

Letter to a prisoner.

When we do not feel God, or hear Him, or feel His mercy.

2018-05-05

Tags: Prison Ministry; Prison Ministry Letters; Mercy; Theotokos; Jesus prayer;

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5-05-2018

Dear N.! Christ is risen! Truly he is risen!

This is our traditional greeting all through the Paschal season. It extends from Pascha (or Easter) until Ascension which occurs 40 days after Pascha. This greeting is modeled after the words said by the myrrh bearing women after Jesus had appeared to them and they had found out about the resurrection. They came back to the Apostles and said "Christ is risen!".

I'm very sorry and my heart is heavy because of the words of your letter. I do not think that you feel the joy of the resurrection. I sometimes do not feel it either because of my sins, but I think that your reasons for not feeling the joy of the resurrection are much deeper. If I had any holiness, and my prayers could reach up to heaven like those of the saints, my prayer for you would bring you happiness. But unfortunately, I am not holy, and even if I were, we need to struggle in this life in order to become like Christ. There is no happiness without becoming like Christ.

I told you that it is a blasphemy to think that Jesus Christ is not merciful but His mother is. That is true. I'm not criticizing you here, but only speaking the truth. God forgives all things, and he also forgives our ignorance. He forgives our brokenness. Your letter makes it very clear that you don't feel the mercy of God, although you are aware that His mercy exists. For some reason you just don't feel that He has talked to you or helped you but His mother has.

You ask a very important question, and it has a very simple and emphatic answer. The question is: "If Jesus doesn't accept the blasphemous then who will?". The emphatic answer is that Jesus does **ACCEPT** the blasphemous. Nobody else can accept the blasphemous. Nobody else has the power to heal the human heart. If your heart is inclined even a little bit towards God and you continue to struggle, Jesus will help you, and you will get stronger, and eventually you will actually feel God. I cannot tell you when that will happen or how it will happen, only that it will happen if you continue to struggle. It is difficult to continue to struggle especially when we get discouraged. I am praying that you would continue to struggle even though you are discouraged.

Certainly, we can pray to the Mother of God because her heart is merciful, and she will convey our deepest needs to her son, the only one who can heal hearts. Of course, she learned to be merciful from her Son who is all merciful. All of her power is only because her Son listens to her prayers, and He is inclined to help the needy and the sorrowing.

It is often mysterious to us as to why we do not hear God or feel Him. I understand some of the basic reasons, but nonetheless it is mysterious. Some of those reasons are because of our sins and our self-centeredness, and also because God's ways are not our ways and we don't understand Him. Knowing these things does not make us feel better as your letter shows.

I could certainly write many things that show that Jesus Christ loves us very much and is trying to communicate with us and that the problem lies with us and not with Him. The Scripture is full of proof that Jesus Christ loves us more than we know how to love ourselves or anyone else. We have broken hearts, and we have a disease – it is called sin. All of us are sinners, and the major result of sin is that it makes us dull in our spiritual vision and hearing and makes it difficult or sometimes even apparently impossible to see God and to know Him. Nothing is impossible with God. Many things are impossible with us, but nothing is impossible with God.

I'm going through a tough time also. I'm really pretty much having a tough time with the grief about Daniel. It's not so much missing him as feeling a form of alienation. These feelings are temptations, and I am trying to treat them as such. I have learned some tools, such as the Jesus prayer and praying to my guardian angel and the mother of God, and the saints – especially certain ones that are dear to me. I also pray for others who are suffering. Some of these people are suffering things similar to what I suffer, and many of them are suffering worse things. It's very important to have a heart that is open to feeling the suffering of other people. That's exactly what Jesus Christ's heart is like, and since our life is meant to be a time in which we become like Him, if our heart suffers for other people, it will not suffer so much because of our own problems. This is absolute truth, that must be experienced to be understood. My poor prayer is that you experience this truth and get much consolation from it.

There are two things that I desire very much for you. One is, quite frankly, that you to continue to come to our services and listen and pray and let God's mercy do its work in you. It might seem the things are happening too slowly but God is always with us and helping us even though we don't know what. I would be very sad if you stop coming to our services because you don't feel better. Even if you do this, I will not stop praying for you.

The second thing that I desire very much for you is that you pray as much as you can. If you cannot pray to Jesus, then pray especially to his mother and to your angel. It would be very good to pray with a prayer rope, or to use a Roman Catholic Rosary parents a prayer rope (but not to do all the prayers that are associated with the Roman Catholic Rosary). All you need is something that has beads on it.

I pray using a 300 knot prayer rope every day and, in the morning, I pray around 500 short prayers. Some of them are the Jesus prayer which I believe I have told you about: "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me". I also pray to the Mother of God multiple times saying something like this: "Most holy Theotokos save us". Sometimes, I only say one word, and let my heart say the rest without words: "Theotokos", or Greek word: "Panagia", which basically means "all holy". I also do the same sort of prayer with my favorite saints and my guardian angel: "Holy Guardian Angel pray for me". I also shorten this, and sometimes just say something like: "My angel...", and then I linger for a moment and let my heart say the rest without words. So, it is also with my favorite saints: "Holy Panteleimon pray for me", "Seraphim, pray for me". There many other saints that I asked to pray for me. Sometimes I add things such as when I'm thinking of you and I will say: "Holy angel, help N.". I try to take my time when I do this, and as much as I am able have my heart pray more than my mind (brain).

