will take it to heart, and it will keep you going too.

You have told about yourself that “I you love God, just not me”.

Sometimes the hardest person to love is yourself. I do not know how to communicate to you how much God loves you and that not loving ourselves is a direct contradiction to His purpose for us. I love you, so I pray my poor prayers, and depend on God’s mercy for you, and for me.

I hope you continue to write me. I will write back. I appreciate your honesty. I will not quit on you. I hope we can see each other sometimes too.

I will not be at the units (Michael and Hughes) the first Wed of Sep, because I will be in Florida with my wife to visit her parents. After that, I will be back. On the second Wed, I will serve liturgy at Hughes at 8. On the third Wednesday I will be at 4 places! That day will be a big day. After Powledge at 8am, I be at Michael at 11am, then mosey to the Estelle unit to see a man I baptized in Hughes who was shipped over a year ago. I am very fond of him, and hope to make regular visits. After this, I truck down to Beaumont, to spend the night (maybe I will kayak in the gulf or the Neches river that afternoon), then on Thursday morning I will go the Stiles unit to see another man I baptized in Hughes who was shipped. I am very fond of him too, and looking forward to the visit. I have been made aware of 7 others in that unit who also may come to see me when I am there. After these visits, I will drive over 5 hours home, or maybe stay the night with friends and go home Friday morning. I did something similar last week. I went to Hughes, then to Midland to stay with a friend, then the Daniel unit in Snyder Texas on

Thursday, and drove home. My total mileage for that trip was 880 miles! Please pray for me, that this little ministry will continue.

I have a little news. My daughter Christina was married this past weekend. It was a very joyful occasion. By the grace of God, her beloved, Tim, was baptized, along with his two children, the weekend before. I performed all the services.

I think I may just jam this letter with misc stuff that I have recently written or seen. I am leaving for Florida tomorrow, and unfortunately, a little under the weather. I hope to run on the beach every day, and kayak at least once. Mostly, we will be with Marina's folks. I am not too inspired right now, so I will just find stuff, but if you ask questions, I will answer them. I hope you pray for me. Everything is too big, and takes too long. I am always not doing as much as I want to do.

Personal letters from you determine how much I write to you.

Here comes the stream of consciousness, to fill some pages.

"The world is governed by God's Providence alone, and in this is salvation for one who believes; in this is the strength to endure earthly sorrows.

"My dears, the world is governed by God's Providence and not by us mortals."

"I will tell you from experience that the sooner we accept what God has given us, the easier it will be to bear God's good yoke, His easy yoke. It becomes heavy from our inner resistance."

"Such a time has come when only faith that God's Providence orders life can overcome all the hardships of life."

+Fr. John Krestiankin of blessed memory

Here is a prayer that I say before beginning the Proskimidie service (a service served just by the priest before the Divine Liturgy). It is from a very ancient liturgy – of St James the Brother of the Lord. I have only served this liturgy once, but I love its prayers.

The Prayer of the Trisagion (Liturgy of Saint James)

Compassionate and merciful, long-suffering, most merciful and true Lord, look down from Thy holy dwelling-place, hearken to us, Thy suppliants, and deliver us from every trial and temptation, both diabolic and human.

Do not deprive us of Thy help, nor bring upon us heavier chastisement than we are able to bear. For we are not capable of conquering what opposes us, while Thou, O Lord, hast power to save us from all adversities.

Save us, O God, from the difficulties of this world in accordance with Thy goodness, so that, having entered Thy holy altar with a pure conscience, we may, without condemnation, offer Thee with the heavenly Powers the blessed and thrice-holy hymn, and having accomplished the divine ministry that is well-pleasing to Thee, we may be found worthy of eternal life.

Here is a prayer I say every day, before commemorating everyone. It is my sincerest desire for you and everyone I care for.

Prayer of St Silouan of Mount Athos: I pray Thee, O merciful Lord, for all the peoples of the world, that they may come to know Thee by the Holy Spirit.

