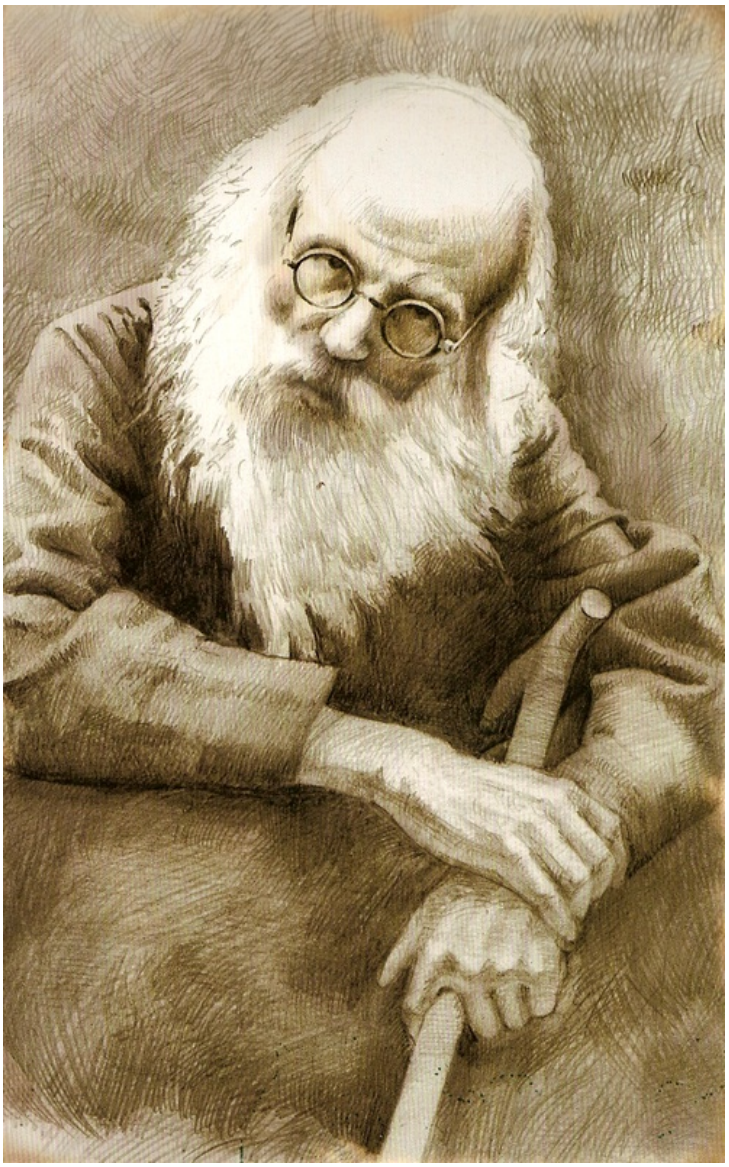
Orthodox Spiritual Letters

by Igumen Nikon Vorobiev



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Foreword

Hegumen Nikon (secular name: Nikolay Nikolayevich Vorobyev) was born on May 22, 1894 to a peasants' family in Tver Governorate. The family was far from doing well, and penury was Nikolay's permanent companion during his school years from the very beginning. After primary school, he studied at a non-classical secondary school in Vyshniy Volochok where his many skills and versatile talents remarkably revealed themselves.

Since the early days of his youth Nikolay showed an extraordinary zeal for the search of the meaning of life and of the truth. At school, he ardently flung himself into studying natural sciences, naively hoping to find there an answer to his question about what the reason for human living was. The blind belief in science easily ousted his, similarly blind then, belief in God. But sometime afterwards, Nikolay came to realization that empirical subjects as such do not deal with such concepts as truth, eternity and God; the very question about the reason for being does not belong to the subjects of the study by these sciences. On realizing this fact, he set about studying the history of philosophy with the usual ardent devotion, characteristic of him. First of all, he addressed his attention to the philosophy of Ancient Greece and Middle Ages, then his interest moved to the contemporary European, Russian and Indian philosophic schools. He learned German and French to understand contemporary Western philosophers better.

Because he had to earn his living by giving lessons to weak students after his own classes, there were only nights left for his own studies and reading. But his thirst for knowledge was so great, that often, left actually without a piece

of bread to eat, he would rather spend money on a book that interested him at that moment.

However, philosophy did not meet his expectations either, insomuch as each philosopher offered his own individual answer; and which one to believe was a big question. And the more mature became Nikolay, the more sharply he grew aware of the senselessness of the life within the system of the atheistic worldview that was followed by intelligentsia and young people in those days. If death and complete destruction of personality is the destiny of all people, why do they live, what is the purpose of their being?

Having lost faith in both science and philosophy, he entered a Psycho-Neurological Institute in Petrograd in hope to find an answer to the question about human "pith and marrow." But disappointment that overtook him there was even greater that in the previous school. After a couple of years of studies, he left the Institute. Spiritual crisis in its ultimate finality seized Nikolay. It was so deep and heavy, that the thoughts of a suicide would come to his mind.

Once in the summer of 1915, when Nikolay's state was that of blank despair, the days of his childish faith came back to his memory and like a thunder struck him with a possibility of God's presence. What if there is God after all? Then it is impossible that He would not reveal Himself! And the faithless Nikolay, as he was at that time, cried sincerely and wholeheartedly: "Oh, Lord, if You exist, reveal Yourself to me! I am seeking You not for some earthly egoistic purposes. I want only one thing from You – to know whether You exist or not.

And … the Lord did reveal Himself.

"*It is impossible to describe, - said later the Reverend Father, - "that effect of the holy grace, which assures one of God's presence so convincingly and with such force and obviousness, as to leave no doubt about it. The Lord reveals Himself*

like the Sun when it unexpectedly comes out from a dark cloud, and you have no doubt that this is the Sun and not a lantern kindled by someone. The Lord revealed Himself to me so strikingly that I fell down clinging to the ground with the words: "Oh Lord, glory be to You, thank You! Let all the sorrows, all sufferings there are on earth come unto me – grant me to suffer through them all but only let me not fall away from You, not lose You!"

That was how an astonishing change of his soul came about. An incredible miracle took place that was, in fact, a natural response of God to sincere, full of energy and every effort, strivings of a young man.

In 1917, he entered the Moscow Theological Academy, but two years later the studies at the Academy were terminated. He returned to Vyshniy Volochok and found a job of a teacher of Mathematics in one of the secondary schools there. A few years later he was dismissed for refusal to work on the Easter day. After that he left for Moscow where he began to serve as a psalm reader in the Sts. Boris and Gleb church. From there, together with Rector of the church Feofan Semenyako (following Feofan's consecration as bishop) Nikolay moved to Minsk. On March 23, 1931, Nikolay took monastic vows and was ordained first as hierodeacon, then as hieromonk with a monastic name of Nikon. Two years later in 1933, precisely on the memorable day when he took monastic vows, March 23, Father Nikon was arrested and convicted under Article 58 (political) and sentenced to a five-year exile in Siberian penitentiary labor camps – to build the city of Komsomolsk-on-Amur. Miraculously, as he put it, the days of his work at the construction of the city were taken into account of the imprisonment years, and he was freed in 1937.

Returning from the Siberian camps to Vyshniy Volochok, Father Nikon found shelter in the house of an acquaintance, surgeon Mikhail Lvovich Sergievskiy, who received him at the risk of his own life and for whom Father Nikon

served as an aide of various services, as an all-purpose servant. Memory eternal to Mikhail Aleksandrovich!

At the doctor's house, Father Nikon had to pass yet another course of a hard discipline schooling him in tolerance. The doctor's wife Aleksandra Efimovna and her sister Elena Efimovna were fervent atheists. They were openly making fun of Father Nikon's religious faith, ordination and monastic life. However, one day, their mockeries suddenly stopped as a result of a wonderful transformation in the life of these women. They gave up their belief in atheism, both became sincere Christians, and one of the sisters secretly took monastic vows and became a nun.

When the churches were opened again for worship, Father Nikon resumed his priestly service. In 1944, the Bishop of Kaluga appointed him to the position of the Rector of the Annunciation church in the town of Kozelsk. He stayed there in the habitation of Shamordino nunnery sisters, leading a strictly ascetic style of life. Father Nikon had changed several places of service, including Tula, Belev, Efremov and Smolensk before the next appointment in 1948 brought him to a remote and poor parish in the town of Gzhatsk (now Gagarin) in Smolensk region to serve as the Rector of that parish church.

Father Nikon found profound consolation in celebrating divine services, especially the Divine Liturgy. He introduced compulsory celebration of the Divine Liturgy on Wednesdays and Fridays, in addition to Sundays, the only day for the Divine Liturgy as had been rule before him. The manner of his performance of divine services was simple, reserved and natural. He prohibited anybody's presence in the Alter, which offended local men. He always preached on Sundays and feast days. The force of his sermons was widely known. The authorities of Gzhatsk had been warned before his arrival describing him as an active preacher known for a strong power of influence. Indeed, he spoke forcefully and whole-heartedly. The main ideas of the

message he proclaimed were about the importance for us to see our sinfulness and to repent; to realize the fallen state of our being, because this is what will lead us to the salutary humbleness and bring forth love, which is not the fruit of our imaginations, but which is truthful Christian love. He did not permit to sing concerts during partaking of the Holy Communion by the clergymen inside the sanctuary - during the “Zaprichastnyy” moment of the Communion. He also prohibited some Cherub Songs, “Mercy of the world..” and a few other songs, saying that those were no prayers, but an ill-spirited performance before God, inspired by demons.

He was a courageous and intelligent man. On the one hand he never touched political topics in his sermons, but on the other – he had no fear when reading out Patriarch’s Christmas and Easter Messages to skip over what he called “political trumpery.” The parish church, that was empty before, began to be crowded by worshippers.

Father Nikon passed away on September 7, 1963. He was buried outside the Alter of the Ascension cemetery church, which had been the place of his service for 15 years. It is worth mentioning the atmosphere experienced by the worshippers at the Liturgy on the day of Father Nikon’s funeral and at the following service for the repose of his soul. That was an atmosphere of peace and heartfelt joy which melted up the commonly shared sincere bereavement.

Father Nikon willed it that we preserve our faith by an all-out observance of the commandments of Christ and by repentance; that we refrain from vanity devastating the soul; and that we take guidance for our spiritual life from the wisdom of the works of St. Ignatiy (Bryanchaninov), whose faithful follower Father Nikon was.

Letters to Monastics of Kozelsk

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My dear and most-respected Father Miletiy:

Although the proceedings of God's judgement are concealed from us, the Lord, however, has revealed to His saints what is useful for those seeking salvation; and they, in their turn, wrote down many things for our comfort and instruction.

Thus, the holy men with whom God was pleased, tell us that in the last days, there will be no monasticism at all, except may be only some appearance of it in some places, without monastic laboring.

People seeking the Kingdom of God will fail to accomplish works of righteousness as such. Their salvation will be achieved by their endurance of sorrows and diseases. Why will there be no good deeds accomplished? - Because people will have no humble spirit, whereas, without humbleness, works they might accomplish may bring more harm than do good; they even may become destructive for the laborer, insomuch as achievements make people become haughty and fall into temptation. Only under the supervision of very experienced spiritual people some worthy deeds may be accomplished, but there are no such people any more, they are nowhere to be found. The supervision now comes from the Lord Himself, and partially, from the books - for those who have them and are able to perceive their content. How does the Lord execute His supervision then? He lets us suffer through persecutions, insults, diseases and long-lasting old age with its burdens and iniquities.

The parable of the householder who hired laborers to work in his vineyard narrates that those who came to work about the eleventh hour received the same payment for the work as those who had been working since early morning. This parable is applicable to us, the present-day monks and all people seeking the Kingdom of God, who have idled away the daytime of their earthly life. But out of His exceptional mercifulness, the Lord calls on inviting us in the last period of our life to work in His vineyard by the endurance of our old age, our diseases, by enduring the loss of our kin or of their sufferings. If, without complaints and with all humility we bear these hardships, our brief suffering will be rewarded, as if we had been laboring our whole life, like were rewarded the laborers who came to work about the eleventh hour. Moreover, St. Anthonios the Great , Abba Ischirion and other ascetic fathers said, that those laboring for salvation in the last days by bearing hardships, will be glorified higher than the Holy Fathers of the early days.

St. Seraphim of Sarov, the wonder-worker, agreeing with the early Holy Fathers, used to say that should people have known what blissful things await those who labor for salvation they would agree to live in a cell with creeps gnawing their flesh for one thousand years in order that they should not to be deprived of the future wheal. *(Motovilov conveys these words as follows: "If this our cell had been full of worms, and if the worms were to eat away our flesh all throughout our earthly life, we should willingly express agreement to such life in order not to be deprived of the heavenly joy, that God has prepared for all who loves Him")*

Accomplish your souls with tolerance. May the Lord help you to carry the crosses appropriated for you on to the end. Amen.

***

Dear Father Miletiy,

I received your letter. Sorry for the belated reply. Works, trips have taken away much time, and - what is more important - I find it difficult to write to you, because you are much more experienced than I am, you have seen more and know more. What good advice or comfort can offer I, a man who has led a life of vanity and self-will? But on your request, I am ready to try and share with you what I find astounding and comforting: a boundless Universe created by God - how great the power of God must be?! All and everything in the Universe as a whole and in all its parts (in a human body, for example) exist in a wonderful harmony – how immense the wisdom of God must be! If everything is harmonious in the world created by God, there must be harmony – all things must be in co-relation, in accord – in all the properties of God. God's "heart," that is love, must be as great as His power and wisdom.

This incomprehensible love is revealed to us in the incarnation of God's Son, the Lord Jesus Crist, in His suffering through spitting, beating, and finally crucifixion. Inconceivable and boundlessly great the love of God is indeed. The entire angelic world was confused while witnessing the incarnation and crucifixion of the Creator of the world out of love for the fallen humankind.

Apostle John asserts by the Holy Spirit that God does not only have love, great as it is, but that God Is Love.

Love bears all things, according to Apostle Paul; it bears our sins and demerits, infirmities, intolerance, grumbles and so on.

Once the believers in Christ acknowledge their infirmities and sins and ask forgiveness for them, the love of God would cleanse and heal all the wounds

of their sinfulness. The sins of the entire world get drowned in the sea of God's love like a stone thrown into water.

So there can't be any space for despondency, hopelessness and despair!

The Lord has brought His Divine Nature into one whole with human nature, washed off the sins of all believers of the world by His Blood, adopted all fallen people into His sonship , took them to heaven and made them partakers of the Divine life and ever-lasting joy.

Today's earthly woes, diseases and the hardships of the old age make us rejoice in the future life. If the Lord suffered for us, how can we, at least in a very small measure, not take part in the suffering of Christ?! Our soul, the image of God in us, is willing to be a partaker of the sufferings of Christ; and only out of our faint-heartedness and iniquity we fear them, while, in fact, we might be strong enough to endure them.

The Lord, out of His love for us, compelling us to sufferings and diseases according to our strength, grants us patience to endure them so as to make us participants of His sufferings. Those who did not suffer for Christ here will be hit by qualms of conscience in the future century, because it was possible to show love for Christs by enduring woes, but they chose to avoid them.

We will feel qualms of conscience for having not reciprocated God's love.

Let us wholeheartedly thank God for everything He chooses to send upon us. It is not in wrath, nor for our punishment the Lord sends grief and diseases upon us, but because He loves us, although not all people realize this. But, as they say, be grateful for everything. It is important to fully entrust oneself to the good will of God, Who loves and saves us, Who leads us though minor difficulties of the earthly life towards blissful eternity and glory of His children.

Let it be so for all of us. Amen.

Forgive me, dear Father, for daring to write to you. May the Lord kindle in your heart deep gratitude to Him, as well as the feelings of awe and absolute faithfulness to His holy will together with the willingness to endure everything out of love for Him.

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Dear Mother Valentina, thank you for remembrance and kind wishes.

I am growing more and more aware of how low humankind has fallen; hence – the importance of our Savior Jesus Christ. Accomplished deeds won't save any soul; only Christ offers salvation to people. He is the Savior of all who believe in Him and realize their need in the Savior – that is those who think of themselves as sinners unworthy of the Kingdom of God. Jesus Christ came to call precisely this kind of sinners to repentance and salvation.

The 2nd volume of the works of Bishop Ignatiy (Bryanchaninov) is fully devoted to prayer as such and in particular – to the Jesus Prayer. From time to time try to read the instructions of the Fathers of the Church in the "Otechnik" *(a set of life stories of the Holy Fathers of the Church, ascetics and monks and of their edifications)*. This book is very refreshing.

May the Lord bless you all, enlighten you and comfort.

I just wanted to finish the letter, but on second thoughts decided to add a few words.

The state of entire mankind and of every person as an individual is that of the fall and corruption; and an individual alone, by his/her own efforts is unable to improve his/her being and acquire salvation and become worthy of the Kingdom of God. Jesus Christ is Who restores people – this is the reason of His coming to the world; but He restores only those who believe in Him and acknowledge their own corruption, or in our usual wording – their

sinfulness. This is precisely what the Lord Himself says: “I have not come to call the righteous (those who believe to be good and righteous), but sinners, to repentance – those who have realized being corrupt, sinful and are powerless to improve themselves and who, addressing the Lord Jesus Christ beseech His help, or to be more precise, are imploring the Lord to have mercy and cleanse them from the ulcers of the sin and heal them from the leper of the spirit, and to grant them the Kingdom of God not for some good works accomplished by them, but exceptionally out of His God’s mercy.

People choosing the right spiritual way begin to see more and more of their sins until ultimately the spiritual sight allows them to see themselves completely affected by sin and spiritual leper; until ultimately they wholeheartedly feel their being all-out mired and impure and become aware of being unworthy even to pronounce the name of God. However, they can just like the publican, not daring to look up, with a heartfelt pain exclaim: “O, God, be merciful to me, a sinner.” Staying in such spiritual state of mind for a long time, a person comes out from it justified, as the publican was.

But if people believe that they are good and consider that some of their sins, even serious ones, were not intentional and happened through no fault of theirs but because of circumstances or interference of other people or demons, such people will inevitably fall into a spurious state of mind - into obscured temptation and offense. May God save us all from it!

To keep on the right track, people must heed to their own state of mind and behavior, checking by Christ’s commandments their words, thoughts and aspirations, never justifying themselves, but trying, as far as it is possible, to improve, never accusing others, but confessing their sins before God and gradually skilling humbleness before God and other people. And in result, God will gradually reveal to such people their fallen nature, their corruptness, and their indebtedness to Him. The debt of different people is different: one

person owes five hundred denarii; another one might owe only fifty, but irrespectively, neither is able to pay off the debt.

It is important that the Lord, out of His mercy, may grant forgiveness to both. So, there exists no righteous person who would not need the Savior's mercy.

And here is where God's wisdom reveals itself: a downright sinner will sooner humble himself and come to God and get salvation, than an outwardly righteous man. As Lord Jesus Christ said, publicans and sinners precede many outward righteous in the Kingdom of God.

By the great wisdom of God, sins and demons help man's humbling and through it get salvation. That is why the Lord did not ask for the tares to be picked out from the wheat: without tares, pride might come forth, while God stands against pride. Pride and haughtiness cause man's destruction.

What conclusion is to be drawn from the above-said? Get to know your iniquity and sinfulness; do not accuse anyone; do not justify yourself, but humble yourself – and the Lord will raise you in due time.

Oh, God, be merciful to us, sinners. Forgive me and pray for me.

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My dear Mother Valentina!

First of all, seek the Kingdom of God and His truth. Aren't people able to provide for themselves? If you are able to work physically for the sake of your body, you will likewise be able to work for the sake of your soul. Sure, your heart needs no less care that your vegetable garden does. If man pays his laborers for their work, will the Lord leave those working for him without reward? And you all know how to work for Him. You should just pray and carefully watch yourself, counteract intriguing, do not quarrel over truffles, cede to each other, even if this might be to the disadvantage of your work

(ultimately you will gain much more), hurry up to make peace with one another, unveil plots and designs, take the Holy Communion as often as possible, and so on.

Is it possible to combine all these tasks with our daily duties? Not all – because of our weakness- by quite a few are still possible for us to do. When doing nothing, we should at least be regretful and distressed and try to work up a humble spirit, but we should never try to justify our idleness, because self-justification deprives us of spiritual growth. If we do not do what we should and do not tolerate abuses and sorrows and because of that do not feel sorry and do not become humble, then I don't know what to say. What, in this case, will make us better than non-believers? This is why I beg you all: endure insults and reproaches, injustice done to you by other people, carry burdens of one another, if only just to fill in the lack of spiritual work. First of all we should realize that the insults that we get, that all the griefs that happen to befall us are well deserved. The reward is tally with our deeds.

As you will know, in the last days, salvation will be achieved through desolation. Are we an exception from this law? It was not without reason that the Holy Fathers advised us to think as often as possible about death, about the Judgement Day and about the inevitable account that we will have to give to the Lord for our every deed, for every word, for our every innermost desire, for our slyness and attachment to the ways of the world, for vanity and for all things that we would prefer to conceal, but which are known to God and to our conscience. You should think about this more often.

God bless you all.

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Dear Mother Valentina!

I have received your letter. Thank you all.

Dear Mother Valentina, the closer people are to Got – not in their dreams, but in actual fact – the more humble they become and the more sinful they fill they are, much more sinful than other people. This is how the Holy Fathers felt. There are many examples testifying to this. You will undoubtedly recall them.

The publican also considered himself as a sinful man. Realizing his sinfulness, he did not try to justify himself, but asked the Lord for mercy and forgiveness, and he got both. All people have an unpayable debt to God. No deeds can pay off this debt. The Lord Himself says that even if people fulfill all instructions (that is, all commandments), they should yet think of themselves as unworthy slaves, who must do whatever their lord tells them to do. So, we, breaking the commandments, must have our soul's inclination similar to that of the publican – not trying to identify our merits but disregarding whatever good deeds we might have accomplished, because irrespective of our good works, we remain unworthy outsiders and slaves. Only God's mercy grants forgiveness to the repentant believers and incorporates them into the Kingdom of God.

