

Ascesis in Prison

Letter to a prisoner

7/14/2018 (7/27 ns) Saint Aquila, Disciple from the Seventy

From: Priest Seraphim Holland PO 37 McKinney TX 75070 TO: Date:7/14/2018 (7/27 ns) Saint Aquila, Disciple from the Seventy

Dear in Christ

You said that you don't listen to me enough but you love and respect me. Yes, my friend, I know that all three of these things are true. I love you too. I know that you have a great ascesis ("aaask-kee-sees") that I can only partially understand. The word ascesis means a spiritual struggle. Certainly, being in prison is a great spiritual struggle, or perhaps it is not for those who do not wish to struggle. I say the latter statement not because I am trying to poke at you, but because you know many people in prison who do not struggle at all. I see you as a great struggler. You need to improve for sure. But I definitely with all my heart know that you struggle and I respect you for it.

I've told you multiple times, and I will continue to tell you that I want you to be free. I want to be free with Christian freedom. That is, to have only peace in your soul and only goodness in your soul and no sorrow in your soul. It's a long road to get there, with persons in prison or not in prison. I don't want to be trite with you, but you said enough things to me to make me think that you may think that if you would have been sent to prison you would just continue to go down. It's a terrible price to pay, but then again you are buying something that has no price. I guarantee you my friend, in the next age, if you struggle, you will have no sickness or sorrow or sighing about your days in prison or your separation from your wife and your children. Today, yes, you will have struggles, and you will have sadness, and sometimes even a deep stabbing pain.

I know little bit about that pain, because I pretty much I still feel it every day regarding Daniel. Part of my sense of loss with Daniel is that I am sure, absolutely positive, that I missed opportunities with him. I'm sure you know that feeling.

What are we to do about this? Well, I guess people could make a joke about me and say that the only tool I have is a hammer, and therefore I think every problem is a nail. The nail is my sinfulness and the sinfulness of people. The nail is my brokenness and my laziness and my ignorance. The hammer is Jesus Christ and the Holy Trinity. Only by prayer and struggling to follow the commandments and by keeping my eyes open and seen the misery of others and caring about them in a substantial way will I be able to be rid of my deep problems. It is the same with you. It is the same with everybody.

Therefore, a little bit of advice here: try to pray more. Try to have the habit of saying the Jesus prayer. If you do not understand what I say ask me the next time you see me. I plan to celebrate the liturgy the next time that I see you. Say you communion prayers and be ready to have confession just before the liturgy., with expectation to the liturgy. Your circumstances will not change. You will still be imprisoned needs to will be beastly hot, you will still have the standard aggravations that you always have. But you will have partaken of the body and blood of Jesus Christ and in a way that is invisible to you He will have changed you.

I told you guys this week that if we were to use math in a kind of weird way and consider kindness to someone or listening to them or praying for them with compassion and without judgment or helping them in some simple way to be worth five points in the world, is worth double that in prison or even triple. The prison environment is one that is full of people are making excuses for their cynicism or their indifference or their worldliness or their sins. People do that in the world to, but they are not in such close quarters, and I think a little less vocal about their complaining. I don't know if you remember John, or if he was before your time. He told me that prison is like being on a ship but never going to port. Of course, a ship is very small, and therefore you run into the same people all the time. It seems like you probably run into the difficult ones much more often than the good ones. Therefore, prison is a great temptation because you in such close quarters. Of course, there are thousand other reasons, such as the heat and the lack of response by the authorities about the heat that are certainly great temptations.

I was thinking a lot as I was going home about the heat and the fact that you guys didn't even get dinner one night, and all the other small and large inconveniences and aggravations and even cruelties of prison life. The problems in this life do not compare to the blessedness of the next life. I think we all believe this, but we gotta really feel it in our heart. It must resonate with us and it must motivate us. It must be the reason why we are kind of people we don't feel like being kind, or we don't complain we feel like complaining, or we do the right thing when the wrong thing would actually give us some small advantage. This is the Christian life that I want to teach you, and that I am trying to learn myself. I don't pretend that I know it, only that I can teach it. By know it, I don't mean that I don't understand what I should do; I mean that I have not yet figured out the way to always do the things that I know I should do. I've told you before, and since you listen to me and take notes, I'm sure you remember – "a priest is a sinner helping other sinners not to sin". That definition fits me to a T.