This one is pretty useful. Priests get a lot of slander, but sometimes the praise is more dangerous.

Protect me, O Lord, from the praise and slander of men. (Evergetinos, Second Book, Hypothesis II , pg 31)

I was reading Exodus recently, and I added this prayer to my daily rule. It kinda sums it all up for me.

Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, shew me now thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight: and consider that this nation is thy people. (Exo 33:13 KJV)

I am on you all the time to pray for others. You can just say the Jesus prayer for everyone, or even just "Lord have mercy on (N)", but sometimes we want to pray a little more for someone. Here is what I use.

To pray for someone more diligently: from Old Believer Prayer Book, with line 4 added

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].

I recently saw a YouTube video, in Greek, but with scrolling English text. I hate those things! They go too slow for me. The content absolutely blew my mind, so I captured the text. What a world we live in! It is easy to do everything **except pray and be at peace!** I ran the YouTube movie on my phone, and when I had a block of text on the screen, paused it, and did a screen shot. I have software on my phone that does OCR on any image. I did this a bunch of times and stitched everything together. The result is below.

Prayer is a painful and bloody struggle. By Elder Ephraim of Katounakia.

Transcript

(Note: these practices are only for Orthodox Christians who strive to live according to God's Commandments and who also have a blessing from their spiritual father to engage in such struggles. They may prove harmful otherwise...)

Prayer is a struggle. It strengthens the fight of the faithful against the devil but it is itself also a painful and bloody struggle. All our effort is to concentrate our nous on the words of the "Jesus Prayer."

We should make our nous deaf and mute to any other thought, either good or bad, that evil brings us. We should not listen to the thoughts that come from outside or answer them. We need to despise them completely and not converse with them. Thus we should seek in every way the complete muteness of our nous because only with this action can we keep our soul in calmness so that the Jesus Prayer can act effectively.

It is known that the thoughts are led from the mind into the heart and disturb it. The troubled mind also troubles the heart. Just as the wind raises the waves of the sea, so the wind of thoughts raises waves in the soul. Attentiveness is necessary for prayer. That is why the Fathers talk about prayer in combination with watchfulness. Watchfulness keeps the nous in constant alertness and readiness and prayer brings the divine grace...

The Holy Fathers teach that even if man is not always under the dominion of the demons he is, however, under their influence and persistent hostility. They continually turn around the soul and try, by all means, to make the faithful sin, either through the senses (when the object is near) or through the imagination (when the person or object is far away) or through the movements of the flesh. For the whole of man, who consists of soul and body, receives the influence of Satan and gets captured by him.

The hostile tactics of the evil, however, are more apparent during prayer. Those who fight in this inner struggle see evil making war against them furiously at every step. They see the devil clearly using all means to distract their nous from God. They see all the cunning devices of the evil demon, who hates the good and kills man.

According to St. Mark the Ascetic: "When the devil sees that the nous is praying in the heart, then he incurs great and malicious temptations". He hates men exceedingly, and his hatred increases when he sees that they tend to become angels through prayer, and occupy the place the demons had before their fall. St. Gregory of Nyssa describes this malicious envy of

Page 6 of 15

the devil, caused by the theosis of man: "The demons are consumed by envy and jealousy when men are ready to acquire kinship with God, whereas they (the demons) have fallen from their relationship with the good"...

Imagination is the most cunning weapon of Satan; imagining the past and imagining the future; imagining good works, imagining bad ones. Various thoughts come and preoccupy the nous, so that it ceases to meditate on the name of Jesus. He tries to make man not to show interest in God and express his love. Primarily he coaxes him to call to mind the various faults he has committed in his former and recent life.

The Holy Fathers say that the war is usually as fierce as the passions were before. For every pleasure he must pay the proportionate pain. There is a close connection between pleasure and pain in the ascetic life of the Fathers. Pleasure brought about both the Fall and pain; and it is precisely this pain which restores man to his original state and cures him. Thus, man suffers a lot. He pays for each thought and evil pleasure the proportionate amount of suffering, so that an equilibrium may be restored.