For this reason, the Lord and the Holy Fathers prohibit us from attempts to work up a state of emotional exultation. The work of our soul should completely focus on repentance and all that leads to repentance; and whatever comes from God's will come to us when the place is clean and when the Lord wills that. If an ascetic's heart is not grieving over his sinfulness, such an ascetic, no doubt, must have fallen to temptations. Especially those who have chosen a life of prayer should address God with the prayer of the

publican and should be spiritually as distressful as the publican was. Otherwise they would be deceived by demons and acquire haughtiness, conceit and enticement. May the Lord save us all from that.

This is an answer to your wish to know what the "publican's dispensation" means. The Lord told us in the parable about the publican and a Pharisee how we should pray and what our soul's dispensation should and should not be (the dispensation of the Pharisee). After the Savior's coming and sufferings the holy fathers, replaced the prayer of the publican by the Jesus Prayer. The meaning is the same.

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I wish you God's peace that is beyond any reasoning and that unites people with Him.

In order that this peace may come to people, they should undertake an effort to acquire a peaceful dispensation of the soul, to tolerate demerits of one another and to be able to forgive all kinds of insults and abuses of all people. Carry each other's burdens and thus fulfill the law of Christ. Those who have fulfilled the law of Christ will also achieve the peace of Christ that surpasses human reason. This peace makes people immune to the earthly sorrows and sufferings; it extinguishes any interest in this world, but draws people up above and kindles in their heart love for all and everything, love that covers all the demerits of their neighbors, , love that makes people to care more for others than for themselves. All people believing in Christ, but the more so monastics, are called to this peace.

If there is nothing of the kind in our life, let us at least weep before God deploring our being poor-spirited and miserable, our being away from all that is good; let us refrain from accusing and reproaching one another when ourselves being unworthy and under an imminent threat of being rejected by

the Lord. Babylon could have been healed but it was not healed. How long will the Lord tolerate us? The truth of God is also related to God's love. Under the law of God's truth, Adam was expelled from the paradise; the flood happened, Sodom and Gomorrah were burnt down, the Lord Jesus Christ was crucified for our sins.

Let us belittle ourselves before one another and before the Lord and mourn our incurable ulcers and let us as far as we can commit ourselves to loving one another. Then for our humbleness and for our toleration of others, the Lord will tolerate us, according to the rule: "*with what measure you mete it shall be measured to you.*" But if without struggle we give in to passions, what if not rejection will await us? The Kingdom of God is the kingdom of peace, love, joy, meekness and of other similar features, whereas differing from these characteristic features will deny us access to the Kingdom of God. We must change our character, bemoan our decaying soul and beg, like a leper, that the Lord may heal and clean us. Ask and it will be given you, seek and you will find, knock and the doors of repentance, weeping and tenderness will open to bring forth peace and salvation to you. Let it be so!

I wish you all good things, temporary and eternal; and may the Lord grant you wisdom and strength in the struggle against the enemy and help you defeat him by humbleness and lamenting heart.

I wish you to stay well. May the Lord bless you all. My best wishes to all. I ask your forgiveness; and may the Lord grant you His forgiveness, mercy and blessings!

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How is the health of Marisha and Katya? Let them not unreasonably overtire themselves with work. This is sin. Work should always correspond to one's capabilities and strength. They should not spend all their strength on bodily

work and leave a few sleepy minutes for the soul. Can such behavior be correct? One should remember the words of the Savior: first of all seek the Kingdom of God. This is a commandment among others, like "do not kill," do not commit adultery," etc. Breaking this commandment is often more harmful than an accidental transgression. It imperceptibly makes the soul grow cold and lose sensitivity often bringing it to a spiritual death (let the dead bury their dead!) This renders our soul inert, without spirituality, without the ardency in fulfilling the commandments, becoming neither hot nor cold, whom the Lord threatens "*to bring forth out of His mouth.*" We should, at least once every day for a few minutes to bring ourselves to stand the trial of the judgement of the Lord, imagining as if were dead and were standing before the Lord on the fortieth day afterwards awaiting His command where to go. Standing in our thought before the Lord awaiting His judgement let us weep and, appealing to God's mercy, beg Him to forgive our enormous unpayable debt. I advise you to make it a daily practice until death. It is good, better in the evening, but if possible at any time of the day and even much better - several times a day- to concentrate wholeheartedly on a prayer to the Lord begging Him to be merciful and grant us His forgiveness. Do take some possible care about your soul. This is a testament for us from God and from the Holy Fathers. All things pass, our death is close by, but we do not think about what we will submit for the judgement and do not care what verdict will be pronounced for us by the All-Righteous Judge, Who knows and remembers every move of our soul and body from our youth to our death, soft and subtle as some of them might be. What will be our answers?

That is why Holy Fathers would here deplore and beseech forgiveness of the Lord, so as to avoid weeping at the Last Judgement and in the eternity. If they needed to deplore their doings, so much should we, the damnedest. Why do we think that we are good when we live carelessly, thinking exclusively about

worldly things? God, forgive me for teaching other people when doing nothing in this regard myself.

The point is that we read about and know what should be done, but do nothing, as if waiting for somebody to act on our behalf. We risk repeating the fate of the barren fig tree. Cursed will be everyone who does the work of the Lord with negligence. And how do we work for our salvation? How do we pray, how do we observe the commandments of God, how do we repent*? "A pole-axe is there at the roots of the tree."*

Forgive me and please continue to pray for me and yourself. Remember me to all and may God's blessing be with you. Write to me.

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May the Lord grant His peace and salvation to you.

I have received your letter. The Lord has visited you with a disease, because it was necessary for your salvation. The way into the Kingdom of God lies through many sorrows. Such is the spiritual law. Apostles, martyrs, the righteous and saints –all came into glory through many great sufferings. The Lord corrects whom He loves and beats every son, whom He accepts. Evidently there is no other way to the Kingdom of God but the narrow way of the cross, and therefore you should not fall into depression when you are ill and weak, but instead you should cheer up spiritually and take comfort in the thought that the Lord has become closer now and that in the future He may accept you among His children, if to the end you remain faithful to Him and without complaints endure all sufferings which He may find necessary to send to you. Who will endure to the end will be saved. We should appeal to God as often as possible and beg Him to grant us endurance when difficulties become overwhelming. As a poisonous snake we should avoid grumbling. The imprudent thief has not only increased his suffering by grumbling and

swearing, but also perished himself for ever; the prudent one, on the contrary, realizing that he deserved the requital awaiting him, alleviated his sufferings and inherited the Kingdom of God.

The morning prayer of St. Macarios the Great, says: “Oh, God, cleanse me, a sinner, who has done nothing good for Your sake.” If this is how the great men pleasing to God felt, what is there for us to hope for? Our only hope is to look forward to the mercy of God. Without remembering all our good works, we must, like the publican, appeal to God from the bottom of the heard, saying: “O God, merciful be to us, sinners!” If the publican was forgiven all his sins thanks to this prayer alone, isn’t it clear that we also should believe that the Lord will be merciful to us as well if we pray as sincerely and heartily as he did? Our Lord Jesus Christ teaches us to pray and hope for the mercy of God. No disease can prevent us from addressing the Lord with our repentance at least once during a day.

There is no case known when the Lord would deny forgiveness to a repentant. The Lord does not forgive us only if we do not forgive other people. So, let us make peace with all others in order that the Lord may make peace with us.

Let us give our forgiveness to others to get the Lord’s forgiveness for us.

May the Lord’s protection be with you and may He grant you endurance and prayer and through them - spiritual joy that overcomes all bodily diseases and all the sorrows of this transient world.

The end is close… but you care not. Be of good cheer and strong at heart.

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The Lord wants salvation to all people, but not all people in actual fact want it. All people want to be saved in word, but in deed, they reject it. How do they reject it? They do not reject it by their sins. There were many wayward

sinners, such as thieves, Mary of Egypt, and others, but after they repented their sins, the Lord forgave them and granted them salvation. Perished are only those who commit sins and do not repent, but instead justify committing them. This is the worst and most pernicious thing to do.

The Lord says: "*I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance*." What do these words imply? According to the Word of God, there are no absolutely righteous people, none at all; all people commit sins. All people are sinners, and the more righteous man becomes, the more of his sins he is able to see. This is the purpose of the Lord's coming – to call sinful people to repentance and through repentance bring to salvation those who will acknowledge their sins, confess them before God begging Him to forgive them. The Lord sweeps aside those who do not realize their sinfulness, who are being sly trying to justify their sins. Thus the Lord during his presence in the world rejected Pharisees, who positioned themselves as an example of righteousness for other people to follow. This is a perilous state of mind. May God save every person from it.

St. Sisoy the Great asked angels who came to take his soul to pray and ask the Lord to give him some more time to live for repentance.

St. Pimen the Great said: "*Believe me, brothers, I will be flung where the Satan is.*" And he (Pimen the Great) was able to raise the dead. In the same way, all other holy men would sincerely deplore their sins and their unpayable debt to God.

We, unlike them, out of our egoism, conceal our sins and justify ourselves, being sly and crafty, even when having one foot in the grave. Marisha, once again I ask you: look through your life, repent all you may find to be sinful; tearfully, like the Holy Church does, prostrating, ask the Lord, saying: "*Grant me to see my trespasses.*" If people do not see their sins, this does not mean that they do not have them. This means that such people are not only sinful,

but are also spiritually blind. If our spiritual father or anyone else accuses us of sins, we should not justify ourselves, but beg the Lord to reveal our sins to us and allow us to repent before our death and receive forgiveness here, on earth. I say again: if you do not realize your sins, this does not mean that you do not have them.

Self-justification and Pharisee-like behavior lead to the very bottom of the hell. Seek to be saved! May God bless you and Katya. Seek salvation for both of you. Don't be doleful and hurry to make peace, if the enemy happens to deceive you.

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You feel so distressed and at a loss because of a minor temptation, but should you? The Lord has allowed this to happen to you so that you may realize your iniquity and see how many things there might lay concealed in one's soul and what an effort one should undertake to cleanse oneself from passions and become a sanctuary of the Living God and achieve salvation. When human iniquity opens to you, you will turn to the Lord appealing to Him from the bottom of your heart, like drowning Apostle Peter did. Then you will get help from the Lord and will understand that the Lord is indeed close to those who appeal to His name in the fullness of the heart; then you will fall to His feet with gratitude, weeping over all your sins by which you used to offend the Him. Then you will become humble, stop accusing other people and will begin seeking Lord's forgiveness for your sins committed in the past and asking Him to keep you from committing new ones and not let you offend Him any more by violating His commandments. You will also see the vanity of this world, and that your attachment to earthly things, quarrels and feeling bad about certain things, words or doings – all these are nothing to be sorry

about and argue over and lose the peace of the soul, and may be salvation itself.

You already know what the word "mother" means and how to be sick at heart, jealous and so on. But should the Lord have chosen to open the innermost of your soul, you would probably have fallen into despair. However, all bad things, passions, all intrigues of demons, all grievances and sufferings are overcome by humbleness. To exercise humbleness, we should just say, like the prudent thief, addressing to the Lord: "W*e have justly received the due reward for our deeds. Remember us when you come into your Kingdom."*

If we succeed in saying these words on all occasions in our life, without any grudges regarding God or other people, we will immediately feel good and find ourselves on the right spiritual road. If we happened to have grumbles against someone, we should humble ourselves even more and say: "Oh, Lord, I am indeed an unworthy person, and you alone can save me." "*Lord, if this is your will, you can make me clean,"* said a leper, who lost every hope for ever being healed, but he heard in response: "*I will: be clean."* Then the Lord touched the leper and healed him.

Let us also, fully realizing our spiritual meagerness and powerlessness, turn to the Lord as our only Savior and with a humble heart beg: "Lord, if you will, you can heal us and save." And the Lord, crucified for our sake, will answer: "I will: be clean." Our soul will clearly hear this answer and will be strengthened to endure with gratitude all the sorrows of the earthly life, just like the thief did, who tortured by great pain did not grumble hanging crucified on the cross the whole day until the night fell. May the lord help you, dear Marisha, to realize this and humble yourself and give yourself over into the hands of the Lord. Repeat incessantly: "Lord, may your holy will be done; do to me whatever you will, but do not let me have grumbles against you, and save me."

So far you have only read and heard about the struggles, weeping and pains of the heart. Now the Lord lets you live through this knowledge and choose whether to endure the pains of life without grumblingand with gratitude to Go, or give in to grumbling and then – which is worse - to despair.

The decision is yours. *Give blood and receive spirit.* The time of infancy is gone; it is time to set about doing the work of grownups. God will not despise contrite and humble heart, and "*the Devil's net does not touch the humble."* (The Vision of St. Anthony the Great about the Net.)

If you give yourself to grudging and start to accuse other people and circumstances, you will then move on to grudging against God and may come to despair. May God save you from this.

May the Lord grant you peace at soul, spiritual meekness and wisdom. May the Lord grant you endurance and strength to carry the burden of your own passions and of the passions of those around you.

Forgive me if I upset you. Live peacefully with Katya. Do whatever you can to have peace with her. I would like to say once again that your salvation is related to Katya. Try to cede to her in everything, even if this might be of disadvantage to the work you do. What good will it do to people, if they acquire the entire world, but lose their soul? So you should better try not to cause harm to your soul because of trifles. Preserve peace and remember that she also has passions, just like you have them, and that it is more difficult for her to struggle with them. If you show charity to her and do not accuse her, so also the Lord will show charity to you and will not accuse you.

I sympathize with you and ask the Lord to help you overcome the temptations….. Study yourself and do not boast that you are free from this or that vice. You have them all, but not all have been revealed to you; proud and foolish words, as well as boastfulness may punish you with suffering.

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Try to think about death as often as possible and about who will meet you there – angels , full of light, or dark and spiteful demons, one glance at which can drive one mad.

Our salvation consists precisely in that we should try to escape demons, get rid of them and enter into the Kingdom of God, into the ever-lasting reality of blissful joy incomprehensible here. All our efforts here are worth that destination. Demons are proud and they seize the proud, so we need to become humble. Demons are irate, so we need to acquire meekness not to come into their possession as those of their kind in spirit. Demons are unforgiving and merciless, so we need to hurry to forgive and make peace with those who offend us and be gracious to all. Such our behavior should always be.

We should suppress evil qualities of our soul and inculcate angelic characteristics described in the holy Gospel.

If after death, demonic features prevail in our soul, the demons will capture us. If here on earth we come to realization of possessing evil-spirit qualities and seek God's forgiveness for them, and in our turn forgive other people, the Lord will forgive us and destroy all features of evil quality and will not give us over to the possession of demons. If we do not accuse anyone here, the Lord will not accuse us there either.

Let us live in peace, forgiving one another, always trying to make peace as soon as possible; let us confess all our sins to God and, while we still have time, beseech His mercy and beg Him to save us from demons and eternal torment. Let us not play with our fate in the eternity. May the lord grant you to be reasonable. Amen.

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Above all, try to preserve peace with those of your household, and whenever get distressed, hurry to ask and to give forgiveness. The enemy will try to break peace and keep you off apologizing. Pay no heed to him. Defeat him by appealing to Lord Jesus Christ for help – continue to say the Jesus Prayer until irritation, anger and spite are overcome. Keep praying to the Lord until He forgives you and until He restores peace in your soul. Peace at heart is the sign of God's forgiveness.

So, try not to give in to irritation and anger, but once you did, ask forgiveness from neighbors and from God. Afterwards, try to attend morning and evening worships; if you pray alone, pray at least for fifteen minutes, saying prayers which you know and at the end – the Jesus Prayer. Say all prayers with awe and fear of God and with a feeling of hearty regret. Absent-minded praying is no praying, though the Lord accepts it from the beginners, yet learning how to pray. Be it as it may, but one day people must learn how to pray properly.

If you abstain from anger and preserve peace, your prayer will be proper, but if you are emotionally upset, ill-at-ease at heart, you won't be able to pray.

Prayers said in anger are not acceptable to God. He would hand over such worshippers to unmerciful servicemen – to demons – who would lead them away from the spiritual "wedding" and prayer into the darkness of empty and at times dirty thoughts and intentions. This will happen unless we humble ourselves and appeal to God begging him from the bottom of our heart to forgive us and unless we, in our turn, forgive all other people; in short – unless we establish peace in our hearts according to the words: where there is peace of spirit God is present; but where there is no peace, the enemy and darkness, and burdens overwhelming our heart and other elements of the hell will reign.

Humbleness has power to collect our thoughts and ideas into thinking about God, while animosity, vanity and pride disperse thoughts. If we have our thoughts widely scattered, something must have gone wrong with our soul; the enemy must have gotten access to our soul, and our repentance and our prayer to God beseeching his assistance and forgiveness are overdue. We likewise should try to find out why this happened to us. Sometimes this happens – even in the absence of anger – because of excessive fussiness, attachment to worldly things, long talking about secular daily life and because of accusing other people. A good-natured, heartfelt and attentive prayer is the way to the Kingdom of God that is within us. If we cannot pray like this, then we must have displeased the Lord by something.

Be considerate towards yourself. Preserve peace and seek reconciliation without delay; as often as possible – always, according to the commandment – appeal to the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, pour out all you trespasses and troubles before the Lord; act in compliance with your conscience – and you will feel good and receive salvation. No pains, no gains! Work for God, and you will be saved. Your life will be good here, and after death you will acquire blissful eternity. Pray for me.

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I learned from your letters that you often lose temper and have no peace with your sister and that sometimes you feel that you might just as well stick your head in the noose. Meanwhile, it is high time for you, and especially for Marisha, to know that there is Devil and demons, which, out of their extreme spitefulness, are anxious to destroy every person in any possible way. This is how they do it: they usually focus their energy on human passions and blow them up to the effect of a destructive force for human life.

Take for example, a man who is disposed to drinking. They will compel him to drink more and more , drawing him further on to hard drinking, fistfights, to murder and to suicide and thus achieving this man's inevitable and ultimate destruction. As regards other people, they will induce some to steal, others – to become haughty, conceited and pride, alluring them into spiritual temptation and thus destroying them. The evil spirits have got many other ways to bring people to eternal perish.

Similarly, the demons are seeking to destroy Marisha and you, or at least one of the two. How are they trying to achieve this goal? You know only too well how. Demons instigate quarrel between you heating you up to the effect that you are ready to beat up each other, upsetting you and making your consciousness so clouded that you begin pondering the idea of being hanged rather than to continue to live like this, as a better outcome of the distress. If you or anyone, for that matter, begin cherishing this idea for a brief moment, demons would try with even greater force and with the help of other, more powerful demons (bringing along "*seven other spirits, more wicked"* than themselves, according to the Gospel)to inculcate the idea of suicide deeper into your mind. If man does not resist this devilish idea resolutely and employing all his strength, but instead show acquiescence, weak though it may be, God might allow demons to have this man hanged for his passions, unrepentance and anger; the demons would be only happy to provide a rope or a towel and assist this man in committing suicide.

Katya, when you are calm, think about how clouded in mind one must be to agree to eternal and horrible torment because of some insignificant distress. Hard as life might be here, even if we had to live one thousand years suffering through enormous hardships, the end will come one day, whereas in in Hell, there will be no end to torments.

Just imagine yourself captured by a gang of one hundred bandits who would torture you whole day. How would you fill? Here on earth you would find relief, if only in death. A suicide will be seized by demons, who are much worse and crueler and much more repulsive - by many thousand times - than all existing bandits; and they will be free to do whatever they want to torture their victim; they would be all-powerful there; besides them, there is only fire that sheds no light and *"is not quench"* and "*their worm that dieth not "*... Those would be tortures without end... Horrors! To ponder the idea of suicide because Marisha is being bad or malicious, because she rejects something, that she does not want to do as she should, or because she offended you. If you are unable to tolerate so little inconvenience, why don't you fear hellish intolerable torments?

You would say that at such moments you are not thinking, but just feeling that you might just as well to stick your head in the noose.

Where there is God there is peace, light, wisdom and joy. Where there is Devil, there is disorder, darkness of the soul and obscurity of mind, despair and readiness to evil-doing.

I have spoken to you about this many times. Perhaps, I should say again, for the last time, to warn you: Don't offer your hand to the Devil. Pray to God when you are calm and ask Him to keep you off any obscurity not to allow demons to take the upper hand over you. The Lord will protect you, if you decide against falling down into the Hell. Remember Judas. He permitted the Devil to penetrate and he died an awful death and doomed himself to eternal sufferings at the bottom of the Hell.

Katya, don't treat lightly such things. Try to keep your mind off such thoughts. May the Lord help you understand the above said and escape demons' hands here and in the future life, so that, having endured a little

here, you may enter into the Kingdom of God, into everlasting joy and blissfulness.

Be healthy bodily and spiritually.

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Peace and salvation be to you from our Lord Jesus Christ!

It is time for you to know that the enemy won't leave in peace those who are seeking salvation, which is why war against him will not end until their death. However, nobody is able to defeat him by one's own power alone. It has been precisely the mission of Crist's coming to the world - to destroy Devil's cause. The Lord is fighting against Devil together with those who always beseech His help. Man, in his turn, should also counteract sin and devils with all his power resorting to measures pointed out by the Lord, apostles and holy fathers. Weapons against the Devil for Orthodox are fast, prayer, sobriety, and humbleness. Without humbleness, no weapons will help; neither will the Lord help the conceited and proud, who will inevitably find themselves caught in the Devil's net.

Those who want to defeat the enemy and to overcome passions, but in actual fact do not struggle against them with given weapons, are not likely to win. The more meek and humble is a man, the sooner he will defeat the enemy. It is worth mentioning here that rancor destroys the power of prayer, because the Lord does not accept the prayers from a man at war with his neighbors or from a rancorous man, but sends such men away to make peace first. Without a prayer accepted by God, man will be alone, and the enemy will completely submit him fully to his power. Even a rightly fighting fighter will not defeat the enemy at once. It takes time and patience. Fight correctly and try to be at peace with all people; learn to be sober and to pray incessantly. Be humble

before people and God and you will be empowered to throw down giants one by one and become free from the captivity of sin.