If you're only able to ask the Theotokos to pray for you, then at least do that. I know that she will take your prayers from a broken heart and bring them to her Son and her God and His mercy will help you.

I'm very sorry it was not able to see you this week, since you are on lockdown. Unfortunately, the third Thursday of this month when I normally would see you is the feast of the Ascension. I must be at home serving the Divine liturgy in my parish. That means I will see you until June.

You also said in your letter that: "All Jesus can do is deliver from Hell, that's about it". That's actually everything my friend. Your statement implies that you think Jesus Christ will not help you now. Actually, our sins put us in a kind of Hell even now in this world. Since you believe that Jesus Christ can deliver from Hell, all you need do is understand that he wants to deliver you from Hell now and not wait until later. After all, He told us that the Kingdom of Heaven is within us. In the Kingdom of heaven there is no sadness nor sorrow nor sighing, but only life everlasting. If the Kingdom is within us now, it must be that we can find a way to feel it now. Your sadness makes it very hard for you to feel this kingdom, but it does

not mean that the kingdom is not with you. You are right that Jesus Christ can deliver from Hell, but not that that's "about it". A better thing to say is "that is everything".

You tell me in your letter that you don't believe in the Trinity because Jesus is not merciful, but I think that you very much want to believe that He is merciful and that your sadness is keeping you from belief. God is not upset with you because of this, He is not angry at you. He is not some sort of malevolent force that will kill those who do not believe in Him as He wants them to. He is our father, and He sees our brokenness and wants us to be healed. Because of His great desire for us to be healed He sent his Son, who is also God, to become a man, and to heal the human condition. Just as it takes a lot of time to recover from a serious accident or illness, it takes a lot of time to recover from our brokenness and our sadness. You will be healed if you keep at it. I'm not going to stop. I will continue to pray for you. You must continue to pray for yourself and also for others that are suffering. Keep coming around. It's gonna get better.

I will end this letter with a simple story that I just got by email from someone. He sends me things because of correspondence regarding my son +Daniel. Sometimes I think, simple stories really help people. I hope that something in this letter, whether it be the story below, or my words above will comfort you in some way and give you hope and a little bit more energy. God bless you. In Christ, Unworthy priest Seraphim, who prays for you.

How to sustain in seasons of God's silence. By Faith Cho

How can we curate sustaining a healthy prayer life in light of past disappointments? When I was a little girl, I sought after God in the quietness of my room. I would bundle up in a blanket, stare into the darkness and whisper, "God, if you're there, please show me something." I would lie there for about five minutes, fully attentive for any sort of light show or grandiose response. After about ten minutes of uneventful silence, I would usually drift asleep. After a few months, I stopped asking. I guess I began to feel that if God truly were out there, He did not seem to care to respond to the likes of me.

I never really resolved the disappointment of my childhood prayers being unanswered. In my reasoning, I wondered why an almighty and powerful God would not find it worth His while to answer the prayers of a young child right in that instance. In due time, the Lord did make Himself known to me in very obvious ways. However, it took a while for me to take hold of the discipline of prayer.

When our prayers are met with silence, it's discouraging. Sometimes, the opposite of your prayers can happen, and boy, does that make you feel rejected by God.

The revelation of what had happened actually came to me as I became a parent. I realized that God does answer all prayers. But, He has a deeper purpose to His answers. He does not answer to merely give us what we want in that moment. He answers to give us what we desire in our lifetime.

It is the same as when my children ask for sugary cereal or another episode of television. As a parent, I care about their everyday wants. However, even more than that, I care about their lifetime desires. I know they would want to grow up to be healthy, powerful adults. I keep these deeper, greater wants in my heart as I decide how to cater to their immediate requests.

The same is also witnessed in history. Hannah wanted a son. Every year, she went to worship God with her husband and his other wife's family (1 Samuel 1). Year after year, she stood in front of His presence with no child by her side. I can imagine how much it hurt to wait, especially as the other wife provoked her. In those moments, you may wonder if God even hears your prayers. Is He some sort of sadistic teacher that is hoping that you learn something good from the torture you feel?

God's silence was not a sign of rejection. It was a sign of a deeper preparation at work – a deeper preparation to fulfill a greater purpose.

One day, the time was right, and Hannah's heart exploded with a new level of surrender (1 Samuel 1:9-14). She asked again for a son, and she dedicated this son unto Him. The fruit of this moment was a boy named Samuel, a prophet that changed the spiritual atmosphere of Israel.

God wanted to give Hannah what she wanted in that moment. However, He waited so that He could give her what she desired in her lifetime, which was to be a part of Redemption History.

The prophet Samuel would later anoint King David, who was the predecessor to Jesus Christ the Savior of the world. We can know for sure that God had this in mind, because at the end of it all, Hannah prayed with her own lips, "He will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed," — a direct reference to the coming Messiah. It is also the first mention of the Messiah as king in the Bible. It was the most unique and powerful revelation of its time, a time when the Hebrew people did not have a king.

I have watched jobless people remain jobless for longer they would have wanted. I have contended for cancer patients who have remained sick. Sometimes people pray for peace within the home, and things get worse for a time. But, now I know. I know...that I know... that I know — God is always answering. He cares about the desires that are behind my prayers. In fact, He cares about them so much, that He answers in His way and by His time. Therefore, I give Him praise — always.

And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him. (1 John 5:15)

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