Events that happened many years ago which he felt pleasure for, being forgotten in the meantime, appear now in all their intensity and range. He may even reach the point of disgust and despair.

Blasphemous thoughts come upon the athlete of prayer...incredulity about the great matters of faith, like the divinity of Christ and the purity of the Most Holy Mother of God and the Saints, etc. Many times these thoughts are expressed and verbalized during prayer, without the wrestler of this struggle knowing it or wanting it...

Blasphemous thoughts must be opposed with contempt. Only in this way do they disappear. Blasphemous thoughts are inspired by the devil they are not ours. Here we can affirm that the Lord's word has validity: "You cannot serve God and mammon", (Matt. 6:24) that is, the nous cannot do two things simultaneously. It cannot be enchanted by the sweetest nectar of the Jesus prayer on the one hand and on the other hand, while it is praying, doubt the power of prayer or dogmatic truths. The latter is the attack of the devil. Contempt then is needed and if the blasphemous thought continually attacks us, it needs confession to the spiritual father. Then it disappears immediately. Moreover, the same happens with persistent thoughts. A thought that persists, especially during prayer, needs to be confessed. Thus the devil who hides under it immediately disappears, like the snake when we lift up the stone...

The athlete of prayer must not let himself be shaken. He must oppose imagination with the continuous invocation of the name of Jesus, and he must be concentrated within the words of the Jesus prayer. He must stand bravely in the conciseness of the Jesus prayer. He must not think of anything during prayer, either of wrong or even good works...

Many times the devil, he continued, appears and talks to the athlete of prayer. He challenges him and tries to open a dialogue with him. Sometimes he blames the athlete, sometimes he praises him, sometimes he scoffs at him, sometimes he interprets certain acts wrongly. The inexperienced in this spiritual contest start talking with the devil and answer his questions and his assaults. However, this is an error, especially for the beginners, because the inexperienced in these situations are defeated even if it seems that the devil was put to flight by their replies. Confusion and fear remain. And later, when they recall this scene and all that was said, they will be shaken and troubled. The Fathers recommend that those who do not have the experience and the necessary strength should not answer. They must be indifferent to the devil and despise him. They must do the same in the war against their thoughts. Thus contempt against the devil and perseverance in the Jesus prayer are needed...

This Transcript is at: <http://www.orthodox.net/articles/prayer-is-a-painful-and-bloody-struggle-by-elder-ephraim-of-katounakia.doc>

Now that you have read this, do something about it! Prayer is the key to solving all of our problems. We must learn to pray. Try to pray the Jesus prayer, as simply as possible, and with as little distraction as possible, every day, for an extended period of time. I do every day.

I also rant to you all the time about praying for others. Here is something from the same elder about this. He is writing as a priest, to priests, but his words do not get you off the hook! Those who love, remember. Those who remember, pray.

Elder Ephraim of Katounakia on the Priesthood



When you liturgize, have in mind that you are a mediator. You receive from the world pain, tears, sickness, and supplications and you offer them above to the throne of the Godhead. Then you transfer to the world comfort, therapy, and whatever need someone may have. God has made you worthy of a great office, my child. Cultivate it. The ear of God is at the mouth of the priest.

The stole has great power. The stole is an arbiter of fallen man with the Father, with his Creator. This is why, as much as you can, commemorate more names.

During the time of the Turkish occupation there were many priests circulating around, but one priest circulated and gathered names to be commemorated during the Liturgy. The Turkish officer said to him: "Hey, he is raising a revolution of the people." He took the priest and brought him in. In his sleep all of those the priest had commemorated appeared to him and said: "Listen, either you release the priest, because he commemorated us and consoled us, or we will take your first child." The Turk became fearful. This was during the Turkish occupation. "Come priest, go and be well", he said, "go, for will I lose my child?"