No spiritual father will think of the person, who has sincerely repented his sins, worse than before, no matter how serious the confessed sins might be. This is a trick of the enemy to make a repenting man conceal his sins and be denied forgiveness. On the contrary, the confessor, as a true believer, would rather think better of this person. Such is the mysterious quality of confession.

Regarding your aunt and other people, remember the rule: "*Carry one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the Law of Christ."* Endure all reproaches, all scolding and aspersions cast on you, deserved and not deserved alike, because, if you do not challenge them with objection, they will help you to clean the soul from sins and ensure the growth of humbleness. Repeat after the prudent thief: "*…we received due reward of our deeds; Lord, remember me when thou come into thy kingdom."*

No nuns will be arrested, except those with a long tongue. Let them keep their tongue within their teeth, if they do not want to find themselves behind the bars.

Tear yourself from this world and its vanity, forgive and be at peace with everyone, stay at home as far as this is possible, don't be idle, but pray or sing psalms, read a little, do things that need to be done, saying the Jesus prayer and keeping God in mind when doing them. Repent and weep before God deploring your innumerable sins, and the Lord will forgive you and accept you into eternal life and blessedness. Forgive me.

***

V. wrote to me that you were crying over my letter. I am glad that you did, if your crying was crying in God, not because of the wounded pride. I sincerely wish you to "see your transgressions" and weep regretting them not only for three days running, but all throughout your life until the end, so that you do not weep for ever after the death.

Both our age and health condition suggest that our end is soon to come, when we have to appear before the impartial Judge Who knows our innermost. What will be his decision about us? What could justify us before Him? There is only one possibility to get proper evidence: during out life time, to come to the realization of our unworthiness before God and before people, to feel sincerely that we are void and useless, and life debtors to God, and therefore have no right to be demanding in relation to other people; and on acquiring full comprehension of this truth about ourselves, to beg for the absolution of our sins here and for the forgiveness of our unpayable debt. We should also tearfully and regretfully admit that we have prodigally wasted our spiritual and bodily forces and have been constantly offending God's love; and beg the Lord that, after our death, He may, despite all our sins and errors, receive us in His mansions of the righteous, as He received the prodigal son. This is what we should care for.

Every night before going to bed, we should look through the events of the day assessing our behavior and regret all the violations of the commandments that we might have committed. We should likewise remember our past life and repent whatever sins we committed and continue repenting until we feel that the Lord has forgiven us. It is also important to ask the Lord to help us not to repeat these sins and not to offend Him and His Divine Will, revealed in His commandments, by the new ones.

We should fear lest we might offend our neighbor, as it is easier to make peace with God than with one's neighbor. Try to be of humble disposition to all people and try, as far as possible, to be of service to other people; do not reproach, do not judge or accuse other people. Make peace with everyone, forgive other people's failures, so as to have yours forgiven by the Lord. This is a term established by the Lord Himself: "*If you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive your trespasses.*" (Mt.6:14, 15)

Try now, as we have entered into the holy season of the Lent, to pull yourself together and to reconcile yourself with people and with God. Cry over your unworthiness and over your coming death, and forgiveness with hope for salvation will be given you. God will not despise a broke and contrite heart - no other sacrifice and works of charity would help you. "*You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. My sacrifice is a broken spirit…*" As St. Isaak of Syria put it, *who cries over his sins is higher than he who raises dead.*

Fervently beg the Lord to grant you the most precious and most serviceable gift – the ability to see your sins and to cry over them. Who has got this gift has got everything.

May the Lord bless you and grant you a clear mind . Please convey my greetings and God's blessing to all.

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Those who deny being sinful and refute all accusations, just and unjust alike, will be denied salvation. Unlike these, people, whose sight opens for them to see their sins, are able to see not only some of their sins, but the all-out distortion of their soul which is restlessly producing all kinds of sins. More than that: even good works are permeated with the poison of sin. When

people get a clear vision of this, thanks to their own and other people's experience on many thousand occasions, they become absolutely confident that it is impossible for them to heal the leper of their soul by their own forces, grow truly humble (show humbleness that is not artificial or self-assured) and stop rebuking other people and themselves get offended.

Such people will see the same, as their own, fallen nature in other people and feel sorry for them as their fellow-sufferers. They will stop to praise some and degrade others, and stop for good being accusatorial, insomuch as on the one hand, all people are fallen, and on the other – human criteria of judgement are not accurate and therefore deceptive, so, hard as he may try, man cannot be objective. How can people justify their sins then? How can they feel insulted if somebody accuses them having no - in their opinion - apparent proof of their fault, when we all have uncountable number of quite repulsive sins that are concealed for other people by the graciousness of God, Who covers our sins?

We should receive consolation not from our imaginary merits, but from incomprehensible Love of God for us, fallen, and from the Cross of Christ, "*which is the image of thy glory and of thy bearing the ulcers of our transgressions."* Jesus Christ came to the world to restore the fallen image of humanity. Our ever-lasing gratitude is due to Him with His Father and the Holy Spirit from the entire creation!!!

Let all our merits disappear in front of Him, and let us appeal to God together with the publican, saying: "God, be merciful to me, a sinner. God, be merciful to us, sinners." Then, we will depart from this life, like the publican departed from the temple – justified; and enter into the "sheepfold" and find an eternal "pasture."

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You ask me to write to you. Just like a drowning man is clinging to a straw, you, too, in a state of soul's discontent, are seeking support from those near you. My life experience brought me to the conclusion that nobody and nothing is able to help us: neither man can help himself, nor other people can, but only the Lord. The disposition of your soul does not change for the better and sometimes even becomes unbearable, because you have little hope and trust in God. Remembering your sins, you correctly find yourself deserving punishment in the future life and also here, before death; and after death to be doomed to ordeals. It is possible to fall into blank despair, should one think so, forgetting about God's love. May a Christian have such thoughts? If it had been possible for people to be saved by their righteousness, why would Lord Jesus Christ have to come to the world and suffer? No man has entered into the Kingdom of God by force of his deserves alone. Man should understand the following: 1) his decrepitude, wickedness, being fallen, his all-out wrongness, etc.; 2) to become convinced by his own bitter experience that he is unable all by himself to improve himself, though he should nevertheless incessantly wage a fight against his wickedness and deplore such his condition; 3) he should address the Lord as the publican did: "*God, be merciful to me, a sinner.*" "I am perishing, drowning in the sea of my iniquities; save me, Lord Jesus Christ, as thou used to save all who turned to thee before me – thieves, publicans, harlots and others."

God is Love. Out of love for the fallen humanity, God did not hesitate to offer his gracious sacrifice: God the Father sends His Son to be crucified; God the Sun obediently fulfills this duty until His death on the cross; God the Holy Spirit does not loathe coming into the sinful soul of man to cleanse and save it. What more is there for the Lord to do for our salvation? The Lord assured

sinners that He did not want them to die but to live. "*God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.*"

This means that salvation is insured for everyone who believes in Christ and asks Him to save from sin and eternal sufferings. The Lord promises forgiveness and mercy for repentance, so that if we ask, we will always get, according the Lord's own words. The entire world was created by the Word of God, and by the Word of God, the world maintains order and does not turn into chaos. The same Word of God promises forgiveness of our sins and an eternal life in return for our faithfulness and repentance, the proof being the embodiment of God's Son and His sufferings on the Cross.

You believe in all this. Why then do you have doubts about your salvation? How can you suggest that the Lord will allow you to suffer here or after death beyond your forces? "No, sir!" Your gloomy mood, disease, despondency and yearning are devil's doing. Don't offer your hand to him, banish all such thoughts by calling the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the publican's prayer, thanking God for all things, for His love towards humankind, for His forbearance of your sins, for being merciful to you and to all people, for your illness – thank Him for each and every thing, commit yourself to His holy will and mercy – and relief will come.

You suffer because of little faith; you focus your attention on your own self, on your sins and forget about God's love. Try the other way round. Always think first about the mercifulness of God, Lord's sufferings on the cross for the sake of our salvation and then about your own sins. Let your sins incite you to say the publican's prayer, to delve deeply into praying, but not be a reason for despair.

Be wise! Do not give up to the slyness of the enemies; scorn them, do not talk with them and remember the Lord saving us. May the Lord enlighten you here and in the future life.

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The situation of almost all of us could be likened to that of a man standing in front of a picture depicting a lavish feast: the table in front of us is laid with all kinds of viands, but we remain hungry. Someone else's bread cannot feed us. In similar way, we are reading the Word of God and the words of the Holy Fathers, and in the similar way, we often pray: we pronounce the words of strange prayers, once said or written by other people, but our soul remains hungry, undernourished here before the death, ready to die unfed.

When time comes for the assessment of our deeds, it may happen so that we will have nothing to present – our talent has not brought forth any fruit, and what is even worse: we will not be able to give back the talent that was given to us, because, like the prodigal son, we wasted it leading a sinful life of vanity, while teaching others how to live. Poor we are! What shall we do? We must listen to our Lord Jesus Christ – this is it!

You ask how to pray. Our Lord Jesus Christ told us to pray like the publican did and to appeal to God, like the widow appealed to the Unjust Judge seeking justice. The Lord teaches us to realize our meagerness, our unpayable debt, to realize our guiltiness before God, to forget all our good works (in fact we have got no good works and even if there are some good works accomplished, they are also defiled by all kinds of dirty alloys, such as conceit, self-exaltation, covetousness and others.) So, like an insolvent debtor, like a prodigal son, ask God for mercy – that is for the redemption of all your iniquities. Do not ask anything else, but only mercy.

As soon as man comes to realization that his soul is completely distorted by sin and is covered by ulcers, and that he by his own forces is unable to heal himself; and when he sees his death approaching him with its sufferings, it will be clear to him that his only hope and asylum is in our Lord Jesus Christ. Until that moment the Lord is usually far from us, or, more precisely, we are far from Him, but at that moment, we begin to see Him as our lone Savior, Who has come down from heaven to save us, Who took upon himself our sins and suffered for them, Who has covered by his love all our iniquities; and Who promised to forgive us, if we have faith in Him and if we repent our misdoings. He has come to cleanse our soul and body, and to unite the repenting sinners to Himself in the Sacrament of the Holy Communion already here, on earth, as a pledge of our unity in the future life; He has come to have us adopted by His Father and through this adoption allow us to share the eternity of the Divine glory and beatitude. This is what Christianity consists in. This is what God's love and mercy for the fallen humankind is about.

Sorrow, inadequacy, permanent remorse, the "*worm that never dies,"* and fire that is unquenchable – this is what is in store for those who disdain God's love and are not fully appreciative of God's sacrifice for us. "*Let all mortal flesh keep silence, and in fear and trembling stand"* before the Cross of Christ and before God's love that is calling every sinner to salvation through faith and repentance. The Lord Jesus Christ has not come to judge the world ruining itself in sins, but to save it.

Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand! Sinful men, be aware of your perish and your guilt before God, do not seek justification in your good works. Realize your infirmity and powerlessness to get rid of your sins, past, present and future. Appeal to the only One who is Almighty and All-Merciful, the One who is the Savior; and He will forgive, cleanse and call us His own; He will alleviate our grief, cast away our despair, rid us of suffering and usher us into

His eternal Kingdom, as He did with thieves, harlots and other sinners,. This is what repentance implies. Amen.

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It is not for the first time that you are writing to me about your fear of death. If you focus on looking at any single object, you will see clearly this object, while other objects around you will be obscured. The same is true with the fear of death. If you look upon death with the eyes of the "old man" and focus on the sufferings at the death-bed, they will frighten you with their enormity. The demons will also do their part to add to your fears. If such your mood persists, no wonder you'll be upset. One should approach death in accordance with the Word of God, like Apostle Paul and all saints did - seeking absolution and staying with Christ. One's earthly life is a penitentiary exile. It is good to be released from prison or labor camps, but it is much more rejoicing for one to exit from the darkness of the earthly life.

You would argue that it is good if one goes to the Kingdom God, but what if hell is the destination? What prevents us from getting into the Kingdom of God? As was said to us, fulfill the commandments and you will be saved. Because we are impotent, wicked, subjected and accessible to demons, the Lord equipped us with repentance and other sacraments. If our repentance is sincere, the Lord will forgive us and will cleanse our soul from sinful ulcers and promise His Kingdom. If you repent your sins seventy seven times a day, you will be forgiven seventy seven times. If you have no trust in the Word of God, then, of course, you will have fears, fall under the influence of demons who will torture you. You, apparently, like the Pharisee, want - though may be unconsciously - to rely on your works of righteousness. But you should better be like the publican and seek your salvation relying exclusively on the mercy of God rather than on your good works, and then you will depart from this

life, as the publican from the church – justified - and enter into the Kingdom of God.

Please pay special attention to this side of the problem, remembering that God has created people not to suffer, but to enjoy Divine happiness. The heavens are rejoicing about every repenting sinner to receive salvationt. To die is to be born, and there is hardly a birth that passes without pain, but this pain will turn into joy, because it is a birth into the Kingdom of God. Deplore your every sin, feel sorry for every ill thought, for having little faith, for doubting, for the senseless fear of death; be sorry and repent at the same time. In this way, you will calm down and acquire peace at the soul together with a firmer trust in God's will. Besides, the whole Church is praying on our behalf: "*A Christian ending to our life: painless, blameless, and peaceful; and a good defense before the dread judgment seat of Christ, let us ask of the Lord.*" You too, join in this Litany of the Church. May the Lord grant you wisdom and comfort.

Dear Sister, do not rebuke anyone, otherwise you will not get rid of your fears; for the Lord will not forgive you, if you do not forgive your neighbors and if you rebuke them. First, cast out the beam out of your own eye to learn to cast out the mote…

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Please accept my best wishes on the occasion of the great feast of the Nativity of Christ and for a Happy New Year.

You will remember prophesies of the early fathers of the Church about our time. They said: people will be saved by the endurance of sorrows and diseases and by repentance. We have no deeds to serve our advantage. We constantly break Christ's commandments during all our undertakings. Therefore, there is nothing left for us to do but to repent, endure and believe

that our Lord Jesus Christ, who has come to seek and save whoever is lost, will also save us, as we are beseeching his forgiveness and salvation. We must firmly believe in this. Those placing their hope in the good works are building their house on sand. People's salvation is achieved through the mercy of God. It is God's gift to the fallen humanity which believed in Christ and realizing its fall is appealing in the voice of the publican: "*God, be merciful to me, a sinner."*

As for human deeds, our Lord Jesus Christ's words are these: "*When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, we are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do."*

This means that we, as servants and creation of God must fulfill His will, that is, all His commandments, but whether or not man who has fulfilled all God's commandments will be let into the Kingdom of God is for the Merciful God to decide. Humbleness, but not deeds, is what appeals to the mercy of God. It is right of people to fear death and get prepared for it, but to fall prey to despair and lose spirit over it is the result of the devil's work.

The Lord told us to be ready to die at any moment. The dreams prompting our desolation and despair are of devil's doing. Dreams coming from God bring tenderness of the heart, make us humble and strengthen our trust in the Savior, Who has come to the world and borne His Cross for the sake of the fallen, not for the alleged righteous, who claimed (falsely) to be worthy of the Kingdom of God. The latter are arrogant men, and their righteousness is fake. All the saints considered themselves to be great sinners.

But you know all this very well. I am just reminding you of some things. The idea of giving out all your possessions or of giving up work for food – comes from devil. Work as much as you are able to, and place your hope in God, Who feeds the entire Universe. Who is approaching Christ with faithfulness and observing His commandments as best as he could and repenting his sins, will

reach Him and be with Him after the death. “I will not cast out who is coming to Me,” He says. This is the good news addressed to all people. There is no reason for a Christian to despair. Be quiet and at peace.

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May the Lord help you to live through this vortex and sail across the sea of life’s ups and downs and come to anchor. This is very difficult, especially for the young people. Always turn to God and the Mother of God for help. Be sure that if man stands firm against committing sin, the entire Hell will do no harm to him, because God’s help will always be there for him. If man is disposed to sin - first in thought, as it were - and is not rejecting such thoughts, as a poisonous snake, the enemy will find access to this man’s heart, and the Lord will allow for the sin to be committed. Similarly, the Lord will allow for man’s fall as a reaction to his arrogance, pride or his constant reviling of his neighbors.

That is why people must be vigilant against cherishing some viper either in their thoughts or in the heart in order to escape its stinging. Only by vigilance, by restraining his senses (the sense of vision, the sense of hearing and the sense of touch) and by calling the name of God as often as possible, can man withstand all enemy’s attacks and avoid committing great sin. We must resort to the name of God to kill all sinful thoughts and feelings, generated by our wicked nature or by demons’ work, before they grow and take root.

There is no other way to cleanse oneself and escape both the miseries of human sinful nature and those caused by the enemies and their weapons, except by being vigilant and by praying incessantly. Be enduring and laborious. Fight and do not offer your hand to the enemy; be faithful to the Lord, and He will not leave you alone, but will stand by to defend you against

any enemy, even if it were the whole world rising against you. "*God is with us, understand this, O, nations, and submit yourselves for God is with us."* May God bless and keep you safe.

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Today, on the Day of the Beheading of St. John, your letter, so sad and grievous, so low in spirit, as if you were imprisoned, has reached me. Even if imprisoned, you needn't be so fainthearted. Just as the weather is changing, so also all people are given to inner changes. Do we need to fall into despair because of bad weather in autumn, when it is wet and dirty, though sometimes we may feel it difficult to cope with it? We bear this unpleasant weather, because we know for sure that spring and summer will come again. You, too, should believe that your yearning will pass to be replaced by rejoicing. Novices, like you, usually experience two different conditions: 1) there are some who will one day feel as if they were in paradise.. but the next day - cool off and begin suffer from a burdensome boredom and yearn for something different; they will not listen to advice, cease being obedient to their supervisors; and feel what you are feeling now – and as a result, they (a) either leave, or (b) bear their depression, become humble and acquire - through the knowledge of themselves – repentance, humbleness and the lost paradise and begin feeling incessant gratitude to God and to all who helped them to settle down; and 2)there are others, like you, who at first will feel yearning, depression, faintheartedness, who will be defiant and ready to leave and go anywhere, feel disgust to all spiritual things, be rude to people around them, will make plans for leaving, and so on and so forth.

These are attacks of the enemy of our salvation assaulting the newcomers with a big army of evil forces - to hinder the access to the Kingdom of God that is within us. Judging by your present difficult state, which is but a weak foretaste of what hellish torments might be, you can imagine the opposite: if

there are hellish sufferings, there must be an ineffable joy and blissfulness, that no eye has seen, that no ear has heard, and what has not entered into heart of man, what is concealed within us and what is the Kingdom of God. This is what we are commanded to seek above all: "*seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness…"*

How to seek it? Just like all other people did before you – by faith, obedience, prayer, by enduring inner and outer sorrows, but watching and restraining yourself, by rebuking yourself and permanent repentance and by refraining from rebuking other people, in short - by undertaking every effort, that brings forth humbleness. Humbleness will be followed by the joy in the Holy Spirit and by the Kingdom of God. You have started with sorrow and faintheartedness. This is good. With the time, you will feel better and better, and the convictions acquired by you will grow stronger and stronger. Be assured, that now, from time to time, you will feel comforted by God, as he wishes that every man be saved and come into the comprehension of the truth. God does not send to man more temptations than he is able to withstand.

Remembering that the enemy attacked you in order to prevent you at your very start from going along the road towards salvation, fight him with a brief prayer – better, the Jesus Prayer – as well as by tolerance, labor and obedience. Also, what is most important, do not connive at thinking about how good your life was before, that you could have sought salvation at home as well, that you could have settled your life like other people, etc. Reject such thoughts, because such thoughts bring one into a dispiriting mood. If you cannot do away with these thoughts, just think that you might have been imprisoned for five or ten years. Try to draw as vivid a picture as possible of your life then, and your present conditions would look as paradise to you. Indeed, it is very easy in your situation to make a mistake and be convicted under the existing harsh law.

The Lord has shown His mercy to you, and now you should thank Him for this and for all other occasions, and especially for that He has chosen you to be among His friends. Take your time, dear, to calm down when you are able to see yourself and all who are around you in the right light. Now you see all things in the wrong light, as they are presented to you by the enemy. Do not find fault with anyone. Listen to what the senior people tell you to do and do as told without objection and grumbling. If you have free time, read prayerfully the Psalms or the Gospel. At least these books are available. Try always with full attention and heartily to say the Jesus Prayer. One trick of the enemy in your depressive condition leads to another one, inducing you to heed to them and waste away your time.

Take an effort to overcome such mood by endurance, prayer, humbleness, and gratitude to God. The Lord is near at hand. He is watching your heart. If you had some love for Him, you would be happy for a possibility to devote your life to Him and would be ready to endure anything. Remember the life stories of St. John the Forerunner, of the Savior, of the Mother of God, of the martyrs and of the righteous people. What not had they to endure! Does your life come into any comparison with their deeds and sufferings? Read life stories of the saints (they must be there to find) and compare their life with yours. Write to me about everything in detail, and I will try to respond as far as I am able to. Be of good cheer, dear. May the Lord be with you and may He not leave you without His help and comfort.

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Why are you so desperate in your letters? Are you the only one there experiencing difficulties? The external difficulties are not what matters in your case – I think you also understand this. The disposition of your soul is it. Wherever you go, you will not go away from yourself and from the enemy. Remember that the spiritual law declares: … we must enter into the Kingdom

of God through many tribulations; "*if any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me*"; "*the Kingdom of God is taken by force;* "possess your souls in your patience you; who endues to the end, will be saved; you will suffer in the world; the world will hate you, and if you intend to serve God, prepare your soul for temptations. … etc.

The Holy Fathers formulated this law very concisely and forcefully: "Give blood and receive Spirit." This is the law for all seeking salvation to abide by. The life stories of all the saints confirm the validity of this law. The example - one for all - is set up by our Lord Jesus Christ; this example has been followed by apostles, martyrs, confessors, and by the righteous. Theirs are telling and widely-known examples. All who ever intended sincerely to lead a devout life in Christ were – though in lesser degree than the saints - persecuted, insulted, and had to bear inner and outer diseases and sorrows.