I will end this letter with the life of St. Marina, aka Marinus. I will look for stuff like this and send it to you and everybody. Our reward is not fully realized until the next life. In the case of St. Marina she did not receive a reward until the end. It is amazing to see someone that was so humble that she did not justify herself even though she was absolutely not guilty of the sin she was accused of. It really doesn't matter in this life whether we are treated justly or not. What really matters is if we learn to live in such a way that we treat people justly. May God help you in all things. Pray for me, as I always pray for you.

St. Marina (beg 6th Century, commemorated Feb 12 (Feb 25 civil calendar)) was the daughter of a very rich Christian man. Her name was Mariam, and her mother died when she was a little girl. Her father raised her and brought her up well. When he wanted to give her in marriage, and to go himself and become a monk in one of the monasteries, she told him, "O my Father, why would you save your own soul, and destroy mine?" He answered saying, "What

shall I do with you? You are a woman." She told him, "I will take off my woman's dress and will put on the garb of a man." She rose up straightway, shaved off the hair on her head and put on the garb of a man. When her father saw her strong determination and persistent desire, he gave all his possessions to the poor, keeping only a very little for himself, and he called her Marianos instead of Mariam (Mary).

Then he went to one of the monasteries, and lived in one of the cells with his daughter, for ten years, fighting the spiritual fight. Then her father, who was an old man, died. St. Marina was left by herself, and she doubled her fasting, prayers and increased her asceticism. No one knew that she was a woman, and they attributed her soft voice to her intense asceticism and vigilant prayers.

Once the abbot of the monastery sent her, together with three monks, to the city on certain business of the monastery, and they lodged in an inn. That same night, one of the king's soldiers lodged in that inn, and he saw the daughter of the owner of the inn, and he defiled her virginity. He instructed her to tell her father, "that the young monk, Father Marina, did that to me." When she had conceived, and her father knew that, he asked her and she answered saying, "that it was the young monk, Abba Marina, who did that to me." Her father then became angry, went to the monastery and began to curse and insult the monks. The Abbot met with him, comforted and calmed him down and then sent him away. The Abbot then called this saint and rebuked her much. When she knew what had happened, she wept and bowed down and said, "I am young, I have sinned, forgive me O my Father."

The Abbot was furious with her and cast her out of the monastery. She dwelt outside of the monastery for a long time. When the daughter of the inn keeper had the baby, her father took him to St. Marina, set him down before her and left. She took the child, moved among the surrounding shepherds and nursed him with milk. She increased her fasting and prayers for the three years, that she was expelled from the monastery. The monks felt pity upon her and asked the Abbot to readmit her. The Abbot consented to their request and readmitted her to the monastery after he had laid heavy penalties and severe rules upon the Saint. She performed very hard labors, such as cooking, cleaning, and watering, as well as her regular monastic duties.

When the child grew, he became a monk. After St. Marina had completed forty years, she fell ill for three days then departed in peace. The Abbot ordered to take off her old ragged clothes and dress her with new ones prior to carrying her to the place of praying. When they removed her clothing, and found that she was a woman, they all shouted out saying, "God have mercy." They informed the Abbot who came, marveled, and wept because of what he had done to her. The Abbot then called the inn keeper and told him that the monk Marina was a woman not a man. The inn keeper went to where her body was and wept much. After they prayed over her body, they came forward to be blessed from her body. One of the monks had sight only in one eye, he put his face close to her body and immediately he gained sight in his blind eye. After she was buried, God allowed a devil to torment the inn keeper's daughter and the soldier, her friend, and brought them to where the Saint was buried and both confessed their iniquity in front of everyone. God manifested innumerable miracles through her blessed body.

May her prayers be with us and Glory be to our God forever. Amen.

Today, Coptic Orthodox say that Marina's body is kept at [Saint Mary Church](#) and has not decomposed. It is displayed to the public on Marina's feast day, on Mesra 15 (JAN 1) The Eastern Orthodox Church believe the relics of the saint were transferred to Constantinople, and from there in 1113 were carried off to Venice Contributed by [Mark Sadek](#)

If you see a man who has sinned and you do not pity him, the grace of God will leave you. Whoever curses bad people, and does not pray for them, will never come to know the grace of God. + St Silouan the Athonite (Writings, VII.4, VIII.6)

The trouble with normal is it always gets worse. Mother Gavrillia, on why it is so difficult to put the gospel into practice, and on why it is so tragic that we don't: "If we follow to the letter what the gospel says, nothing will be left standing. There will be such an earthquake! And then you will see what happens! Isn't that what the first hermits attempted to do, when they left by the thousands? A few years after the gospel was put into practice, the desert was filled with a multitude of hermits. Because they feared that by living in the World they would commit sin...Yet now, we have become accustomed to it. And we do all the things that are contrary to the principles of Christianity...."