The stole has great power, my child, great power. As much as you can, commemorate more names.

Yes, years ago I was given by Fr. Arsenios, spiritual brother of Elder Joseph, some names from the time he was an immigrant from Russia and came to Greece. I commemorated them. Later he told me: "You know, Elder, what I saw? I saw in my sleep that those names I gave you, well I went to one of their homes. I asked how they were doing here. 'Well,' they said, 'somewhat good, but Papa-Ephraim comes and consoles us.'" It was because I was commemorating his name. Yes. Later he asked another: "How are you doing?" They said: "So so, but it's raining a bit and we're cold, but Papa-Ephraim comes and consoles us." I said to him: "It is, my brother, the names I commemorate."

Why did Papa-Planas become a saint? He commemorated whole papers. Once I remembered some names and I posted them at the Proskomide. There at the clipboard. So in my sleep I saw that certain elderly came, with old clothes, as I heard from the mother of my father, and they said: "You, my child, wrote us down, but the Elder, my child, does not commemorate us."

"Come on," I said to the Elder, "why don't you commemorate them?"

"I could not see them clearly," he said.

"Elder, I saw this and that, and they said that the Elder does not commemorate us," I said.

From that time I received the desire to commemorate as many more names. The more the names, the more the wages you receive. But this is the greatest charity: to unite man with God. This is the greatest charity. And you can do this. As many more names, my child, that you commemorate, so much more the wages do you receive. Yes.

<http://www.orthodox.net/articles/elder-ephraim-of-katounakia-on-the-priesthood.doc>

I hope I have not sent this one to you yet. I just finished writing it. You will never be glad unless you seek the right kind of gladness.

Two Kinds of Gladness

"And when they heard it, they were glad" Mark 14:11

The Evangelist Mark thus described the Sanhedrin after they heard from Judas a way to take Christ by subtlety, in order to kill Him. This is evil gladness, black gladness, insane gladness.

"Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord." (John 20:20)

This describes godly gladness. The disciples saw the Lord on the day of the Resurrection and they were in His presence, and all was well, and their hearts were alive and warm, and they were glad.

We live in a society where gladness is considered to be the prime priority. Not many people are glad but they are seeking it all the time. They seek after what appears to make them glad, or what they have been taught, and even manipulated, to think makes them glad. They seek a feeling of happiness or being filled with something, spurred on by gluttony or lust or the desire to have satisfied, even for a moment, one of their passions or desires. Some desire a massaging of their ego, or a feeling of safety against the uncertain future, or an identity as something, and they count this as gladness.

Gladness is not from possessing anything except Christ and the Spirit of Christ. Gladness is from having God fill the soul. Gladness is to be in the presence of God and nothing else.

The Pharisees were glad in a worldly way, an evil way, a demonic way. Satan laughs, but has no gladness. He laughs when he sees suffering, and when he sees people turn away from God, when he sees things that are fetid and terrible.

The fly likes to land upon excrement. He considers this to be his food, he considers this his joy, and it makes him glad, but the bee considers it to be filthy and terrible and instead goes to beautiful flowers and is glad with their beautiful smell.

What makes a man glad? This is a question which everyone must answer every moment. Ask this question of yourself, and you might be surprised at the answer.

"Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity. Wherefore God, Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows." Psalm 44:7

This Messianic Psalm, which describes the One Who made it possible for us to be glad, also teaches us the ONLY way to obtain gladness. We are to become vessels, which can contain the "oil of gladness" - the Holy Spirit, the Comforter. This is only achieved by those who love righteousness and hate iniquity. Any other way leads to false gladness, and all false gladness inevitably becomes sorrow.

Be glad that you are a Christian. Be glad that even though you are mortal and bound to the Earth and full of passions and unworthy of even life itself God will save you. God will bring you to the eternal gladness. All you must do is seek after true gladness and not that false gladness that the world offers.