Besides, you must know that the early fathers predicted that in the last days, those leading monastic life, will not get salvation through their deeds but through enduring sorrows. It is important to know that the multiple sorrows and diseases that befall man are the clearest indication of this man being chosen by God and by God's love for him. And the other way round: if a man considering himself as a true believer has got no sorrows or diseases to bear, this, according to Holy Fathers, is evidence that this man is not in Lord's favor.

Now try to apply all the above-sad to yourself. The Lord wishing your salvation, loving you, sends to you what all people without exception need – afflictions. But you do not understand this and see your tribulations as something you would rather do without and even find them detrimental. Detrimental as they might be for your sinful and fallen human nature, they are not detrimental for your soul. It is also true, that they are detrimental for the "old man," but they are salutary for the new man. The enemy knows this

and he perturbs you with wrong ideas, stirring up impatience in your soul and making you judge other people, disapprove the ways of their life; disapprove of your superiors, etc. You must see this as tricks of the devil, confirming this knowledge by experience, and stand up against the devil. According to God's word, sorrows and sufferings during the earthly life are not evil, but the good gift of God; "*For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him , but also to suffer for his sake"* (Phil. 1:29)

Different people bear the hardships that are important for the salvation differently, each depending on on his/her own individual disposition. If person believes God's word about the necessity and inevitability of sufferings for his salvation, if he comes to realization of his innumerable sins – by word, by deed, and in thought – and finds that the sufferings befallen him were in fact a much softer punishment than what he really deserved; if he humbles himself before God and before other people, the sufferings would feel easier, and with the time bring forth inside man what is dearer than the whole word with all its worldly goods, which Apostle Paul described like this: "*Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, no have entered into the heart of man the things, which God has prepared for those who love Him."* (I Cor. 2:9)

Man who grumbles over his afflictions and diseases looking for whom or what to blame for them , be it other people, demons or circumstances, will do the utmost to escape them, and the enemy will be ready to help him in this. He will show him sham offenders (authorities, rules, neighbors and many other sources of his misfortunes) and instigate animosity and hatred of this man towards his imagery offenders along with the wish of taking revenge and of abusing them. As a result, this man's soul will be plunged into the darkness, despair, hopelessness; the man will be anxious to be elsewhere and hide himself, even if only underground were the possibility for the escape, so as not to see or hear his imagery enemies, while listening to and pleasing his only real and mortal enemy – the devil, who is inculcating in him these evil

thoughts and feelings, intending to ruin him and even to lead to suicide, the final, irreparable perish.

If you want to find peace of the soul, consolation and salvation, humble and bring yourself under God's strong hand, and He will rise you. In other words, accept everything that happens to you as things coming from God's hands rather than from other people, demons or by force of circumstances, for indeed nothing can come about without God's will. People and circumstances are only God's tools, often not aware of what they were doing.

Lord Jesus Christ announced to all people that His upcoming suffering on the cross will not be people's doing. His sufferings will not be the work of Pharisees, Scribes, nor of Pontius Pilate or Judas, for they are only tools. "*The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?"* says the Lord. Not people, but His Heavenly Father gave the cup of sufferings to Jesus Christ for the redemption of the fallen humanity. The cup of our sorrows is not given to us by people either, but by the Lord. The Lord God has suffered for our sake, why then, tell me, shall we not suffer for our innumerable sins, which we even do not see? We must ask God to let us see our transgressions.

If we are granted to see our sins, we will feel how heavy they are and see how unacceptable to God man with sins is, as well as how important it is for us to get God's redemption and purification of our leprous soul. Then we will understand why we should prostrate before the Lord weeping, like a sinner woman, and beg Him, like the publican: "*God, be merciful to me, a sinner."* "God, do with me whatever you wish, send unto me any sorrows there are, but only forgive me my sins and cleanse my leprous soul and do not deny me your Heavenly Kingdom and do not hand me over to my enemies – demons."

Humble yourself before God and like a prudent thief say: "I receive the due reward of my deeds; God, remember me in Thy Kingdom." Don't be alike the other thief, who was rebuking all and everything, blaming other people for

his sufferings, which made him feel worse until his ultimate perish. Unlike him, the prudent thief resigned himself, turned to God and found consolation and alleviation of his pain, and rejoiced foretasting upcoming freedom from his sufferings and a blissful life in paradise - "*today, you will be with Me in Paradise."*

The Lord has done everything for our salvation, so also, we should work for our own salvation, trying to follow the example of our Lord Jesus Christ in our actions, thoughts and feelings – that is, behave in compliance with His teachings offered to us in the Gospel. If you, too, take an effort to become a schoolgirl of the Savior and live according to the commandments of the Gospel ; if you begin to sincerely deplore your intentional and unintentional transgressions and repent; if you try to preserve peace with your neighbors and humble yourself before them; and if you begin to ask forgiveness for all things done wrongly, you will soon feel God's gracious mercy sent unto you ; you will forget all your sorrows or will find them very easy to overcome, and you will begin thanking God for the lot He has predestined for you.

"*Learn from Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."* (Mt. 11:29)

You will also find rest and joy, but not in changing places. You will find rest and joy only in the commandments of God, especially if you are peaceful, humble, unjudging, repentant and praying. Apparently, you pray little and reluctantly. Learn to look for solace from God in prayer, and you will not "*depart void."*

Letters to Other Different People

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I have received your letter about Fr. Vsevolod (Schpiller). The very fact that you are disturbed, witnesses to your being in the wrong. *"Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou clearly see to cast out the mote of thy brother's eye."* There is a deep psychological dimension in this advice. If a man gets himself cleansed from sins and as a result has received a clearer vision of things, he will: 1) see things in a different light and be able to assess them correctly; 2) have love in his heart for every creature together with inconceivable feeling of compassion and desire to protect everybody from suffering, from any possible damage and detriment. *(see St. Isaak the Syrian, Word 4)* This is when it is possible to teach one's neighbor and only if there is God's will and His blessing for that; then the word will be effective and useful, will be healing and not wounding. Until we get corresponding skillfulness, we ought not to impose our teaching on others. The Righteous Father Nil Sorskiy never spoke from himself, but laid out opinions of the Holy Fathers. If he did not find an answer in their writings at once, he would not say anything on this subject either until he found the opinion on it once expressed by the Holy Fathers. We, meanwhile, ignorant as we are, are always ready to harangue on a problem just because we might have heard something about it, or just because "it appeared to us to be so or such." An intelligent listener will immediately see the inanity of our words and shame us.

We all are in a state of the "ugliest delusion," as Venerable Symeon the New Theologian put it, which means that we are lost beings living in the darkness of the devil's slavery. Only few are liberated by God from this situation. How

can one blind person guide another? But you continue to teach everybody, no matter what. Stop doing it!

The publican did not teach, but humbly repeated saying: "*God, be merciful to me, a sinner,"* not only attending worship in the temple, but always, having the same "dispensation" of the soul – otherwise, he would not be able to pray in this way at the temple. Was he, or any other person in such state of mind, fit to teaching others? No, of course, not. Meanwhile, the publican's disposition of the soul would be only proper for those enslaved by sin and the devil. The power of God will be effectively working if this is a state embracing the whole man. "*My strength is made perfect in weakness."* (2Cor.12:9). When man comes into the "publican's" state of humbleness, God's power will take effect empowering him to lead people out of Egypt to the Promised Land. There is no other way to get God's power working in people. I am writing to you in this way, believing that I have the right to it as a spiritual father. Forgive me.

May the Lord keep you safe and in mind for doing good. Please accept my greetings and God's blessing for you and all our acquaintances. My best regards to your grandfather (Fr. Vsevolod). Please remember me to him.

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Ten days have already passed since I received your letter and before I was able to set about writing you back.

With regard to your doubts about the Easter Matins, I would like to tell you that all circumstances in which those who love the Lord may find themselves serve for their good. The Holy Fathers said that the Kingdom of God does not come through the observance of rules and rites. It might happen – and very often it does – that spiritual joys do not come when we expect them to come. Man with the right disposition of the soul feels himself unworthy of any

spiritual comfort. Moreover, as St. John of the Ladder said, "*Decline with a humble hand any upcoming jollity as one who does not deserve it, lest it should bring you into delusion and make you take the wolf for the shepherd."* Differently worded, this message is communicated by all Holy Fathers. All people are susceptible to sinfulness, especially to the so-called trivial sins, that are no less harmful for that, than serious ones. Nobody can foresee and overcome all of them by himself.

Only realization of one's own iniquity, meagerness, sinfulness and insolvent indebtedness to God along with unceasing weeping because of that (in other words , having a broken heart that becomes humbled that all men with whom God was pleased used to have) is the correct spiritual disposition to defend man against fall and to guide him forward to spiritual gifts and to protect these gifts, if man is blessed with them. A zealot with a tearless heart must be living in a spiritual delusion, having a false disposition of the soul; and if he does not improve, he can fall prey to devil's deception and perish. In our time, such cases are not high-profile news; they are not noisy and widely known, but they do happen, nevertheless. A great many adherents to ascetic life give in to the temptation of delusion, be it a temporal occasion, happening from time to time, or a permanent state. It is a very subtle matter.

Success of spiritual life is not measured by spiritual solaces, which might come from the devil, but by the depth of humbleness.

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Peace to you. Love of fame is an inherent feature of all people, and it is so strong that man becomes wholly interfused with it – from the outer looks to the innermost depths of his being. This feeling is also so poisonous as to impede any progress in one's spiritual life to be made. It is necessary first to restrict this feeling and ultimately do away with it. Anyway, it is important to

watch your emotions and suppress any expression of vanity by heartfelt regretting it. Appeal with a sigh to God with a sincere prayer, saying: "Oh, Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, be merciful to me, a sinner. I do not want to accept this feeing, deliver me from it and grant me to see my transgressions." In this connection, it would be proper to read the work by St. John of the Ladder about vanity, especially chapters 5, 6, 7,10,11, 14, 17, 23-26,31, 34, 38, 39, 41 43, 45; read also what he wrote about pride: chapters 1, 2, 5,11, 16, 17, 20, 34, 38.

Reproach yourself each time when breaking even the least one of God's commandments, rejecting any attempt at justifying yourself. Remember the Savior's commandment: "*When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, we are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do."* We, however, not only do not fulfill all commandments, but do not fulfill any one of them as properly as we should, but every now and then we are open for vanity and pride. May the Lord help you get rid of this viper! But we cannot defeat this ugliest and the meanest enemy without taking an effort and due care of ourselves and without beseeching God's help. The cases of the manifestation of vanity about which you wrote to me are indeed very conspicuous and impudent. There are much subtler forms, and if it were not for God's help, it would be easy to fall into despair. Rely on the Gospel and on the example of the Lord Jesus Christ in your struggle for humbleness against vanity.

On all occasions, whether insignificant or of great importance, put your trust in God rather than in your own forces. We are unable to do anything good and useful for ourselves without God's help, for what might seem good to us, according to Mark the Ascetic, may turn to be pernicious, which in fact is any endeavor taken without prayer and without beseeching God's assistance.

You are asking for my “holy prayers.” Only those prayers are holy that come from a humble heart and are pronounced with awesome love for God, whereas Pharisee-like prayers, filled with pride and self-conceit, are not holy, but blank vileness before God.

Please forgive me and seek salvation.

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I have received your letter about the disease of Lyubov Aleksandrovna. She is permanently on my mind. Although all people, big and small, famous and not are doomed to leave this world one day, when it immediately concerns someone close and dear, our consciousness involuntarily revolts against it. Deeply at heart man feels his immortality. And immortal he is indeed. What we call death is a birth into a new world, transition from one state into a new one, and for many Christians - into an undoubtedly much better realm. So there must be no reason to lose heart at the approaching death, for this is rather an occasion to rejoice, but we, either have little faith in the future life, or fear it, or because our present life also tenaciously holds us here.

From the spiritual perspective, we should be happy for Lyubov Aleksandrovna. The Lord has given her time to get prepared for the future life, but on the other hand, we fear lest she might repine because of departing this life and lose heart. If only she could humble herself and turn wholeheartedly to God, repenting sincerely all her transgressions and missteps, and partaking the Holy Communion with due awe and faithfulness! The death would appear to her as a happy new birth opening a way to meet those who dearly love her, who are waiting for her to fill in with an everlasting joy, which “no eye has seen and no ear has heard and which has not entered the heart of man.”

Please tell Lyubov Aleksandrovna that my sympathies are with her, that I wholeheartedly wish her to pass over the pains of the death and move on smoothly and happily into the future life, into our homeland, predestined for us since the creation of the world, where people will be like Angels, with the faces radiant like the Sun.

Tell her also, that I will never forget her for her love she showed me for many years, not knowing me. I will remember her, irrespectively of whether she has yet long to live or depart very soon. She will be dear to me after death too.

If a person is able to love and care for another person, how great must God's love be for us, if it sent Him to die on the Cross for our salvation. So, Lyubov should not have fear; let her trust in the boundless love of God!

Let Lybov justify her name (Lyubov means love, charity) by showing her love for God, who has suffered through great pains, insults and death on the cross for entire humanity including personally her. Then the heavenly Charity/Love will accept the earthly Charity/Love as her own daughter and make her a partaker of the glory and blissfulness of the Divine life. We must prove our love for God by enduring the painful parting with this world, enduring tormenting disease without grumbling in order that we may become partakers of Christ's sufferings. Suffering together with Chris, we may be glorified together with Him.

I would like to repeat: "Lyubov Aleksandrovna, my heart is with you, wishing you all things written above. Be enduring, do not grumble. If you feel that your faith is growing scarce, pray: God, I want to be a faithful and true Christian, please help me, lacking faith!" And God will not leave you alone!

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Christ is Risen!

I have received your gloomy letter. You, certainly know the spiritual law, saying that the way to the Kingdom of God lies through many tribulations; that you will suffer in this world; that you should strengthen your soul by endurance, etc. Every believer should know this rule by heart. The God Man has endured spitting, beating, mockery and other insults, the horrible Crucifixion and death; as a sword-sharp pain was piercing the heart of the Mother of God, when she stood watching the sufferings of the Savior. The apostles, martyrs, confessors, the righteous people and other true followers of Christ- all endured a lot, didn't they?

"*If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.*"

If you sincerely want to follow Jesus Christ, you should know that there is no other way except the one He has showed. This way goes through outer hardships and one's bodily diseases, and through constant struggle with one's own passions which may take very different forms. There are obvious passions, such as gluttony, all kinds of whoredom, greed for money, melancholy, despondency, anger, conceit, pride, lack of faith, jealousy, deceitfulness, disapproval of other people, etc. The followers of Christ must lead a war against all these passions. They will lose some and win other battles during this war. It takes an all-out effort and endurance to win. It often is very tormenting; this is real carrying of the "cross" which is impossible to put aside. There are two options: either to give in to the passions and betray Christ and choose the world and the worldly life, or to struggle, suffer and thus ensure spiritual growth.

Your condition, which you only ‘brush over” in your letter, is passion. It is a feature of the “old man” that is not clearly evident, but is obscured and hidden amidst various admixtures as a result of the wily enemy’s tricks. Demons, whose reasoning was darkened by the fall, have preserved something of the angelic wit and a few other potentials. They have thoroughly explored human physical and psychic characteristics; they have access to the body and nerves, and to the brain of man; they affect human heart and its inclinations, always causing evil and perish. Since people are able to identify evident passions and the damage they cause, the demons try to confuse people’s feelings by intensifying some and weakening others and in this way to draw people into aberration. They will amplify the significance of passions to make them appear in a very attractive light. Their tricks, slyness, deceit, various ways for seduction and perish of man are innumerous and boundless.

We, inexperienced beginners, without spiritual guides, should remember that alone we cannot overcome passions and defeat demons, but we must struggle with them as much as we can, and when falling down incessantly implore God’s help. “*They” (enemies and passions) “surrounded me, but in the name of the Lord I pushed them away.”* Neither you by yourself, nor anyone else is able to help you “*push them away,”* but only the Lord. That is why it is important to pray as much as possible, to pray awesomely and wholeheartedly beseeching God’s help to overcome passions and iniquities, as well as His forgiveness for committed sins. Thus doing will soon make you feel peace at heart and calm you down. This will also somewhat humble you and at the same time make you resolute to endure everything for the sake of the Lord and for the sake of your own salvation.

Now I am going to say a few words about a feeling which you are inclined to believe is experienced only by you alone. This is the feeling of loneliness, of being forsaken.

I have not met a single girl or a single woman who did not experience this feeling and did not suffer from it. This must be inherent in a female nature. God said to Eve at the fall: "…*your urge shall be for your husband."* This urge is not exclusively fleshly, but also – and even in a greater degree and sometimes exclusively so - a psychic urge. This must be urge that is working in all single women. Unconsciously for them this urge takes various forms of expression. Created from Adam's rib, she is being drawn back to her place - to make one whole human being with man. Don't get offended by my words, but rather try to make out what caused your feelings and why. In any case such feelings are characteristic of the "old man," and we should not be overwhelmed by them, but rather we should try to overcome them by fast, prayer, reading works of the Holy Fathers of the Church and of the New Testament, as well as by physical work and sometimes by tiring ourselves.

May the Lord set your mind towards all good things, bless and help you find the right way of your own to take you to the Kingdom of God!

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I greet you, wishing you peace and salvation, as you are struggling with the stormy waves of life!

My response to your confession is: "*Our Lord and God, Jesus Christ…. Amen."*

Do not despair and do not lose your faith, no matter how many times you might fall down. Preserve at least "one fleck" of sight and mind to see, comprehend and to deplore sometimes your condition – and you will not get drowned in the worldly sea. The Lord will not allow this to happen and at the critical moment, He will offer hand to you, as He did offer hand to the drowning Apostle Peter. "*World will hate you,"* said the Lord to His disciples two thousand years ago. This prediction has been repeatedly fulfilled until today with regard to all other Christ's disciples. Another piece of advice is

also working today: "*Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world. The One Who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world,"* says Apostle John the Theologian.

The word "world" is used here in its two meanings. The first is the world around us, the fallen humanity; and the second - the "old man" inside us, with passions and sinful inclinations. This "inner world" is the realm that is open to the devil. Here, he finds his tools to persecute and perish followers of Christ. But the Lord has overcome the world, has defeated the devil, so that against man's will the devil is unable to do him any harm. Only those offering hand to the devil by their free will, come under his power. Those who resist the Devil and appeal to the Lord Jesus Christ for help, are safe; and all demons' temptations may - and in fact they do – even serve for their good.

People should use their falls and "decrepitude" for the acquisition of humbleness. Together with humbleness people acquire a special inner state, an energy that is capable of fighting off all attacks of the devil. In this state, people no longer rely on their own forces, but exclusively on the Lord, Who is All-Powerful and Who has defeated the devil and continues to defeat him in our soul, when we are struggling against him not resorting to our forces but by appealing to God and by giving ourselves up to his Will.

Don't let yourself up completely. Don't think that confessed sins make the confessor feel repulsion. On the contrary, he feels special mercy and love for the repentant if the repentance was sincere and filled with regret. This is precisely what he feels! The confessor's feeling so is proof that God forgives the repentant and with love accepts him into communion with Himself, just like He accepted the prodigal son.

So, courage! Let your heart get strong. "*Who is in you is stronger than who is in the world."*

May God's help accompany you in all your good endeavors, and may He grant you to be reasonable, and strong; and may He "*establish you on the rock of His commandments"* and bring you to salvation and everlasting joy. Amen.

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"*Who will roll away for us the stone from the entrance of the tomb? –For it is very large.."* The Angel did on God's command. He will also roll away the stone of insensitivity away from your heart, when it is time for that. It is important to show your faithfulness to God when you are being insensitive, when having little faith, doubts, feeling cold-heartedness, or during sufferings, diseases and other troubles. You must by force of will to fortify your faith when it is almost dying out, as God let it to be, so that again and again you should show for what you aspire and what you prefer.

As an utterance of the elders goes, any good work is either preceded or followed by temptation. Such good occupation, as praying and especially taking the Holy Communion, cannot pass without devil's vengeance. He will do the utmost to prevent one from praying duly or from taking the Communion. If he fails to do so at this particular time, he will try to foul up afterwards, so that there is no trace left of the acquired good. All leading a spiritual life know this very well. That is why we should humbly and heartily beseech God's protection against plots and intrigues of the enemy, who may affect our soul acting directly or through people in his subjugation.

Don't be surprised at this. This battle is severe; and "*unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it; and unless the Lord keep the city, he watches in vain that keepeth it."* We should give ourselves up to the mercy of God, admitting before Him our iniquity, powerlessness in protecting ourselves from the visible and invisible enemies. Don't be afraid. The devil

does not do what he wants to do, but only what God allows him to do. See the Book of Job.

May God's blessing be always with you. Do not despair in any situation. Let the Cross of Crist on all occasions be a reminder for you about the boundless God's love for the fallen man. Isn't this remembrance alone sufficient for us to give ourselves up into God's hands? We must, if only a little, seek the Kingdom of God, and the Lord will never leave us without His help and console. The Lord loves you!. Bear the Lord!

***

One of our nuns was dying in great pains. We should ask the Lord beforehand to let us have "*a Christian ending of our life: painless, blameless, and peaceful; and a good defense*...." We must think about our own death, illness, poverty, the demons that found access to our heart, our many shortcomings and demonic characteristics of our soul and the power of demons over this part of our soul; as well as about the absence of our good works on which to rely. The mercy of God for all who believe in Him and who acknowledge their iniquities is our only hope.

When praying, lay bare your soul before God in all its ugliness and as filthy as it is, not justifying yourself, but as a leper, saying: "*My Lord, if it is your will, you can cleanse me;"* or as the publican: "*God, be merciful to me, a sinner."* By these two and similar other examples, the Lord has showed us the right disposition of a sinful soul and pointed out that only thus disposed soul can bring forth a sincere prayer free from delusion. Such prayer is always answered by God with His blessing and redemption of a sinner suffering from spiritual leprosy, just as the publican was redeemed, and the leper cleansed.

There are two periods in the spiritual life of Christians:

1) of the realization of their wickedness, fall, sinfulness; and

2) of gradual healing of the ulcers of their soul.