God made us for one reason only. The Scripture says "God is love". We know that God is a Trinity of persons, each person being of the same essence, possessing as much "godliness" as the other, and each person fully loves the other and knows the other. God created us because He loves. He also created us in His image and likeness, which means we are not truly alive, or even truly human, unless we love. We must love as God loves, and then we are united with God, and our attributes of knowledge, appetite and will are in perfect agreement with each other and God. (Me)

"We have within us deeply rooted weaknesses, passions, and defects. This cannot all be cut out with one sharp motion, but patience, persistence, care and attention. The path leading to perfection is long. Pray to God so that he will strengthen you. Patiently accept your falls and, having stood up, immediately run to God, not remaining in that place where you have fallen. Do not despair if you keep falling into your old sins. Many of them are strong because they have received the force of habit. Only with the passage of time and with fervor will they be conquered. Don't let anything deprive you of hope." – St Nectarios

You cannot be too gentle, too kind. Shun even to appear harsh in your treatment of each other. Joy, radiant joy, streams from the face of one who gives and kindles joy in the heart of one who receives. St. Seraphim of Sarov

The spirit of lukewarmness reigns. There's no manliness at all! We've been spoiled for good! How does God still tolerate us? Today's generation is the generation of indifference. There are no warriors. The majority are fit only for parades. Godlessness and blasphemy are allowed to appear on television. And the Church is silent and doesn't excommunicate the blasphemers. And they need to be excommunicated. What are they waiting for? Let's not wait for someone else to pull the snake out from its hole so that we can live in peace. They're silent out of indifference. What's bad is that even people who've got

something inside have begun to grow cool, saying: "Can I really do anything to change the situation?" *We have to witness our faith with boldness, because if we continue to be silent we'll have to answer in the end. - St Paisios

Elder St. Porphyrios on the Work of the Holy Spirit...

"The Holy Spirit permeates everywhere. And that is why the person who is borne on and infused with the Holy Spirit also possesses the knowledge of God. He knows the past, the present and the future. The Holy Spirit reveals these things to him. Nothing of our actions is unknown to God; all are recorded. They are recorded and yet they are not recorded. They are born, brought into being, and exist, and yet they are not born. What you know now, God knows before the creation of the world. Let me remind you what Saint Symeon the New Theologian says in the Prayer of Preparation for Holy Communion: 'Your eyes knew my yet unaccomplished work; and in Your book the things I have not yet done are for You already written.'" - 'Wounded by Love'

"Ever let mercy outweigh all else in you. Let our compassion be a mirror where we may see in ourselves that likeness and that true image which belong to the Divine nature and Divine essence. A heart hard and unmerciful will never be pure." St. Isaac of Syria

"We can go wherever we want and do whatever we want, but that is not freedom. Freedom belongs to God. When a person is free from the tyranny of thoughts, that is freedom. When he lives in peace, that is freedom. He is always in prayer, he is always expecting help from the Lord - he listens to his conscience and does his best. We must pray with our whole being, work with our whole being, do everything with our whole being. We must also not be a war with anyone and never take any offense to heart. Let it be. Today we are offended by one person - who knows who will offend us tomorrow? We are constantly thinking about these insults, but we should just let them be in peace. We should never take them to heart. When we do the adversary will try to do it again, but if we just let the insult bounce off us, and remain peaceful, then people will give up trying to offend us. And people will ask you, "How come you are always at peace? Everyone else is nervous and easily offended, while you don't seem to be interested in this life at all. How did you become like that? How can you stay so calm? Well, that is how the Lord keeps us from harm." ~Elder Thaddaeus

The only legitimate reason or baptism...

Far from God, man is a prodigal. He loses his beauty and his worth. He has no father. He has no house. He does not have love. He has no friends. Everybody takes advantage of him. This is why, sometimes, from within his bitterness and tragedy, he seeks for God.

The desire for Baptism can be seen in precisely this perspective. He wants to obtain life, which is God, and he wants to have a personal relationship with God, who is his archetype. The quest for Baptism does not have a social character it should not be inspired by external, human questions. Rather, it must be placed within this perspective.

Someone wants to be baptized so that they can return from death to life, from that far country to his father's house from deprivation to abundance, from being an orphan to having a father. -- Metropolitan of Nafpaktos Hierotheos, "Entering the Orthodox Church, A Contribution to the Pastoral Ministry for the Catechism and Baptism of Adults", page 71

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