In the next life, for those who are glad, there is only gladness. There is no sickness, nor sorrow, nor sighing, but life everlasting (this is from the prayer "O God of Spirits...", which we pray for the reposed). All in this life that does not make you glad, if you pursue with effort the One who makes glad, will lead you to true gladness, and all sorrow will be forgotten. If, however, you pursue false gladness, or turn away from the pursuit of true gladness when you encounter difficulties and sorrows, you will only find eternal sorrow, and not a shred of gladness.

Sorrows and struggles are only evil when they are eternal, or when we avoid them in such a way that they do not lead us to eternal gladness. Gladness is only good when it comes from the One who is Good. All other Gladness is actually future sorrow, disguised as gladness.

I must make a comment about the political and the social climate today. We are besieged by "identity politics". This is seeking after a false kind of gladness. People identify themselves as something that is unclean or untrue and they think that this brings gladness to them. Our society is busy promoting this false seeking after gladness, and it is permeating every level of government, education, and even religious institutions.

The more radical among those who promote "identity politics" are like those of which it says in the scripture **"Is Thine eye evil because I am good?"**. They are not content merely to be able to practice whatever they identify with in peace; they want everyone to identify their identity as good and wholesome and making a man glad. They are not glad until they see their way of life promoted in every place of society. Of course even if and when this occurs, these things that are not of God will never bring gladness. They will just bring the sardonic laugh of Satan and then weeping in the night.

We must not identify ourselves by any of our sins. The thief must say, "I steal, but I know this passion will not lead me to gladness." The sexually unclean, the lazy, the egotistical, and all addicted to any passion must say "that which gives me pleasure is a false gladness. I repudiate it and will struggle against it till the end of my days, and God will save me."

It is not possible to do things that are unclean and to be truly glad, therefore all of the identity politics of our day is a false gladness. The only identity that a man should have is that he is possessed by the Holy Spirit, and that he is Redeemed by the lamb, and that he lives for eternity.

Priest Seraphim Holland 2016

http://www.orthodox.net/full-voice/full-voice_2016-08-13+two-kinds-of-gladness.doc



I think you will like this stuff from Elder Porphyrios.

When we or someone else are facing some problem, let us ask others for their prayers and let us all entreat God with faith and love. Be sure that God is pleased with these prayers and intervenes with miracles. This is something we haven't understood properly. We say, 'Say a prayer for me,' but without realizing the power of common prayer.

Pray for others more than for yourself. Say, 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me,' and you will always have others in your mind. We are all children of the same Father; we are all one. And so, when we pray for others, we say, 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me,' and not, 'have mercy on them.' In this way we make them one with ourselves.

Prayer for others which is made gently and with deep love is selfless and has great spiritual benefit. It brings grace to the person who prays and also to the person for whom he is praying. When you have great love and this love moves

you to prayer, then the waves of love are transmitted and affect the person for whom you are praying and you create around him a shield of protection and you influence him, you lead him towards what is good. When He sees your efforts, God bestows His grace abundantly on both you and on the person you are praying for. But we must die to ourselves. Do you understand?

Elder Porphyrios, Wounded by Love, pp 131-32

You get upset when others are unwell, whereas what you should do is devote yourself to prayer so that what is desired comes about through the grace of God. With your own wisdom, you tell others what should be done, when that is not necessarily the best thing. The secret is to be found elsewhere, and not in what we say or suggest to others. The secret lies in our devotion, our prayer to God for what is best for our brethren to come about through the grace of God. That is the best. What we are unable to do will be done through His grace.