Without the first, there cannot be the second. The former often leads to a sincere and deep humbleness, the only which makes it possible for us to recover and to receive other good gifts from God. Without humbleness, damage or even perish may be the outcome. Seek the spiritual knowledge of the ways of salvation in books and in life experience.

May the Lord set your mind towards all good things, grant you His blessing and protect from evil.

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You appear to be regretting that your years pass by, that you are not settled in… Such thoughts are worldly thoughts coming from the Prince of the World. He is confusing you, infusing you with all kinds of fears; he continues to tell lies and nothing but lies, which ultimately gives him away, no matter what he may undertake.

What is the essence of Christianity? It is in that the Almighty and All-Knowing Creator of the Universe so loved humanity, so much cared for it and wanted its salvation that He gave His Only Begotten Son to suffer through infamy, the Crucifixion and death. The Lord takes care not only of humankind as a whole but of every individual, protecting each person against visible and invisible enemies, teaching everyone through other people and by books, different circumstances and by one's own experience. If it takes a punishment to bring man to reason and to protect him against a greater trouble, He punishes mercifully, and afterwards, if this man duly accepts the punishment, God rewards him generously, as if regretting that He had to punish him. Those whose inner sight has opened will see the remarkable providence of God about man in all aspects concerning him. If God sacrificed for the sake of man the most precious what he had - His Son - is there anything He would

not give, considering that the entire Universe cannot come into comparison with that Sacrifice? No, the Lord will not refuse to give anything, especially to those who are seeking Him and who are trying hard to fulfill His commandments, who weep over every sin, as a violation of His will as disrespect of Him, as an expression of their ingratitude and of the absence of their love for Him.

"And him that cometh to Me, I will in no wise cast out!" The Lord rejoices about anyone on the way to Him. His joy is much greater than mother's when she rejoices about love of her child towards her.

This is why you needn't be afraid of the future. God is with us today and will be tomorrow and unto ages of ages. Fear only to offend Him by this or that sin. But if, because of our weakness, we fall into something that is not good, let us repent, and the Lord will forgive us so long as we do not conscientiously commit the sin (want to commit it), do not justify it and do not grumble against God. Do not fear anything. Be of good cheer and put all your sorrows, perplexities, fears, insults from demons and people onto the Lord, Who is willing and Who knows how to deliver you from them, if this is going to be of benefit to you.

Do not trust yourself or other people. Put your trust in the Word of God, the Good News. Learn the Gospel by your life experience. Life in Christ will fully fill you with a comprehensive knowledge, with a spiritual joy and firmness so that the secular life will seem to you – and in fact it is such – meager, uninteresting, poor, miserable, full of vanity, of good-for-nothing squabbles and troubles, and often - of serious hardships. You are happy. Preserve this condition. Thank God for it; and He will reward your gratitude with pouring even greater mercy on you – as great as you can bear. Let it be so! May God bless and keep you safe!

***

Thank you for the congratulations. I remember your request about N. I feel deeply sorry for him. Sometimes remembering him with love, I wish him to free himself from the devil's paws. He should not look for what he lost in philosophy or science, but *without having seen Him*, make himself - by mere will-power - believe in Him and start building up his life according to that belief. In this case, he will receive help from the above that will disperse enemy's darkness and get him assured of the truthfulness of Christianity with such all-powerful conviction that he will exclaim from the bottom of his heart: "O, Lord, I am ready to go through any hardships, only do not push me away from Thee!" All who sought God have experienced this moment. "*Ask and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: …What man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?"*

Why is he eating pork and has abandoned the Fathers? Does he think that all of them were in delusion?" If only one of them was telling the truth, the entire Christianity is truthful. And what tortures the martyrs had to suffer to witness the Truth which they had come to know?! Of course he needs personal experience. Let him ask and he will undoubtedly receive.

Sad and sorrowful as you might be, don't lose heart. Devote more time to reading the Gospel. Jesus Christ used to forgive all who repented, but warned: "*…go, and sin no more."* Turn to Him oftener admitting your wrong-doings, asking for His assistance, force yourself to say permanently – out loud and in thought – the Jesus Prayer.

May God enlighten you and keep you safe from evil. If you write to N, please convey my best regards to him and tell him that the Holy Fathers designated unbelief among passions, such as fornication, vanity, pride and others. Here the devil is working more than man. We must counteract unbelief in the same way as we are counteracting other passions: not deliberating about them, not opening discussion with them, but flatly rejecting them by will-power, as well as by prayer, especially the Jesus Prayer, which, as far as possible, we should make an on-going prayer combined with our heartfelt request for mercy. By His Holy Name, before which every knee of heavenly, earthly and underworld forces bows, the enemy's force weakens, and peace, hope, faith and tenderness come into man's heart, and all temptations go away. But as long as he continues reading scientific and philosophic apologies, he will be getting stuck deeper and deeper. He should better give up doing all this and turn to One Who is Way, Truth and Life.

May God help him! I am writing this as a brother, not as a teacher.

***

Peace to you!

As you could feel from my letters, I do not reproach you, but feel sincere compassion and sympathies with you in your grievance. Just like patients in a hospital do not condemn each other for this or that illness, neither should we, who are all sick, suffering from spiritual diseases – sins. We must be confident about and remember one thing: never to despair and lose heart in any situation in which we might find ourselves. Despair, often leading to suicide; it is death for the soul. Any hard sin is possible to repent and have forgiven. Many inveterate thieves and killers not only were forgiven, thanks to their sincere repentance and improvement, but even some of them succeeded in reaching sanctity, including, the Monk Moses Murin the Black,

holy Martyr Babaros, former thief (commemorated on May 6), Daniel, and others. These are examples given to us by the Lord, so that we should not despair, like Judas, but repent and be saved….

Tenderheartedness is a gift of God. Are we worthy of it? We should not seek to reach some kind of a high state when praying. According to resolute demand of Bishop Ignatiy (Bryanchaninov), a prayer should always be a prayer of repentance and nothing else. That was what our Lord Jesus Christ denounced in the parable about the Publican and Pharisee. For us, sinners, the prayer of the publican is suffice. Learn from him how to pray. I wish you were able to master this! Don't think this is easy. There is a great depth in this prayer. It opens a profound abyss of human soul, filled with all kinds of creeping things – "*a great and wide sea, wherein are things creeping innumerable."*

As for taking the Holy Communion, I would not advise you to partake before the Cross Venerating Sunday; afterwards you will see when is best for yourself. But before, you have to take the pain of doing good things, even against your will, to tire yourself with praying, bows, standing on the knees, as far as your strength permits, of course. Try to keep silence as often as possible. Refrain from idle talking and meetings. Kliros (choir-place) is not a good place for prayer. You should better find a quiet spot in the corner of the church and follow the example of the publican.

"*Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man."* (Ps.146:3) Put your trust in God, and also labor yourself. If, on your side, you ignore laboring, the Lord will not help you either. Judas serves as an example here. "*The effective fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much"* (James 5:16); in other words, this happens if a person, asking for prayers, helps the prayer by his/her own life.

May the Lord help you on the way to salvation. Force yourself to recall the Lord as often as possible. People always have those whom they love on their

mind. Now and always, imagine yourself as if you were the publican, and pray like he was praying, at home and in the church, and everywhere, and as often as possible.

May God keep you safe! May He enlighten you, bless you and protect against evil.

As often as possible make one bow at home, saying wholeheartedly: God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

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About Prayer. Pay full attention to the words of a prayer. If your thoughts start wandering, rebuke yourself, "*open yourself to God"* and force your attention again to focus on the words of the prayer. And little by little, your heart will soften, though from time to time it would object, and sometimes, tearfully. At such moments, wholly give yourself up to prayer and disregard the enemy's inducements, who will find thousands of reasons for you to break up praying and start doing something else.

Read what Ignatiy (Bryanchaninov) wrote about prayer in the first volume, and especially in the 2nd volume of his works. An absent-minded prayer, in his opinion, must be considered as sin, as coming from the devil. Knowing how much good praying does to man, the devil is trying in every possible way to distract a praying person from the prayer. Detect devil's plots and ignore him.

Having trust in oneself is not wise; and doing repenting is necessary. The Lord has come to save sinners, who are repenting sinners. Judas committed a sin but did not repent it, fall into despair and perished. Apostle Peter repented and was restored in his apostolic status. Jerusalem committed sins and underwent terrible destruction. The same fate befell Sodom and Gomorrah, Chorazin, Bethaida, Capernaum, but Nineveh repented and was

saved. We all are sinners and all need repentance; only repentant are redeemed by the Sacrifice of the Savior on the Cross.

Also, the Lord said addressing those, whose sins he had forgiven: "*Go and sin no more."* We should undertake every effort not to fall down into the abyss of sinfulness. When man stands on the brink of the abyss, it is easy to push him and he will fall down. When he is far from it, he will have to be drawn closer to it, in which case he will have time to cry for help. Therefore, a frequently given advice is to keep off the places where it is easy to commit sins.

Dear O., "*draw yourself away from the earth and cling to God,"* as St. Sisoy the Great advised. All earthly things will pass and disappear as mist, and if our soul was filled only with earthly things, with what will we be left? Do have compassion for yourself, seek salvation. What profit is it to you, if you "gain the whole world and lose your own soul?" Do not participate in Godless talks, do not read or watch the atheistic rubbish. May the Lord enlighten you!

***

Herewith I'll try to solve your doubts regarding some issues.

1) Your "thoughts and feelings" are obvious to have been inspired by the enemy. The most effective means to get rid of them is to open them to a spiritual advisor.

2) Immediately at their coming, repeat saying "Lord, have mercy" or the Jesus Prayer. Better, say the first prayer until these devilish inculcations disappear.

Remember the words: "*They (demons) surrounded me, but in the name of the Lord I pushed them away; they surrounded me like bees, but in the name of the Lord I will destroy them"* We cannot do anything by our force. We must humble ourselves.

In the condition of a complete coldness and darkness of the soul, one must fulfil the "Rule" (sets of morning and evening prayers), despite coldness, absent-mindedness, etc. "Give blood and Receive Spirit."

Each time when a sinner opens heart admitting his sins with sincere repentance, he becomes closer and dearer to the spiritual advisor/confessor. This is a well-known fact. Thinking otherwise is the result of the devil's work - to frighten the sinner off confessing his sins.

Under no circumstances fall into despair and lose hope – this is worse and more dangerous than any sin. Despair and hopelessness lead to spiritual death and even to suicide. "There is no unforgiveable sin, except the unrepentant one." Therefore, one should prayerfully seek forgiveness from God, Who has come not to perish, but save the fallen. According to God's word, everything serves for the salvation of those who love Him. So why despair and lose heart? "*Get a fall? – Get up; another fall? Get up again, and go on in his way until death."* These words belong to St. Sisoy the Great. Falls humble man; and without humbleness no good gift is possible for man to receive here. "*God giveth grace to the humble,"* just as "*He hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden."* We all have pride beyond any measure. Words will not suffice to make us humble. That is why God allows us to fall into all kinds of infamy, so that we might come to realization of our meagerness and disgracefulness. All that is good and beautiful is in God and comes to us through God. "*Pull yourself away from the earth; approach God,"* and He will console you both here and in the future life.

I congratulate you on the holidays. May the Lord allow you to pass them with peace at your soul and with gratitude to God Who loved us so much, and in irrevocable resolution never to betray God and not offend Him by sins, but rather showing Him some of your reciprocal love. Amen.

May the Lord keep you away from evil and safe against encroachments of the enemy. In your turn, do whatever you can; and God will do everything that is necessary for your salvation.

***

Peace and mercy of God be with you and Sergey. *(Sergey Pavlovich Maninov is Katya's husband, an accountant, a drunkard.)* I have received your letter. You did not write about your feelings for a long time. I am glad that you are writing about them now, if these are what you really experience. People often write about their dreams or just to discuss what they read or heard. What you are writing about happens to all people, who are going along the road of spiritual life. Seek salvation, labor, pray and be at peace with other people, do not reproach anyone, but feel compassion for everyone, do not renounce obvious sinners, but sigh about them appealing to God to forgive and enlighten them about salvation.

The spiritual growth of man is measured by his humbleness. The higher man stands in his spiritual life, the more humble he is. And the other way round: the more humble man is the higher in spirit he stands. It is not the rules, prostrations, fasting or the reading of the Gospel, but humbleness that brings man closer to God. All, even the greatest, deeds without humbleness are not only good for nothing, but might be detrimental to man. We can witness how someone, because he happens to pray a little more than usual, to read the Psalter or fast a little longer than usual, becomes proud and feel himself better than others and starts reproaching other people and teach them when they do not ask him, and thus shows his own spiritual emptiness and his departure from God to a far-away reality. Beware of being haughty.

Our Lord Jesus Christ says that if we fulfill all that was prescribed – fulfill all commandments – we should feel like servants who have fulfilled their duties.

Salvation is God's gift to meek and humble. Therefore we need to ask God for humbleness. Humbleness is incompatible with condemnation of our neighbors and with our own touchiness. If we renounce or reproach others or if we get offended, we are in want of humbleness. Holy ascetics were grateful to those who insulted them, because through bearing offenses they learned how to be humble. The Mother of God says that God chose her because of her "low estate." The Lord also calls on people to learn meekness and humbleness from His example – not to lean fasting, praying, not even love for the neighbor, but humbleness. Only through humbleness man becomes one in Spirit with the Lord, Who has humbled Himself to bearing spitting, beating and the Crucifixion. It goes without saying that we must try as hard as possible to fulfill all the commandments, but, I repeat, without humbleness they are either useless or even harmful. Don't misunderstand me.

May the Lord enlighten you! May He deliver you from the slyness of visible and invisible enemies. These have indeed become extremely cunny. God bless you!

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How are you? How's your health? I would like to see you and talk with you very much. I've heard that you continue to drink much to the serious detriment to your health. What awaits man on this way? I am going to write below what.

If you do not struggle against this disease, you will fall under complete subjugation of demons. They will inspire you to drink more and more and undermine your nervous system as a result. You will become irritable and irate. Quarrels, light at the beginning will become harsher and longer. You will feel lack of money more and more acutely; you will be sacked from the job and as a result you will have to sell your belongings, ask people to lend

you money in a humiliating manner, and maybe steal. Your annoyance will grow into demonic anger up to the desire to kill.

Demons, which used to act invisibly at first, will begin appearing in the image of thieves, wild animals, snakes and other creepers. They might appear personally, ugly and repulsive as they are. If you do not come to your senses even then, they might force you to commit a serious crime, such as arson, murder, and then lead you to blank despair and suicide. Had man disappeared for good after death, we would have been happy to see the end of his sufferings, but he does not. Drunkards, suicides move from brief and transient sufferings to the everlasting power of demons and to horrible tortures without end.

Unlike adherents to spiritual life, who struggle against sins and overcome them, gradually becoming sensitive to perceive the spiritual world and to see Angels, those who are given to heinous passions, especially drunkenness and dissipation, unless they repent, will see demons and will be enslaved by them.

The very differing appearances of people leading a spiritual life and those enslaved by the devil clearly shows where the two different ways go. "*Wherefore by their fruits, ye shall know them,"* says the Lord.

My dear Seryozha! Come to your senses: think, where you are going. If you find it difficult here, think how difficult it would be for you after death. Passions, by many thousand times more powerful than here on earth, would burn you without any possibility to alleviate them. Your conscience, like the "*worm that never dies,"* would devour your heart for the lost life and for the committed crimes. And your consciousness would torment you incessantly for having deprived yourself of eternal blissful life among the saints and Angels.

Seryozha, if you are unable give up drinking, try at least to realize that you are doing wrong, perishing yourself, mistreating those close to you and

offending the Lord. Try to comprehend this and at least once bend before God and appealing to Him, say: "O, God, I am perishing, save me, don't let me come to complete destruction. God, be merciful to me, a sinner." If you wholeheartedly repeat these words every day, the Lord will forgive all your sins and save you from destruction.

A thief was the first to enter the Kingdom of God. The Lord arranged this to encourage and to console us, sinners. The Merciful God forgives everything to a sincerely repenting sinner. No sinner should fall into despair. Don't say that you are already lost forever – this is a diabolic thought. The heavens rejoice about each repentant sinner, according to the Lord. He, our Savior, "*came to seek and save that which was lost."* Don't be afraid of demons. As soon as they appear call the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, make a sign of the cross on yourself and at the apparitions, and they would disappear as smoke. Don't defend yourself by a knife or any other material weapon – they are not afraid of them. Defend yourself by God's name. "*They surrounded me, but in the name of the Lord I pushed them away."* That was how true Christians defended themselves against demons and taught us to do the same.

Seryozha, I have been always remembering you in my prayers. I promise to take out a particle from the alter bread for your sake at every Liturgy and ask the Lord that He may enlighten you and help you overcome this misfortune. But you, too, should undertake some effort and not offer hand to demons. At least once every day, bowing to the ground, ask the Lord not to leave you for perishing and save you from eternal sufferings. Show care for yourself and for Katya. You used to love her once, and maybe continue to love her. Do you, tormenting her so, feel no pity for her? Ask her to forgive you, if you happen to offend her so that the Lord may also forgive you. If you are not at peace with your kin, how will reconcile yourself with God? Don't lose heart, no matter what you might have done. At a good moment, pray to God and He will help you and forgive you. Come to senses, Seryozha, show some care for

yourself! Come to visit with us. Here, you will be able to confess and take the Holy Communion. Here, you will attend divine services, read religious books.

A sinful man, as I am, I care for you with all my heart. The Lord's care for every sinner is by many thousand times greater. He just expects the sinner's conversion to forgive him all his sins and misbehavior, and save him. Turn to God with prayer, repent your sins; go away from bad people and leave your damned service, and the Lord will save you. It is better not to work at all; just stop drinking and destroying yourself.

If you do not turn with repentance and humbleness to God, great sufferings will await you're here, and after death where there is weeping, the gnashing of teeth, darkness, Tartar, the worm that never dies and unquenchable fire – everlasting, inconceivably horrible tortures.

No matter how difficult it might be here, all earthly hardships come to end. But after death there is eternity either of everlasting blissfulness or of horrible tortures. The choice is in our hands. God wants eternal joy for everyone, but does not forcefully draw anyone to Himself. If you don't want to share with the Lord a life full of light and joy, you will have to go to the devil's realm of eternal darkness and torment.

All written above is the undoubted truth. Do have pity for yourself, Seryozha; be merciful for yourself. Amen.

With sincere love and wishing you good, I remain your friend and father.

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Thank you for your letter. I have started to worry about you. Unfortunately, the pressure of the past has been very heavy for you. I am glad that you understand this and do not accuse you. Man is very weak, and sin is very strong in his soul and body, and demons are so spiteful regarding those who

want to slip away from their power, that falls and some returns to the past sinful life are inevitable. Don't be distressed and lose heart about it. It takes time and effort even to weave a bast shoe. The way to the Kingdom of God lies through many hardships, struggle and efforts.

You must have read in the Gospel, that the Kingdom of God is like leaven that is put into flour till the whole was leavened. The same is true with human soul: it cannot be leavened with Good News leaven all at once. Sometimes the process of leavening may go fast, but sometimes it may slow down. You will know what I am talking about. One thing is necessary: try to live according to the commandments of the Gospel, counteract every sin whether it was committed in deed, in word, or in thought, and do not give in to bad inclinations. If you fail, repent before God and ask forgiveness, and then go on fighting - until death.

Remember, that you will achieve nothing by yourself; so appeal to the Lord Jesus Chris for help at every temptation. Then, your good intention will be strengthened by God, capable of doing away with any sin and any demonic intrigue. If you succeed in fighting a sinful inclination, do not attribute the victory to yourself, but to God thanking Him for the assistance in overcoming the temptation of sin. If you attribute it to yourself, you will fall again into the same sins.

Appeal to the name of God as often as possible. Now that have got some understanding of good and evil, the Lord expects you to stick to Him, to stick to His sacred commandments and be guided by them in life, instead of being misled by the inculcations of demons and by your own fallen nature, contaminated by sin. The choice is yours. The Lord is watching you to see your inclinations. The earthly life is given to man to make his free choice to be with God or with the devil. So, the future life depends on the present life: those working for the devil committing sins will stay with him forever; while

those who have been striving for God all their life, though having falls from time to time, will after death stay with God, enjoying everlasting blissfulness.

The Lord has not sent you your disease for no purpose or just to punish you (though, according to spiritual law every sin is to be followed by grief); He has sent it out of His love for you – to tear you off the sinful life and put you on the way towards salvation. Thank God for His care for you and do not offend Him by sinning. Do the utmost to fight every temptation of sin; otherwise, you might encounter sufferings that would be even worse than before.

Forgive me, if I offended you. May the Lord bless you and help you to save your soul from losing it in favor of meager and sly worldly interests.

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Your dream clearly shows the following: first, that the enemies of our salvation are trying hard to enter into our soul to blaspheme it and render it unworthy for the Lord; second, that to be safe from them, it is necessary to pray at home and in the church and observe God's commandments; and third, that the Lord takes care of people and each person individually, wishing all to be saved. How great love of God for sinners must be that He, the Creator of the World, will assume human nature and come to the world to suffer through spitting, beating, mockery and death on the cross for the salvation of the sinful humanity!

If we respond to God's love with indifference, unbelief, unwillingness to struggle with sins, conscious violation of God's commandments and self-justification instead of tearful repentance, what will await us? God's rejection is it what will await us. "*With what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you,"* says the Lord. If we reject God's love by our deeds, the Lord will reject us. "I do not know you; go away from Me to where there is eternal fire

burning." Such is God's judgement, pronounced here for inveterate sinners, who are holding in contempt the word of God and who are distorting the Gospel to justify their sinfulness. Woe unto them! Everlasting tormenting, weeping and gnashing of teeth await those who have ignored God's love and for the sake of dirty pleasures of this world sell their Christian dignity, having preferred the obedience to the devil's will. After death, man will be with him, whose will he is fulfilling now on earth. A devil's slave on earth will remain his slave after death sharing one destiny with demons.

Seryozha, there are all conditions available for your repentance and salvation - both external and internal – which are rarely available to other people nowadays. If you miss this opportunity and continue postponing the cause of your salvation, a serious self-deceit is a very likely outcome. We cannot be certain if tomorrow comes for us. God warns all people to stay awake, for they do not know on what day and at what hour He will come for our soul.

I urgently advise you not to justify yourself of any sin, small as it might seem. Every sin is trespassing God's will and is an indication of lack of love for God, and vice versa. "*The one who has my commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me,"* says the Lord. Therefore, it is necessary to cleanse every committed sin by repentance.

Seek salvation. Try to get rid of the ways of this world that was always and will always be hostile to all spiritual things and to God Himself. "The world will hate you," said the Lord. Who is meant by "you?" These are all those who will believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and try to live according to His holy commandments.

Please pray for me.

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How are you? Do you feel well? Do you feel depressed? We must not become downhearted, air grievance over our diseases and sorrows, for there is law established by God, that is firmer than heaven and earth, according to which, "*We must go through many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God."* Meanwhile, we have entered today into a period in the life of mankind, when salvation could be achieved only by humble endurance of sorrows with faith in God and hope for His mercy. Nobody today is capable of achieving salvation in any other way. There is only one way left for our time, which is bearing hardships. According to St. Isaak of Syria, "*Much more precious before God are sorrows for Him and for His sake."* Each sorrow accepted without grumble, in the manner of the prudent thief, believing that it was a reward due to our deeds, will be designated as a sorrow for the sake of the Lord; and our personal cross will transform into the Cross of Christ by which our salvation comes. According to Apostle Paul, if we suffer with Christ, we may also be glorified with Him.

At the moments of grief and downheartedness, it is helpful to remember the advice of St. Isaak of Syria: "*Always keep memory of those sorrowful and embittered who undergo much harder sufferings* (those in prison or in exile, for example) *so as to be able -in your situation - to offer due gratitude for your lesser and insignificant sorrows and happily overcome them."*

The sorrows that are borne joyfully and with gratitude to God, Who is saving us through our hardships, comprise a spiritual joy, witnessing to our spiritual growth.

The more efforts man undertakes and the harder he works to cleanse himself from the sins, to cleanse his thoughts and feelings and do away with sinful desires, even vague ones; and the more forcefully he induces himself to an incessant sincere and heartfelt prayer, the weaker and less burdensome his

sorrows will become, and easier it will be for him to bear them. The point is that the purpose for which they are sent to us is served by our labor, by making ourselves observe the commandments and by a heartfelt regretting that we do not do it properly. This kind of heartfelt pains and self-inducement to doing good could serve the purpose of our salvation instead of other means and in place of other sorrows.

We must especially see to it that we are tenderhearted and kind in our attitude to those who are close to us, who are our neighbors. "*Our salvation is in those near us," said St. Pimen the Great.* This means that who treats his neighbor correctly – in other words, who fulfills God's commandment, saying: "*You shall love your neighbor as yourself,"* – will also be able to fulfill all other commandments, including the primary one – about love for God. One cannot love God and at the same time be ill-disposed to even one single person. This is understandable. Love and hostility cannot coexist in one soul – either one or the other, but not both. Love for the neighbor will bring forth love for God. The nature of both is mysterious and is far from what we know about the relations of the "old man." Only experience acquired through the fulfilment of the commandments will reveal to us their depth in a measure corresponding to the level of the renewal of our soul.

Seek salvation, do not lose heart and do not complain, and do not offend anyone by sharp words. Pray and always try to have God in front of you.

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Why are you so depressed? Where is your faith? Hasn't the Lord promised to fully provide for each one who is seeking the Kingdom of God and His truth? Check if you are involved in this search, if you have faith in the life after death, if you have trust in the teaching of the Holy Orthodox Church, in the teaching of the Lord, to be precise , promising that all people will be

rewarded after death according to their deeds. Do you believe the Lord's promise that not a hair will fall from your head without the will of the Heavenly Father?

If you believe in all that and in that God so loved the world that He sacrificed His Son, having sent him to infamy and to the death on the cross, so that everyone who believed in Him will not perish, you ought to give yourself completely to the will of God and weep not over the lost place or pension, but over grumbling, over your little faith, intolerance and every trespass of His holy commandments by which we respond to His love. Didn't the Lord say that whom He loved, He would punish and by means of sorrows tear us off the earth – to let us "*have our hearts lifted up "* not only during the Liturgy, but always. Do we have the right to tell the Lord what to do with us? We must be obedient to Him and stop grumbling and weeping about secular things, and instead start weeping over our sins and permanent violating God's commandments and offending Him by our little faith, by lack of trust in His words, and insensitivity to His love for us. But if we do not see our sins, we should double and triple our weeping because not seeing our sins means that our soul has hardened and darkened, and our inner sight weakened. Kneeling down and with earth- bows, let us ask the Lord: "Let me see my trespasses. "

After cleaning ourselves by penitence, we will see that he hardships befallen us were nothing but an expression of God's mercy and love for us, and that we need them more than all possible earthly goods. The most distinguished One, Who is *more honorable than the Cherubim, and more glorious beyond comparison than the Seraphim,* the Mother of the Lord, has undergone so great sufferings that the most serious yours would seem nothing to speak about.

Moreover, God does not allow us to encounter temptations and sorrows that would be beyond our capacities to overcome them. You did not yet fight till it

bleeds, if you struggled at all against the enemy or against your passions, did you? Did you not show indifference about how you live, continuing to live anyhow? Did you not offend your neighbors? Were you never engaged in idle talking? Look through your life with a prayer, repent of past misbehavior sincerely and tearfully, promise to the Lord to undertake every effort to fight against sins and to fulfil His holy commandments – take an effort and you will soon see God's mercy for you, and, probably, you will begin thanking God for the hardships He sent for you. Humble yourself before God and people.

If you fail to do anything of this kind, but continue committing sins and being sorry for yourself, try at least to endure the sorrows that might befall you without grumbling and say the prayer of the prudent thief: "I receive the reward that is due for my deeds." Do not lose heart. Bear the Lord, weep over your sins, little faith, lack of trust in God's providence for us, and the Lord will comfort you.

Forgive me and pray for me. May the Lord bless, enlighten and grant you solace.

My poor and saddened Katya, if I feel sympathy and care for you and remember you, will the Lord's love and care not be by many thousand times greater? Bear Him and do not offend him by your complaints; and He will grant you solace much greater than what you might expect.

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You continue writing about your hardships, present and awaiting you in the future. What can I say to that? The answer is there in the Gospel. The God-Man ended his sorrowful life on the Cross after having endured all sorts of mockery and beating. The prudent thief after prison also ended his life on the cross. He is an image of sinful and repenting people. The other thief, who also

ended his earthly life on the cross, moved into a life of everlasting tortures. This is an image of humankind as a whole.

There are spiritual laws in the moral world, just as they are in the visible world. The basic law declares: "*We must through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God," and "Whoever want to be my disciple, must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow Me."* See? Those who want to follow Christ into the Kingdom of God, must bear long and tormenting pains to suppress all naughty and wicked habits of the "oldt man" inside themselves and endure all kinds of tribulations and diseases. By His boundless wisdom, God gives each man – for his recovery, cleaning and salvation - his own individual cross to carry that is corresponding to his character, capacities and potentials. If we succeed in carrying our cross without grumbling, by repenting our sins and not justifying ourselves, we will, like the prudent thief enter the Kingdom of God.

If we complain, abuse other people and God, we will perish, like the angry thief, experiencing much greater pain with no hope, alleviating sufferings, for salvation. The choice is ours. We must also be prudent. Cross is inevitable for all to carry. Let us make it lighter by our faith in God, by the struggle against sin, by repentance and by forgiving our neighbors, by obedient bearing sorrows, and by offering our prayers to God. Out of His love, God wants our salvation and does not allow us to have troubles unless they are absolutely necessary; nor does He allow more troubles than we are able to cope with to befall us. Sorrows are necessary, but man is able to understand this only after a thorough cleaning himself by repentance and abstention from sins and by reading the Gospel.

Forgive me. May the Lord strengthen you, grant his blessing and protect you from evil.

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As regards your inner laboring, I'll tell you this: do not set up any great tasks for yourself and do not fix any deadlines, but always in whatever you might be doing abstain from evil and from trespassing external and inner rules and force yourself to do good. In other words, no matter how much energy and struggle it takes, try to act not as you wish, but as the Lord tells you to do in His commandments. It is not said without purpose that the Kingdom of God is taken by force. This commitment is complemented by another one – the endurance of sorrows and diseases.

The Lord has bestowed a great mercy on you to show that He does not want sinners to die. You were close to a spiritual perish, and after death, an abyss of the hell would have been awaiting you. You did not and could not hear what you were told. So, a stronger instrument was needed to tear you off the way leading to perdition. And the Lord had to send you this instrument - your disease (cancer of the lower lip). So do not grumble against God, do not be downhearted, but thank God for his gracious care for your salvation. According to the Good News, "*For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth."* You are dear to God. So do not offend him by ingratitude, by violating His holy commandments and by grumbling.

To learn how not to be absent-minded when praying, one must humble before God and people and exercise a lot to obtain this skill. Without humbleness people will always suffer from absent-mindedness. But do not lose heart because of that, wait and be patient, consider yourself unworthy of any good gifts. We all are unworthy not only of any special mercies, but even to pronounce the name of God.

If it is necessary and useful for you, God will extend your life for your good. A life to the detriment of the soul is worse than the death opening the way to

the Kingdom of God. I am glad that you have overcome feeling bad about me. This gives hope that with God's help you will also overcome worldly convictions and inclinations and all that takes us away from God. Try to do away with other passions in this way. It is no easy task, but this is the only way to salvation. Always blame yourself, saying: "the Lord knows everything, so this is what I deserve." This will make you calm down.

Pray for me. I also remember you in my prayers. Go on laboring. Do not lose heart, but endure everything and thank God for whatever He may send you.

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I am writing again about your phrase that "*L. has given up some of her lessons and it became easier; the counting lessons especially are making little progress."* I remember already writing to you about this issue. I am going to share with you thoughts that are not mine. If all commandments are comprised in the first two – to love God and one's neighbor – and love is achieved through the fulfilment of all other commandments given to us in the Gospel, we must find out the shortest and easiest way for the fulfilment of these commandments. A secular man may confine himself to physical laboring, for people who are striving for more, inner work is also necessary.

The Lord used two words to describe what this work consists in and what must be done, especially at the time of troubles: "*watch and pray."* On what occasion and at what hour is not specified – this requirement is for always. To "watch" means to watch your behavior, words, thoughts and feelings; to watch out for all that comes into contradiction the Gospel and push these things away by the Jesus Prayer, thus fulfilling the second command. The fulfilment of these two commands could replace all other deeds, though the deeds individually needed for the laborer are not excluded either. Permanent

inducement oneself to the Jesus Prayer is the best proof to man's willingness to be with the God and to fulfill His command.

Even the publican who used five words to appeal to God during worship was redeemed and justified. The Holy Fathers say that all prayers could be replaced by one Jesus Prayer.

The correct praying using this prayer is ensured only when it is inseparably combined with repentance and if it is an expression of a heartfelt grievance about one's own unworthiness, sinfulness, and of man's realization of his repeated violations of Gospel commandments. The publican's way of praying was such expression reflecting the grievance of his heart. Try to keep this in mind. The expected result is not achieved by repeating the Jesus Prayer out loud; it must be an outpouring of grieving heart to warm it and make it tender, as well as to make praying and other good-doing easier. Possible fulfilment of the commandments of Gospel outwardly and inwardly, vigilance and a heartfelt Jesus Prayer are the invincible weapon available for us – I would say the only weapon available for our time. This occupation makes man spiritually fit. This occupation is not dependent on books, housing conditions, not even on man's health condition. It is possible always and anywhere, except, perhaps, when man is absorbed in doing something that demands his full attention.

I wish you to understand this and skill doing it. Set up a daily working schedule for yourself, that would be lenient and possible to follow in accordance with your circumstances and forces; and devote the rest of the time - of the day and night , and any available moment – to the fulfilment of the "watch and pray" rule of our Lord Jesus Christ. The fulfilment of this rule will spare you all future troubles, both material and spiritual alike.

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Please forgive me for my belated reply to your letter which is dear to me. I am not feeling well, and the thoughts about death do not leave me alone. I feel that if I live up to see 1963, I will not pass it through. For me personally, death is desirable. I know that there is future life, that there is God's mercy for us and there is hope for us believing in the Lord Jesus Christ to enter into the blissful eternity, rather than an everlasting torturous future.

Religious perceptions, though different from the psychological meaning of the word, are also as real as the perceptions of the physical world. The earthly life is not for pleasures but for getting knowledge of oneself and of God. During their earthly life people must make a resolute and irrevocable choice – to strive for good or for evil; for God or for devil. Those seeking God and His truth will find God and the rudiments of a new life here, on earth, and in its fullness – after death. An egoist looking exclusively for earthly pleasures will find the devil and after death, as of one in spirit with the devil will go to the Devil's kingdom, Hell, to join the community of downright egoists and evil-doers. Our future destiny is in our hands... Forgive me, if I am writing not quite what I should. I am sorry not to have come to see you this summer.

I wish to be farther from this life and from the spirit of this world. This spirit has taken possession of the whole mankind. Only from the outside it is possible to see and to feel the loathsome vileness and ugliness of this spirit. There are very few people in the world today, who are capable of escaping the influence of this evil spirit on them. This is horrible! They say, that a frog meeting with the eyes of a snake cannot cast its glance away, it starts to cry, but is unable to run away and instead is moving closer and closer to the snake until it finally gets into its mouth.

There are words in one of the evening prayers, pleading: "*Lord, take me away from the mouth of the abhorrent serpent, desiring to devour me alive and to throw into the hell.*" These words come from human experience. Those possessed by this spirit do not understand them and do not believe those who have freed themselves from it.

May the Lord bless you and protect you from evil and lead you to eternal blissfulness after death. God willing, we might see each other in the outer world.

Choose God; keep away from the devil in spirit and in deed, so that the Lord's words: "*Who is coming to Me I will not cast out*" may be also said about you.

Letters to the Students of the Moscow Theological Academy

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There is so much to say in response to your letter, but I will focus on the most important things. The wisdom of God is so great that even evil is turned by Him to serve for people's good. The implications of this idea are revealed by many Holy Fathers. The point is this. The possibility for man's salvation is offered by his faith and fulfilment all the commandments. The fulfilment of the commandments changes man's psyche (soul), renewing him, making him a new man in the image of God, more precisely – in the image of the Savior Jesus Christ.

The basic characteristic feature of the "new man" is humbleness – "*learn of Me for I am meek and lowly in heart,"* – without which even the fulfilment of all the commandments will not only not bring man closer to God, but will turn the man into an enemy of God, because in the absence of humbleness, pride comes in. The following story, in my opinion, aptly describes the danger causing by pride to human soul: the Satan, being expelled into the world, wandering about, saw an empty house, well cleaned and decorated; occupied it together with seven other evil spirits, even angrier than himself, and settled down in it (human soul), which is much worse than just arrogance, taken alone.

St. Macarius of Egypt presents humbleness in comparison with other virtues in a parable about a luxurious dinner given in honor of the king and his escort of noble men. Because all the dishes were cooked without salt

(humbleness), the king instead of thanking the host brought down his anger on him. The idea of the parable is that without humbleness, all other man's virtues are good for nothing. Without humbleness, the soul will be occupied by pride together with seven demons – the passions. A man who is attentive to himself, who is constantly struggling against sins, will clearly see how seriously ruined he is and how deeply pride has permeated his nature. To overcome every opinion of oneself, one's own vanity and arrogance is tantamount to overcoming sinfulness as such.

As it turns out, man's falls can also help him acquire humbleness, if only he does not blame other people or circumstances for his falls, but blames only himself, which is correct. Man is always to blame; circumstances and the devil are subsidiary agents that assist luring man into committing sins, but the final decision belongs to man, which makes him fully responsible. Qualms of conscience felt by man after committing sin confirm this argument.

Struggling with sins inside himself and constantly falling into the temptation of different new sins, man comes to the knowledge – not theoretical but practical, through his own experience – of his spoilage and powerlessness, and little by little acquires humbleness. Always defeated by his sins, man, downhearted, ultimately appeals to God admitting wholeheartedly and tearfully his sinfulness and powerlessness to overcome it by himself and begging, like a leper: "*God, if you will, you may clean me ,"* I cannot do anything about it all by myself. Lord, save me; Lord, teach me to fulfill your will; Lord, free my soul from the dungeon." This is when man perceives his need of the Savior, of His coming to the world and fully realizes the significance of His Crucifixion. At this moment, man also gets the knowledge of God's generous mercy for the fallen humanity, as after man's sincere repentance God protects man and cleanses him from the sins, heals the ulcer of his soul caused by sin; and man learns by his own experience about God

and about His providence about humankind. Man also comes to realization that God is close to the downhearted, that He indeed is the Healer of our souls, and learns many other things about Him… In this way, sins, being evil, serve good. The remarkable Wisdom of God reveals itself here, as well as in many other ways.

So, my dear, do not lose heart, if you fall into some sin, repent it before God without blaming anyone for it, humble yourself, and realizing your all-out powerlessness ask the Lord to help you with the fulfilment of His commandments. This does not mean that you yourself should not undertake every effort to continue the struggle. You should go on fighting and learning the methods of fighting from the Holy Fathers. It is also necessary to foresee the circumstances, which of them lead to victory and which cause defeat and to avoid the latter while seeking the former; and above all, it is important to appeal heartily to God for help at every emergence of sinful desires, admitting your powerlessness to overcome the temptations all by yourself. Even if you have failed to resist the temptation and committed a sin, turn to God begging him without concealing anything: “God, see what I am doing, be merciful to me, help me and free me from the power of the devil.” As often as possible call on the Lord, weeping inwardly, to help you with everything in your life, because it is difficult indeed to fulfill His commandments amidst the worldliness of this world. For this reason, the Holy Fathers of old days were weeping about the life of the people of today, foreseeing that many of them would perish because of sins.

There is yet another powerful tool in the struggle against any sin: as soon as you fall into some serious sin hurry to your spiritual father to confess it. If this is impossible immediately afterwards, do it at first convenience, but never put it away till tomorrow and to an indefinitely later date. People who often and right away confess their sins prove that they hate sins, hate being enslaved by the devil; that they are ready to feel shame and embarrassment

during the confession to get rid of the sin. God rewards such people not only with the redemption, but also with empowering them for further struggle and absolute victory over sin, which does not make them proud and think high of themselves because of that. Pay attention to that. (The devil's net is everywhere.)

So, lay a good foundation: struggle as much as you can, don't be discouraged by falls, but call on the Lord instead, try to foresee circumstances and avoid harm and danger, confess without delay to your spiritual father, acquire humbleness, recall the sins and trespasses – past and present – and the Lord will help you to become a skillful warrior of Christ, who in the future will be capable of helping others.

Do not give way to laziness. If laziness takes hold of you in one job, take up another one. Remember to observe a modest rule. Make it a daily habit at least once every hour - and if possible more often - to address the Lord and the Mother of God with a prayer asking for forgiveness and help. May the Lord, by the prayers of St. Sergius and other wonder-workers of Radonezh , help you. Take courage and don't lose heart.

May the Lord bless and enlighten you for every good and protect you from all evil. Acquire humbleness and a weeping heart because of 9the sins. Make everything serve for your good. Whoever loves God (seeking God through the fulfilment of His commandments) gets everything for doing good. Go on with your fighting!

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I have received your letter which has filled me with a deep sympathy for you. I would like to tell you many things to dissuade your doubts and grievance, but I am not good at writing. You have chosen a way of life, which is exceptionally difficult in our time. But if you follow this way to the end, all

your hardships - though I wouldn't say they will all be forgotten - will be overcompensated by million times, so that you will even regret that they were so easy. You might find it strange, but this is true. It is my deep conviction that even the great martyrs of the past wished they had suffered more to have their love for God to be adequate to Him.

Human love is expressed through doing things that would please the loved one, even at the cost of many sacrifices. The stronger one's love is, the greater is one's desire to prove it; and a sacrifice is the best proof of a selfless love. Because true love has no boundaries, the thirst for sacrifice as an expression of love is likewise boundless. Those who love God would be willing to suffer for His sake; the more love for God becomes, the greater is the desire to bear anything, so that He might not forsake us, and that we may be closer to Him. It is impossible not to love God, if we come close to Him, or to be more precise, if He comes close to us.

We may assume that the worm that never dies and the fire that does not quench in the future life are an expression of everlasting grief of the soul over the missed opportunity to prove our love for the Lord and to endure some hardships for His sake, as well as our regret for our failure to prove our love for Him not only by sufferings, but by our faith in Him despite all our doubts, our fears, spiritual loneliness, powerlessness and weaknesses.

We can and must prove our love for Him here, on earth. We should pledge: "I will believe in You, and will undertake every effort to fulfill all Your commandments; I will suffer for your sake; I will give up all things and everybody, including private life and family, if only You, Lord, should not give me up and not allow me to lose my faith and courage or let me grumble against You when too hard difficulties and sorrows befall me and my relatives. Please grant me to love you with my whole heart." If you keep this pledge, it would be easy for you to pass your life's journey.

If you hesitate and let your heart doubt, If you voluntarily break this or that commandment of God and darken your consciousness and weaken your forces; if you fail to call on God to help you; and especially if you become arrogant and put trust in your own forces, you may fall very low and make your life extremely difficult. But even if such is the case, you needn't lose heart. Instead, you should humble yourself even more and place your hope in the Lord, in His mercy and help. Such would be a correct behavior and disposition of your soul. However, without the experience of inner ups and downs, it is difficult to develop such disposition of the soul and behavior. This disposition is characterized by man's deep realization of his weakness and powerlessness to live according to God's commandments and to love God as He loved and continues to love us.

This kind of soul's disposition brings forth a feeling of frustration, heart's weeping, and impossibility of covering our debt to God (ten thousand talents). And God will not spurn a broken and humbled heart, as a source of man's love for him. One's own desire and will alone are incapable of generating such love. It takes a life according to God's commandments together with repentance, weeping over one's falls and deep regret for permanent breaking of God's will, instead of showing love for God and doing things pleasing to Him.