In my life, prayer occupies the first place. I do not fear hell and I don't think of Paradise. I ask only for God to have mercy on the whole world and on me. If I repeat 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me' with intensity, even when I have people around me, I am not distracted from the prayer. It is just the same as when I am on my own. I pray, I receive everyone in the Spirit of Christ, and I am eager to pray for all the people. I try to love Christ. That is my aim. Because of my many illnesses, I'm not able to speak much. But prayer helps more than words. *Elder Porphyrios, Wounded by Love, pg 132*

Pray for those who make accusations against you. Say, 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me,' not 'have mercy on him,' and your accuser will be embraced in this prayer. Does someone say something to you that upsets you? God knows it. What you have to do is open your arms and say, 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me,' and make your accuser one with yourself. And God knows what is torturing your accuser deep inside him and, seeing your love, he hastens to help. He searches the desires of hearts.



What is it that St. Paul says in his Epistle to the Romans? *He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because in accord with God He makes intercession for the saints.* (Rom 8:27) Elder Porphyrios, **Wounded by Love**, p 133

Here is a quote I saw recently. It sums up what we must do in life. I actually preached about it, but I have not transcribed the sermon. My secretary is incompetent, slow, and lazy.

"Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief. Do justly, now. Love mercy, now. Walk humbly now. You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it." From the Talmud

It is a commentary on this verse: "He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"(Micah 6:8)

Of course, the Talmud has things that any Christian would disagree with, but this bit of wisdom is absolutely true.

Something I heard, and agree with: "Suffering is inevitable, but misery is a choice. "



This quote is a little complicated, but I hope you think about it. Talk to me if it confuses you.

If we work to correct ourselves and look more intently towards our "inner" activity rather than our external, giving precedence to divine help, we can in turn be of greater and more positive help to others. We will also achieve an inner serenity that will quietly help the souls of the people we encounter because spiritual serenity reflects the virtue of the soul and transforms souls.

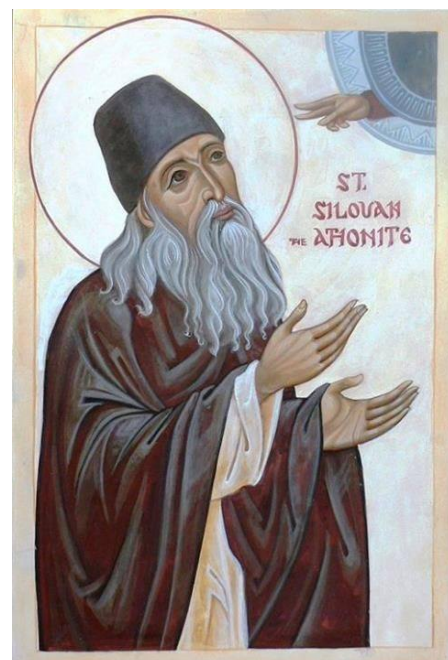
When someone applies himself to external activity before having polished his spiritual inner state, he may struggle spiritually, but he will be fraught with worry, anxiety, lack of confidence in God and frequent loss of serenity. If he does not improve himself, he cannot say that his interest for the common good is pure. When he is liberated from the old self and all things worldly, then he will receive divine Grace and be not only at peace with himself, but also able to bring peace to everyone else.

But if he has not received the Grace of God, then he can neither govern himself nor help others in order to bring about a divine effect. He must first be immersed in divine Grace and then utilize his resulting sanctified powers for the salvation of others.

From Spiritual Awakening (Spiritual Counsels of Elder Paisios)

Ok, I am almost out of room. Here is the last one for page 7 (for some reason, I already did page 8)

The Lord greatly loves the repenting sinner and mercifully presses him to His bosom: "Where were you, My child? I was waiting a long time for you." The Lord calls all to Himself with the voice of the Gospel, and his voice is heard in all the world: "Come to me, my sheep. I created you, and I love you. My love for you brought Me to earth, and I suffered all things for the sake of your salvation, and I want you all to know my love, and to say, like the apostles on Tabor: Lord, it is good for us to be with You." (St. Silouan the Athonite, Writings, IX.27)



to examine whether he is right or not, we feel offended, then we are in the grip of pride. Elder Thaddeus