The weeping and heartfelt regretting bring forth fear of God, which is a fear of possible offending Him. This fear is followed by the feeling of God's closeness to us, described by Prophet David in this way: *"I keep the Lord always before me."* Then, little by little, man grows confident in his belief that it is better to die than to offend the Lord, which results not only in uncomplaining endurance of sorrows and hardships, but also in being grateful for them, because of the consequential joy of being cleaned thanks to enduring the sorrows and because of feeling some satisfaction with the

possibility of enduring for God's sake and in this way to show our love for Him. "*How can I repay the Lord for all the good done for me?"*

Excuse me for the verbiage. Probably, it is not the best time to write about all this either. Your desolation has prompted me to it. Hopefully you might also find it useful and consoling a little.

My dear friend, never depart from God, I beg, no matter how low you might fall, what a serious sin you might commit or how seriously - God forbid! -you might offend God. Follow the example of the prodigal son: ask God to forgive you and repeatedly induce yourself to live in accordance with His commandments. Whoever is coming to Me, I will not cast out, said the Lord. He, who is going to the Lord by way of the fulfilment of His commandments, even if he happens to fall down on the way, gets up and continues going forward and ultimately becomes numbered among the warriors of Crist and is distinguished by Him, no matter how many wounds he might get in the spiritual war against his passions, against his fallen nature and demons. May the Lord enlighten you; may He fortify your faith and will, and may He protect you from evil. May the Lord bless you. Stay fit and healthy.

Keep this letter to refer to at the moments of melancholy.

P.S. There is one more thing I want you to know. Remember these words of our Lord Jesus Christ: "*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."* (Jn.15:13) People lay their life for other people, for their homeland, for their fathers and mothers during war time, in an honest battle against the enemy. Nowadays there is much talking about war. If war breaks out, you will have to go to the front. There, an easier way will open for you to save the soul: not sparing yourself, with faith in God, honestly fulfill every order, even if you have to face a certain death. But yourself by your own free will, don't risk unnecessary, because sometimes it may look like an attempt at suicide. Just but fulfill any order of the commander with courage,

despite all difficulties and dangers, calling on God and saints to help you and inspiring courage in your fellow-soldiers by your own example. Death at war is the death "for your friends" leading to the Kingdom of God, and therefore it should not be feared. Don't fear anything. The Lord is with you. There are many glorified saints of the military background in the Russian Church. You will learn about them from the history of the Church.

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You must have read the article by Aleksandr Osipov in *Pravda* of December 5. *(Aleksandr Osipov, a professor of Old Testament at the Leningrad Theological Academy, who before his apostasy had been under suspension for his second marriage)* I have no doubt about what your opinion or that of any person with some wits is. I would like to know, if possible, in detail, about the reaction of the students. Do they see that this poor man revealed himself as an absolute moral nullity in this article – and what is important, himself being unaware of this. The article's effect is the opposite to the expectations of the author. The article has neither justified the author, nor caused any harm to the religion, but it has clearly showed that the Lord uncovers disguised "judases" and casts them out from the Church.

I wonder if you have noticed that in the section about prayer, three dots precede the word "worship. " I don't doubt that some dirty word was in that place. Even the newspaper's editors found it impossible to have it in print. The spirit moving the author's pen has poured all its spite on the worship and on the Jesus Prayer. Take this to notice! At the moment of a heartfelt and sincere prayer, a fallen man comes into community with the Creator of the world and receives from Him great good gifts and power to push away the mighty spirit imagining itself equal to God. Is it possible for this spirit to tolerate such indignity?! That is why he pours down his spite and hatred on prayer and worship. Let them (students) comprehend the significance and

power of prayer and of God's mercy to us, the fallen! Poor Aleksandr has showed by his words about prayer that he never prayed and therefore never believed in God. His is not abandonment of God or Christianity, but of the vision of religion and of God he used to have.

The reasons which caused his "doubts" and renunciations were as shallow and superficial as his superficial faith was.

His apostasy as such is not a result of his sincere reservations and strivings. He has showed himself as a pragmatic man of this world. As long as his situation was more or less stable and as long as he received a good salary, he disguised himself as a religious believer, kissing hands of hierarchs, whom he despised, and "training young man for pastoral service." But when his position began to shake, he decided to look for a better position for himself in a different front. He hurried to do so before it is late and when his apostasy is still working and could serve the purpose of him being accepted elsewhere.

When Jesus Christ, after feeding five thousand, began to talk about the bread of life, many people departed Him, because they could not assimilate His words. They acted honestly. Their fleshly wisdom could not rise up to the Spirit of the Truth. But Judas did not depart from Jesus Christ, because he was in charge of carrying the box with money and because he used this privilege to use this money for his own needs. Besides, he hoped for more. Like others, Judas expected the Messiah to become the King and ascend the throne, which suggested certain advantages for him too. But on finding out that Jesus Christ was not going to establish His Kingdom on earth and that death awaited Him, Judas used these facts to his own advantage: he defected to the camp of the enemies and betrayed Him and received his thirty pieces of silver – Why not? Jesus was to die anyway!

It is not without reason that those giving up Christ nowadays are likened to Judas. This is done not to insult such people - they deserve to be pitied – but

because in both cases, they followed Christ seeking their own advantages and betrayed Him also seeking advantages for themselves. However, traitors were never trusted and less so respected anywhere. "*The Moor has done his job, the moor can go…"*

Aleksandr was not sincere before the apostasy, nor is he sincere afterwards. He is a psychologically "touched," who has built a house on sand. A minor temptation pulled it down, and the damage was great.

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Evil is not God's creation. Evil has no being of its own. It is a distortion by the free will of people and angels of world and moral –as regards people and angels – order. If there were no freedom, it would have been impossible to distort moral order, wise and perfect, as it was. If there were no freedom, angels and people, just like robots, would have obeyed the laws of physical and moral world, and there would have been no evil. At the same time, however, without freedom, there would have been no image of God in people and in angels. A perfect being is unthinkable without free will. (By the way, all atheistic teachings have to deny the freedom of will; but the denial is theoretical; in practice, the atheists allow of its existence, because otherwise their followers would have to admit that man is an insignificant part of some huge inanimate machine, that knows nothing and does not want to know anything about man and pitilessly maims or destroys him, when its operational manual envisages this.)

Reasonable beings, who have come to know themselves, who position themselves as independent personalities, as new independent sources of light, as centers for which the entire Universe, as a circumference of a certain radius, is an object of study and exploration, and for whom even God could, in a certain sense, be an object of study – before the fall, these personalities in a

much greater degree had realized their importance and greatness. “You all are gods and children of the Almighty,” was said about them. They did not experience evil and could not fully assess their good life and good things they had at their disposal. The desire to be like gods to know good and evil, led them – both people and angels – to the fall. From here, the history of humankind dates its beginning. To bring up man in love and veneration of God, in love of other people without suppressing his freewill and to raise him to the dignity of the son of God is no easy task. It is an absolutely insoluble task for people; and even from God it demanded a great sacrifice of the Incarnation, Crucifixion and Resurrection.

A proud man cannot get salvation. Even in paradise, his pride may induce him to depart from God, which will lead him, like the demons, to the final, irrevocable fall.

Therefore, during man’s whole life on earth, God gives him an opportunity to realize that without God he is a nonentity, a slave of his passions, and a slave at the servitude of the devil. For this reason until man’s death, God does not allow tares to be pulled out - not to damage wheat. This means that a man without drawbacks, with exceptionally good characteristics will inevitably become proud of himself. If we, with our small virtues, find it possible to be proud, what if the possibility of the glory of a sanctified soul were offered to us in its fullness here, on earth? Even Apostle Paul needed the negative assistance of the Satan’s messenger to torment him, in order to keep him from being too elated. What is there to say about us, then?

Just as God is seeking to save man, the devil is seeking to perish him. The Devil, by giving man an illusion of a victory over himself, makes him conceited and proud of himself. Also, through the achievements of people in the exploration of nature, the devil convinces them into believing that the knowledge of sciences will help them conquer nature and make their names

immortal and become gods, and that already now they deserve praise for their achievements.

The opposite destination of the two ways is obvious. The difference between God's providence about man's salvation, and the intention of the devil to destroy even those who spare no effort for the search of what they really need – the Kingdom of God - is only too clear. The theory comes true and becomes a reality, in which man is incessantly fighting to overcome the evil of the devil – his temptations and inculcations – alternately experiencing falls and getups.

In the course of this struggle, man receives knowledge of his iniquity, of the sly nature of the enemy, and of God's help and love for him. He learns about the price of good and evil and as a result conscientiously choses good and gradually becomes steady in his preference of good and its source – God, while rejecting evil and the devil. True, man happens to fall and to do bad things, but realizing this as evil and sin, he renounces himself, repents and asks for God's forgiveness, which makes his choice in favor of good and God stronger, though through a negative experience.

This topic is a widely inclusive one. You were right to say that man should become humble to counteract pride. I am discussing the same idea only from a different perspective. I hope that you might be interested in reading what I wrote above, and if not now, then some day in the future you might find it useful. Sure, this topic could be presented more convincingly and in a better wording, and with references to the Holy Fathers. Here is just an enlistment of the thoughts that have been recently occupying my mind. Forgive me.

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Peace to you! We have been missing you. How are you? You needn't worry about the "partial" attitude by other people to you. You are coming further

and further into real life meeting different people who all are fallen beings. Their fall cannot but affect their relations with people around them. By the way, this is why the Lord said to his disciples: "*I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise…but remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age…*"

On the one hand, man himself should be wise and watchful, but on the other – which is more important – he should always turn for help to God, Who is invisible for the fleshly man, but visible by Spirit God, Who promised to all who have trust in Him, that a hair will not fall down from their head without His will.

With their trust and hope in Him, the apostles have endured all hardships and have overcome the world: a small flock of sheep has defeated countless packs of wolves. Isn't that a convincing testimony about the power and providence of God? Meanwhile God is also present today as He was yesterday and will ever be for ages and ages. Turn to God to share your sorrows and hardships, and He will feed you.

It is possible at any moment, in any rush or hurry to appeal to God in thought and say: "Jesus Christ, be merciful to me; Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner;" or at least, as St. Varsonofiy the Great advises, remember that there is the All-Seeing God, who watches you, and this would be enough to help you out of the difficult situation. When grief befalls you, and the prayers bring no relief, do not despair, grumble, and do not lose faith. Remember that salvation is not achieved without sorrows; nor is it possible to get life experience without them.

Faith and prayer turn grief into a great advantage, whereas grief without prayer may lead to grumbling and unbelief and do a serious harm to soul and body. That is why it is important to learn to be always with God, Who is

always with us. “*God is with us! Understand this, O nations, and submit yourselves, for God is with us!”*

On encountering troubles, do not despair, but “*cast your burden upon God, and He will sustain you.”*

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I have received your letter. I feel a deep sympathy for Father Pavel. By no means you should reproach him, but each time you remember him, sigh for him and appeal to God, saying: ”Lord, help your servant an save him!.” He indeed needs our compassion and prayers. If one member hurts, so does the whole body. We must together ask for a Liturgy to be served for him and ask the Father Superior of the Laura that prayers for him to overcome his present temptation be offered in all the churches there.

His situation is fruit of the wrong approaches to education at the theological school. First of all, it is necessary to offer all possible assistance for the students to gain a foothold in the living faith in God, before demanding from them to know by heart a lot of raw data. Does any subject reach out to their mind, let alone their heart? Do they “feel at home” with at least one subject? I seriously doubt it. All their studies are confined to learning a bunch of facts, a raw, undigested material. Moreover, dealing with spiritual truths by the fleshly “fictitious” mind in the absence of firm belief in God leads to the degradation of the significance of these truths. Their mysterious implication and the depths of God’s wisdom become lost on the students. These truths become a subject of “linguistic” debates about the terminology, alien to the students. Their faith weakens and may even die. As a result, quite a few of the most venomous atheists come out from theological schools.

The students are overburdened with the subjects to study. They have no time to think. The objectives of the Theological School are: 1) to strengthen

students' faith in God; 2)to teach them praying; 3)to teach them to cognize themselves as fallen creatures; 4) to teach them fighting with sin and temptations on the examples of the Holy Fathers; 5) to teach them to perceive the works of the Holy Fathers –and through their works to perceive the Gospel; and accept them not as a subject of study, but making them close to their heat, living, belonging to their life as the sources to satisfy all the demands of their soul; 6) to teach the students to look on the commandments of the Gospel not as an impediment to a free life and exclusively as a set of moral rules for public life, but as a means for finding here, on earth, the precious pearl, having seen which, man will voluntarily following the draw of his soul towards this pearl and give up everything he has - his secular habits, interests and pleasures – all the worldly valuables of this world. Everyone believing in Christ and striving to live in accordance with the commandments of the Gospel can find this pearl.

This brief and far from being complete enlistment of the tasks of the Theological School shows how far from these tasks the contemporary school stands. It needs an all-out restructuring – from its curriculum to the administration and premises. There might be voiced an objection that the timing is wrong. If a complete change is not possible yet, some things certainly could be improved. It is important to have this goal in view and do whatever we can to move towards it and to deplore what is not yet possible for us. Then the very attitude to the students would not be as it is now; they would be treated as human beings, to whom the entire school personnel - from the Rector to the technical staff – should feel indebted and unable yet to cover the debt in full.

There are so many useful and interesting things for the students to learn from and about the New Testament. It is more useful for them to know, for example, the Holy Fathers' interpretation of the parables and other difficult passages, especially the ones in the epistles of St. Paul, as well as the

teaching about the "new" and "old" man; the foundations of the spiritual life and the implications of salvation and many other things, instead of wasting time on critical studying of different texts and other useless activities that have nothing to do with the main goal, for which the Lord came to the world and established His Church and for which theological schools exist. This goal consists in the healing of man's soul and ensuring his salvation.

The main obstacle is the absence of proper, fit for the job people: "*the faithful have vanished from the human race."* Jesus Christ, Son of God, be merciful to me, a sinner. God keep you safe!

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It was God's good will to have close around reasonable and free beings to enjoy His good gift of blessedness and to participate in His life – to "*be partakers of His divine nature."* (2 Pet. 1:4) To this end, He first created the angelic world and then man. Some angels misused their freedom, desired not to be one with God, counter-posed themselves to God, became arrogant and, unable to participate in the Divine life, were thrown down from the heaven and cursed to "*go down on their belly,* rotting in their passions *and eating dust all the days of their life"* without God.

Man also fell, but not in the same way as the angels. Before creating man, God had foreseen that man would not be able to stay faithful to Him forever and properly appreciate His gifts - the blissful life in the paradise and his own original dignity and qualities. To appreciate these gifts accordingly; to love God with all his heart, mind and being; and to understand that away from God, he will always suffer; that his real joy comes from the communion with God and from his heartfelt love for God, man has to take a special path in life, along which he may experience evil, all kinds of hardships and meet his death.

Further, man has to come - through his own experience - to understanding that he is unable to restore the communion with God all by himself. This communion is possible only after cleaning his body and soul of the accumulated filth, which, according to a thousand-year experience, is impossible for anyone to do alone, by oneself. Man, who relies in his life only on his own forces, exists without God in his earthly life and so also after death, will have to be where there is no God – go down to the hell.

When humanity comprehended this truth, the Lord did something to make the heaven (angelic world) and earth (the Universe) shudder. The Lord Himself "*came down from Heaven, and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became man,"* voluntarily submitted Himself to persecution, spitting, and the Crucifixion in order to save man by making him one whole with Himself and by having endured on his behalf everything, what every man would have had to endure to restore his communion with God. The love of God that revealed itself in this Sacrifice is so great that it cannot but win over and draw to itself even the most hardened heart.

To be saved, man must during his earthly life to achieve the following: to come to belief in God; to comprehend his own fallen nature; to turn to God; to reciprocate His love with his own love by proving it with his life according to His word; to become unable to use his free will against God - not under pressure or by force of external circumstances, but because of his devotion, love and gratitude to God.

There might be some other ways to man's salvation, as some Holy Fathers thought possible on grounds that God is All-Powerful and can save by different ways, but, proceeding from the Divine properties, it seems to be right and proper to conclude that the way chosen by God is the best and shortest.

Man's "ego," the "personality" claim to have an independent existence, positioning Man as the center of all the things around him - as the "subject" in relation to all and everything around him as the "objects." Among the objects, there is not only the entire Universe, but God as well. Hence the incessant temptation of exalting himself and of submitting to his will all objects, including - O, horror! God – and seeing in all these "objects" a reflection, or sort of extension of his "ego." And the more talents man claims to have, the easier it is for him to slide down into this temptation. There is also the devil, whose position to God and world is finally determined as unwaveringly hostile, ready to assist man in this.

That is why God had to choose the "special path" for man so that he should not exalt himself in the other world, following the example of the devil, but consciously and sincerely loved Him and submitted to Him once and forever without the slightest possibility of departing from Him. The characteristic feature that is opposite in the meaning to "pride" is "humbleness." The latter is appreciated and welcomed by the Gospel, the Mother of God and by the Holy Fathers. No deed alone, without humbleness, is able to protect man from falling into the temptation of the sin of pride and depart from God. It is love that unites man with God, but without humbleness there is no love either.

In conclusion:

1. The attempts by man to find a rational answer to the perplexing question why God has chosen the Incarnation of Lord Jesus Christ as the means for the salvation of humanity, do not remove his perplexity, and man assumes that there might be other ways for God to save people or just to forgive the sinners and let them enter the paradise. First of all, the response could be formulated by the words of St. Paul: "*The foolishness of God is wiser than*

men." So, man should accept with faith and humbleness the Incarnation of the Son of God and acknowledge this way of salvation as the best.

2. If the Lord had not become Man and had not suffered for our sake, we would not be able to perceive the power of God's love for man. Confronted by the sufferings of our relatives, by harsh expressions of evil, falsehood and cruelty of the world, man is able to overcome all this and reconcile himself to the outcome and not "*return the ticket to the world,"* using the expression of Ivan Karamazov, remembering that the Creator of the World Himself suffered to destroy evil and to draw people without any pressure on their will into the Kingdom of goodness and love.

3. When man is able to see the depth of the humankind's and his own fall and comprehend his nonentity, the ugliness of his soul and his absolute unworthiness to inhabit the Kingdom of God, and also the impossibility for him to improve the situation by his own effort, even if he were able to start his life anew; when, because of that, man falls deeply into despair and is overwhelmed by hopelessness, which used to lead ancient pagans and leads present-day atheists to suicide or to defiling God, he will see that the only outcome is to believe in God, Who came to the world to sacrifice Himself for our sins, Who has become the Lamb to take upon Himself the sins of vileness and abomination and the wickedness of the world. This is a belief, that whoever has it and appeals to God sincerely opening his weeping heart, God does not reject him, but despite his dirtiness, cleanses, restores and covers all his iniquities by His love, making him close to Himself. He raises downright sinners to the dignity of His sons.

If there had been no Incarnation and Savior's sufferings, would we have believed in the great love of God for people? No, we would not and would have perished of despair; we might have enter into a venomous condition and, like Satan, become the enemies of good and adversaries of God. Only the

Incarnation and the Cross of the Son of God are in power to save people. There are no other means or instruments. To fully assess God's Sacrifice and acknowledge its necessity for man's salvation one must come to cognition of the power of evil in oneself and in the world.

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I wrote to O. that whoever is seriously seeking the Kingdom of God would feel loneliness, but the Lord will send the searchers on the way to this goal such consolations that no earthly joys are able to come in comparison with them. It is only necessary to go forward, like Ignatiy (Bryanchaninov), without glancing back.

Did Nikolay Germanovhich tell you what No. 11 says about freemasonry? Please read this very attentively. We all must beseech spiritual wisdom, because close beside it there is devilish wisdom.

People, in fact, in their essence, in their core, are much better, than what they appear to be in daily life. Image of God at creation and grace received at the Baptism – this is what makes up man's true, original, personality, his "own self," his "I." This is a great gift of God. A new center of self-consciousness, "one's own self," self-aware of itself and of the entire world around, has come out from non-existence. This "my own self," "Me" is equal to the whole Universe, because "I" as a self-aware personality has the whole Universe and even God as his objects. This "I-person" strives for perceiving and making part of himself the whole Universe and God Himself. "*You are gods; and all of you are children of the Most High."* So, this kind of knowledge is permitted to man by the Creator; man is called to acquire knowledge, but only in a rightful way. This is how high man's status is! That is why sometimes man looks so winsome, though his great original "essence" is not manifest, as if lying in the

grave covered by empiric rubbish: shallow knowledge, feelings, petty interests, occupations and goals. "*Man being in honor, abideth not…"*

In youth – and some people always – many are able to feel the depth of human soul through their empiric sensitivity. With the time, permanent encounter with the "old" – empiric man - makes one be careful with him, to which our Savior calls us. I will not expatiate on this further, though there is much what can be said on this topic. I hope the above would suffice.

The other day, I was reading, though rapidly and without due attention, "The Karamazov Brothers." This is where human soul is revealed! The scientific psychology looks a poor parody before the psychology of Dostoyevsky. Once I was so naïve as to seek knowledge of human soul attending courses on psychology. It is amazing how many silly things a young man may do without due supervision. My condition was as if I were living in woods. The Prince of this world blinds people, so that they have to blunder their way along and therefore they move stepping out from one puddle into another.

Science lies if it claims its data to be absolute, for tomorrow science will reject its achievements of today; Art is conscious falsification for the most part; politics is always full of deceit, falsehood and crime – all things here should be seen the other way round; what is known as "life," is nothing but "*vanity of vanities; all is vanity;"* and what is more important, there is pettiness and emptiness, lies and lies without end. In short, this is an "era of lying," the realm of the prince of this world.

I am writing this letter in the morning, with a refreshed strength, and therefore have lost myself in chattering and got carried away by philosophizing.

My dear, try to break away from "unreality" to the "reality" in your own expression; from empiricism to noumenal reality, where there is truth, peace and joy. Cling to the Savior. He is the Way, the Truth and Life. He is the Door

for us to enter into the truth and eternal life. Only with His help we can break away from the vanity and the kingdom of the devil and get into the Kingdom of God.

We all are blocked up by the rubbish, but a small light of the authentic human core is glimmering no matter what.

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St. Isaak of Syria writes in his second "Word": *"Take an effort to enter your own inner world, and you will see the heavenly world there, for the former and the latter are one and the same thing, and on entering one you see both. The Ladder to the Heavenly Kingdom is within you, hidden in your soul. Immerse into yourself away from sin, and you will find the steps along which you will be able to go up."*

The Lord said: "*The Kingdom of God is within you."* For this reason the Holy Fathers urgently advise us to say the Jesus Prayer as often as possible. Man enters inside himself through this prayer. I am writing about this now, because during the long divine services in the church, especially during the Lent period, it feels good and easy to say the Jesus Prayer repeatedly for a longer period of time. I advise you not to ignore this precept of the Holy Fathers. The devil in every possible way tries to distract man from doing this. You must be aware of this and resist him, and induce yourself to this wonderful prayer.

The Lord has opened for us the entrance to the Kingdom of God here on earth, but we would rather look for the miserable crumbs of the truth in science, philosophy and elsewhere, except the Gospel and the works of the Holy Fathers, who have fulfilled the Gospel in their deeds. Miserable people we are, aren't we? We voluntary doom ourselves to an almost animal-like

existence, and at that, blame others for the hard life. The reward is due of our deeds.

One thing just came back to my mind: when attending a lecture you may find dull and uninteresting, but no other occupation is possible, why not taking "exercise" in the Jesus Prayer? The word "exercise" is a frequently used word, but using it with regard to a prayer, people show that they do not know what prayer is about. Man should not "exercise" praying (one can go as far as getting "training" in praying), but when praying he should stay in awe before God , and, fully admitting his own unworthiness even to pronounce the name of God and only hoping for His mercy, with fear and full attention say the words of the prayer.

The right prayer will soon teach man's heart how to behave when praying. There is a precept telling us to pray incessantly. Prayer helps man rise from the worldliness, become untouchable for the bunch of creeps, *"cursed to go on their belly,"* and be free like a bird breaking out from its cage. This is the implication of the expression of the Fathers " *to tear off the earth."*

But we, contrary to this good advice, have stepped away from God and tied ourselves to the earth and go on our belly there, eating dust – passions – and tormenting ourselves and others. We are going in the light of our own source, having rejected the light of God. Satan offered Jesus Christ all the kingdoms of the world for giving in to him. We, unlike Him, disregarding our dignity, willingly agree to submit to Satan, ready to bow and to be at his service any moment, like serves, just to have thin soup in abundance for our meals. This is how human soul may be blinded by man's daily vanity. Again, it is pertinent to remember good advice: Do not overburden your hearts with overeating, hard drinking and vanity.

Alas! Man did not comprehend his honor, and became like unreasonable beast.

Forgive me for unrequested advising. May be something will stick to you, and I may at least have my "feelings vented," for I just talk and do not do what I must. Woe to me!

I like the time of the Lent!

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It's a pity that I was unable to talk with you.

Cheer up and be patient. There is no end to people's arrogance and wise-mindedness. Man has to get into a mess many times before realizing his limitations and need of permanent God's help. If all soul's resources are distorted by the fall, the distortion of the cognizance of one' own self is the greatest.

As an image of God, called to be God's son, to be a partaker of the Divine nature, man is much more precious than the entire world. He should be much more aware of this and thank God for the privilege and behave accordingly; but if fact, man, either is unaware of his high status, or because of his wickedness, is wasting himself away on trifles, on the satisfaction of his narrow egoistic vanity and on praising himself, and thus becomes repulsive to God and other people. Such wickedness is worse than other sins and it heals with a great difficulty, because it affects the innermost of human soul. Humbleness is the cure to overcome this distortion and therefore it is so highly appreciated. My explanation is superficial. This topic is deep and difficult and cannot be presented in several sentences.

Until the end of his life, every man has to struggle with his fallen and false "ego." Success in man's spiritual life is measured by the depth of his humbleness. It takes man's constant struggle for the acquisition of humbleness and serious help from God to achieve this goal. Without God's help the task is impossible for man. That is why it is necessary to accept all

kinds of humiliations, insults, offenses and even falls, as if these were handed down by God – which is indeed so –without grumbling, but with gratitude, because all of these unpleasant things help man suppress his "ego." Even if man succeeds in following this line of behavior all throughout his life until death, it is not possible for him to get rid of his high opinion of his intellect and of vanity completely. Likewise without humbleness man cannot receive God's good gifts without harm for himself. Under these circumstances, the prophesy for our days asserts that in view of growing man's pride people's deeds will not be taken into account, but their salvation will come through enduring sorrows and diseases.

So thank God for getting – if not the best, - but not the worst mark, as well as for other similar unpleasant episodes as for the tools of the Providence by which He teaches humbleness to you. "*For whom the Lord loveth He chesteneth…"* Learn the truths of Christianity by experience. Do not be anxious to get good marks. Theological School offers some theoretical education about Christianity. With this knowledge and with the title of Doctor of Theology, one may not only have no belief in Christ, but even deny God's existence as such. Only experience, the real communication with Christ gives a living and clear-sighted faith. Such faith is acquired by many sorrows, temptations, falls and get-ups; it first leads to humbleness (there are different levels of humbleness) and then to spiritual gifts. Beg God to grant you wisdom to use your sins and temptations to your advantage, for your spiritual growth. It is important to remember to seek the Kingdom of God in order to find it.

May the Lord keep you safe and lead along His way to eternal life. Do not sell God for big or small price. The poverty of Aleksey God's Man is better than all the riches and glory of this world. Make your choice once and for all and follow your way, no matter what!!!

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You are writing about your clashes with N.G. over Roman Catholic ascetics. Logomachia is of no help here. The core of the matter is not in the "logos," but in spiritual practice. What did Eastern and Western ascetics seek? What Eastern Fathers resolutely, strictly, with threats and persuasion, and by all possible means were prohibiting, Western ascetics were anxious to achieve by all possible means.

All Eastern Holy Fathers, except those affected by delusion, thought of themselves as absolutely unworthy of having a foresight and special talents, and if - against their will - they received such gifts, they begged God to take them away or provide special protection for them, fearing lest these gifts might turn out harmful or even destructive for them. They believed that all people need profound and permanent repentance all throughout their life until death, because man owes a debt to God that is impossible for him to pay off. People will never be able to "earn" enough to meet this debt. They have got no extraordinary achievements. "*When ye shall have done all these things which are commanded you, say, we are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do."* All debtors, according to the Gospel, got only forgiveness of the debt, but none was able to pay off his debt, be it fifty talents, five hundred, or ten thousand talents. What is there to say then about any extraordinary deserves? In reference to the talents received by apostles, the Lord said to them: "*Freely ye have received, freely give."*

The Eastern Holy Fathers warned that if man becomes anxious to get some good gifts or talents, the devil, on noticing his anxiety, will try to lure this ascetic into high-mindedness, take hold of him and ultimately destroy him, unless this man comes back to his senses in time.

What an easy prey they are, who, like Western ascetics, without cleansing themselves, while being under the influence of the "old man," set out on the search of high spiritual conditions! They all are under imminent threat of becoming devil's puppets and tools.

Both the Word of God and the experience of the Holy Fathers witness that good gifts are granted to the meek and humble. Only the meek and humble can use such gifts without any detriments to themselves, because they think themselves unworthy of them, and if they come into possession of such gifts, they believe this possession to be a temporary trusteeship for protecting these gifts, about which they should be accountable to God and which they would rather have taken away from them.

The most important is to come to the realization of the significance of humbleness through one's own experience. In this way, one will clearly see that right were not Western, but Eastern Fathers. It is important to experience, for example, the truthfulness of St. Isaak of Syria's assertion that "*who is weeping over his sins is higher than he who is raising the dead.*" It is impossible for those who do not understand this to argue with Western Fathers. The conversation will turn into logomachy, in case neither party knows the subject and can only attack the opponent with alien terms, not always using these terms to the point.

May God keep you safe! We look forward to seeing you. Best regards to N.G. and to all to whom this is possible to do. Even the last phrase is possible to understand differently, to say nothing about complicated matters.

Learn to be humble.

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A spiritual man is the one who has acquired the Holy Spirit and become a temple of the Holy Spirit. "*You are God's temple, and God's Spirit dwells in*

your midst." (1 Cor. 3:16) You will know how to acquire the Holy Spirit: the Gospel and –in greater detail – the Holy Fathers speak about this.

I will mention the characteristic features of a spiritual man, as he was described by the Holy Fathers. A spiritual man is very different from a "sensual" and from "fleshly" man – the latter two are the same in essence. A spiritual man is the "new man," whereas a sensual man is the "old man." What "new" is there about the spiritual man? In fact, everything is new in him - his mind, heart, will, the whole of him, even the body.

The mind of the "new" or spiritual man is able to grasp distanced-off events of the past and many of those yet to come; he is able to see the essence of things, not only what they appear to be; to see the souls of people, angels and demons, as well as to comprehend a lot of what is belonging to the spiritual world – the other world. The spiritual man Apostle Paul says about spiritual people: "*We have the mind of Christ."* (1 Cor.2:16)

The heart of the "new" man is able to "feel" conditions, which "*no eye has seen, nor ear has heard, no have entered into the heart of man,"* which is impossible for a soulful, fleshly "old man." Perhaps, the word "feel" in this context is not quite correct. It would be better to say that the new man is able to experience and get cognition of things.

Such experiences… I've written the word and stopped. This word has a subjective implication, and, perhaps, it would be better to describe such condition as heart's perception of the absolute blissfulness and ineffable joy that deeply affects man's soul and overfills him with profound gratitude and love for God as the Source of this experience or condition, and gets him ready to endure any torments and sufferings for His sake – to reciprocate His love and to preserve these good gifts of God.

"*What shall I return to the Lord for all His goodness to me?"* The soul of the new man is also leaned to loving and thanking God and to seeking to fulfill God's commandments instead of its own desires.

In other words, man, who has acquired the Holy Spirit, becomes completely renewed - in mind, heart and will.

The body of the new man also changes and becomes in some respect like the body of Adam before the fall – capable of spiritual perceptions and actions, such as walking on the water, staying without food for a long time, covering long distances at a fast speed, etc.

The condition of spirituality feels so good as to make Apostle Paul exclaim: "*...the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."* (Rom. 8:18) St. Seraphim, agreeing with the Early Fathers, in his turn, said that *if a man had only known about that condition of blissfulness which also happens here on earth, but in a much greater degree in the future life, he would agree to live one thousand years in a pit, filled with creeps which would be gnawing his flesh, in order to experience this kind of blissfulness*. This is what can be said in brief about the spiritual man and spirituality. In the sacraments of Baptism and Anointment, man pledges faithfulness to Christ and the Holy Spirit – he pledges to a life in Christ and in the Holy Spirit. It is man's free will either to live in accordance with Gospel commandments and leaven himself with the leaven of the Kingdom of God and of the Holy Spirit and become the New Man, or to reject this possibility choosing the "old man's" life.

The sensual (yucikoj) man "*receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God,"* for "*they are foolishness unto him."* (1 Cor. 2:14) We meet proofs to this at every step, because we ourselves are not spiritual, but sensual, still staying in the condition of the "old man." We may at best realize what we are and try to become spiritual, but we do not try as hard as possible to achieve this goal.

We also can highly appreciate spiritual people, but we are unable to understand and identify them, but acknowledging them as such, only because other people say they are, though mistakenly more often than not. The fleshly man is to be rated even lower than the sensual man. The definition of the "old man" fits both the former and the latter. Both are "old," not yet renewed. However, the fleshly man is cruder than the sensual man, more materialistic; he has a weaker faith, if at all, in Jesus Christ; he has no idea about spiritual things.

Secular people - to use a new term standing for the "fleshly" and "sensual" people - attribute the "spiritual" definition to clergymen or sometime to anyone, who begins to do a little of the psalm-reading, go to church and read theological books. All said above proves them to be wrong. So also some books are called "spiritual" because they discuss spiritual questions, whereas in fact there are almost no books that would fit the "spiritual" quality. Only the Holy Scriptures and the works of the Holy Fathers are spiritual. Studying them, one can find out what the attribute "spiritual" implies. Compare the writings of Ignatiy Bryanchaninov to those of some professors of Theology. What a great difference! You know the difference only too well.

Here are more texts to prove the said: "*These be they, who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit."* (Jude, 1:19)

"*Such wisdom does not come down from heaven, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic."* (Jam.3:15) In both cases the different words "sensual" and "unspiritual" are used in the meaning of the Greek "yucikoj."

The Greek used "yuch" (psychic) in reference to the lower part of human soul that is similar to animal's soul. The Greek words "noj" or "noaj" meaning "mind," "reason" stand for the upper part of the soul.

In their writings, the Holy Fathers speak at length about spiritualty and about the deification of man, asserting that man becomes god by the gracious will of God. Their works also discuss man's fleshly and sensual conditions.

It's a pity that sensual and fleshly people have no taste for reading spiritual books. But when they do, only their mind is engaged in the reading leaving them cold and not satiated; and without comprehending what they are reading, give it up the reading and turn to Doctors of Theology, usually Protestant.

Please do not conclude from what I wrote that I have acquired knowledge about man's spirituality through my own experience. No, this is not so. God, true to His word, offers a possibility for all seeking the truth, especially those at the very beginning of the way, to foretaste future good gifts in order to encourage them to go forward with the search. All involved in the search say so.

But unfortunately we, like dogs, return to our vomiting (see 2 Pet. 2:22) and lose heavenly gifts. To miss regretfully the lost paradise is what is left for at least some among the losers in a situation of the absence of deeds and efforts for retuning it. Here is yet another reason for weeping over our sinfulness and over betraying God by our doings…

Be healthy. May God save you from fleshly occupations and from the devil.

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I have received your letters, and would like to respond briefly to some of the points.

Where does the wild idea suggesting that "man is incapable of doing good by his own free will, not because of his fall, but because of his very nature received at the creation," come from? A Christian expressing such an idea

must be out of his mind. What was the sense in offering man commandments, the fulfilment of which is good-doing? Why was man's salvation conditioned on his fulfilment of the commandments, if because of his inherent nature, he would not be able to fulfill them?

Before the fall, man was free both to choose to do good and to do good. After the fall, he became a slave of the sin. St. Symeon the New Theologian assets that after the fall, man lost the freedom of doing good, but retained the freedom of the choice to do good, to prefer good, to be willing to do good. To realize his choice for good doing, man has to appeal prayerfully to God asking Him to empower him for the fulfilment of the task. St. Isaak of Syria agrees with this statement.

Inadequate fulfilment of the commandments is to be filled in by a heartfelt regretting of the failure.

I would dare to assert that a heartfelt regret, the weeping of the heart over the failure to fulfill God's commandments is worthier than their fulfilment executed by man's free will, insomuch as the latter might lead the executer to feel proud of himself and thus to ruin the good of the achievement. The grieving heart, by God's mercy, takes the place of doing and makes man humble, which is a condition, without which any work is vain and even harmful.

You ask if Bishop Feofan was right asserting that "God's grace affects only mind and feelings, while man's will remains untouched."

The truth universally acknowledged is that the Lord (his grace) does not coerce man's will. Good achieved by coercion is no good. In this sense, Bishop Feofan's thought seems to be correct. However, while accepting the part of his affirmation that "God's grace affects mind and feelings," which is an action to help man find the truth and salvation, we at the same time may challenge the part about the will. Man's soul does not consist of separate

independent parts, such as mind, feelings, will and others, but is one whole entity. The cleansing, or enlightenment, of mind and heat by God's grace would actually affect the whole soul, including the will. Won't both ascetics' mind, clearly seeing the truth and the consequences of sins, and their heart, striving for God, help their will choose the way to salvation, the way leading to God, and to reject way leading to darkness, evil and perish? Clearly, there is at least indirect influence on man's will.

With regard to the above we can also say that if man sees good and prefers it to evil, if he wants to follow the way leading to salvation, he must ask God help him to achieve what he wills, and if there is something he has failed to do, he must cover by heartfelt grieving. By the way, using the phrases "grieving heat," the "weeping of the heart," we know little, if anything at all, what these expressions imply. The same is true with a few other phrases and words. We use words but are unaware of their force.

May the Lord enlighten you about all that is good!

***

Here are a few ideas about the holiness of the Church. Before dwelling on why it is holy, we must formulate a definition of the Church as a concept. What is the Church? The Church is the body of Christ (Eph.5:23; Col. 1:24.) Christ is the Head of the Church. (Eph.5:23; Col. 1:18.) God has neither past nor the future; there is only present. He (God the Father) has chosen us in Him (in Christ) before the foundation of the world; has predestined our adoption to Himself through Jesus Christ, in whom we all are redeemed by His Blood and our sins forgiven by His rich grace. (Eph. 1:4,5,7).

All believing in Christ enter the Church as its members through the sacrament of Baptism; and in the Sacrament of Partaking the Holy Communion, are united into one Body and become of one Spirit with the

Lord. If man does not consciously renounce the Lord in word or in deed, but tries to live in accordance with the commandments of the Gospel, repenting when breaking them, he is not potentially, but really holy, because he is a member of the Church, a member of the Body of Christ.

After committing serious and conscious sins, man temporary drops out of the Church, but by repenting and confession of his sins (by passing the "*second Baptism"*) he may re-establish his unity with the Church. To this end, the father-confessor reads a special prayer on behalf of the repentant, saying "*Reconcile and unite with Thy Holy Church."*

Man is holy because of the image and of likeness of God; because in the Sacrament of Baptism, he joins the Mystical Body of Christ; and through partaking of the Holy Mysteries of the Body and Blood of Christ, his holiness is further confirmed.

If when fighting with sin man happens to be wounded but continues the battle, repents, asking for forgiveness and help from God, he becomes a holy warrior of Christ, and in the struggle against sin acquires many spiritual treasures that he would not have been able to acquire in any other way.

Just like human body ejects through an abscess a foreign matter, so also alien members are cast out from the Holy Church by the Lord, or more precisely, they drop out of the Church. Therefore, the Church is always holy. It is a Mysterious Body of Christ. It is pillar and foundation of the Truth. The false-minded man is unable to perceive this and therefore he needs faith. "*I believe in the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church."* (Remember Metropolitan Veniamin). Those who want to perceive the mysteries of Christianity through experience must devote every effort to spiritual laboring and not to confine their endeavor to the brainwork. These are some considerations concerning the topic you have raised.

I would not be surprised to know that Bulgarian professors - like many, if not all, our own - are grazing on the works of Protestant scholars, and even become adherents of their views. Protestantism is rationalism and external knowledge; Orthodoxy is life in Christ. People have become inert, as if dead. It is easier to talk than to work and to pray and struggle against the "old man." "*Christianity imperceptibly is moving away from people, giving way to hypocrisy."* These words belong to St. Tikhon of the Don, quoted by Bishop Ignatiy Bryanchaninov.

God keep you safe!

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Please accept my congratulations on your Angel's Day and Birthday. I was not feeling well lately and could not force myself to take a pen.

You are already 25, a grown- up man. In youth, all people make a big mistake by postponing to an indefinite future what should be done today with a complete dedication of oneself.

As a result, time is running out, man is growing older; conditions might also turn for the worse, man's health often fails him too, and man does not do what he ought to do, to what God called him and what was clear to his mind and heart. It is left for man only to deplore his fruitless past life and to repent.

In this situation, man begins to wish it were possible to have a new start in life, believing he would not have made many of his mistakes. This is nothing but wishful thinking. Just as every single small seed of an apple-tree, contains all the potentials and characteristic of the apple-tree and not those of an asp, so also every individual is unchangeable in his essence. However, man can and must change his external, empiric "old" standing for a "new" one according to the Gospel.

Therefore it is important to establish one general rule: to act and behave in correspondence with the Gospel at any age, during any engagement and under any circumstances. Then there will be no errors and no belated regrets. Along with man's fulfilment of Gospel commandments, man's personality and his God's image, his noumenal value will grow. He will more deeply perceive himself as the image of God; he will see himself in a counter-position to the external world and become higher in standing. In this way, man will establish a real, quite identifiable and tangible relation with God that would be so strong and durable as to withstand all storms and winds of the this world.

The conclusion from this verbosity is this: starting from today, pay attention to what you do, do not, as far as possible, break even a minor precept of the Gospel, either by tongue, sight, hearing or feeling. One, faithful in small things, will have power over many things. Do not judge anyone. Beware vanity as the most poisonous snake that is able to kill all your spiritual gains.

This is my testament for you on your 25th birthday and for the rest of your life. How it (life) will come out - God's will be it, but always in thought and in deed and in heart stay with God. Then everything will turn out good for you. You can see how fast changing – actually by the day - everything is in this world. The most firm-standing agent of this world – science – easily rejects today its own assertions of yesterday. Art has become corrupt at the service of human passions. People are not reliable. Only in God, there is reason, peace, joy and an unshakable rock to withstand all the ups and downs of life.

I would like it very much that you accept my words not only into your ears but into your whole life. This would ensure your salvation, your independence from people and circumstances and your peace amidst the storms of daily life. I am speaking from the bottom of my heart, urgently advising you to heed to my words. Please think about it and act. This is what

our Lord Jesus Christ Himself commanded us to do! I only remind you of this. If we believe in the existence of God and His Son, we must also believe that what He said is an immutable law, the fulfilment of which ensures world's wellbeing and salvation. Amen.

August 13, 1963

TESTAMENT

I urge all my relatives and close friends to be steadfast in adhering to the Orthodox Christian faith and to undertake incessant efforts to seek salvation until death through the fulfilment of Gospel commandments and by confessing your sins and partaking of the Holy Communion as often as possible (at least once a year). During my life, encountering very hard troubles and most ferocious temptations, I found solace in the faith in Lord Jesus Christ and in prayer.

I entreat you to show care and love for each other, to help each other in material and spiritual needs. Where there is peace and love there is God, joy and salvation; hostility and jealousy come from the devil.

Seek salvation.

Hegumen Nikon

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