



088. Aug. 10/23, 1971. St. Laurence the Archdeacon

Categories : [Letters](#)

Date : May 3, 2016

Dear Brother in Christ Laurence,

Congratulations on your namesday! May God grant you to grow with each year in Christian virtues and attain in the end to His eternal Kingdom!

Enclosed is our official epistle to you to help you make up your mind about joining us. What does it say to your heart?

Fr. Fyodor's being so upset is apparently significant of something; he complained also to Deacon Nicholas. As for giving advice, he asked for it, telling Fr. Herman that he was dissatisfied where he was, that he had a chance to go to Vlad. Vitaly, or maybe he would join us, and what did Fr. Herman think? Fr. Herman's reply was by no means unkind or sharp, but it was very definitely based on the idea that we could not possibly ask someone to travel 3000 miles to our primitive conditions when he was no more than casually (if at all) interested in what we are doing. Fr. Herman suggested that he read several issues of the OW if he wanted to know what makes our community "tick," but that probably he would find himself more at home with Vlad. Vitaly's Russian-oriented work. That Fr. Fyodor could get so upset at this leads one to suspect that he indeed did have in mind just what he told you: that he, being experienced (?) in monasticism, wanted to come and "run the show."

But of course he is correct when he says that what we are doing is "irregular" — from the point of view of the prevailing Russian Church practice. There are, however, plentiful precedents from the lives of Saints — St. Sergius, for example — for going to the wilderness to save your soul. "Establishing a monastery" is another matter, but we did not come here with the intention of "establishing a monastery," and in fact we've had nothing but trouble since Vladika A. "established a monastery" for us; but if this is what God wills and the Church desires that we have, then we will fight to have a real one, and not a fake one that is just a bishop's whim, and we will fight for the genuine, independent monastic spirit and not be tempted by any barren fig trees that come around boasting of their "experience," ukases, organizational ability, or whatever.

In the prevailing Russian understanding today a "monastery" is a place with an incidental collection of people, with a definite function in the Church: to serve as a bishop's summer residence, picnic center, manpower pool for church needs, etc. And "monks" are those people who becomes slaves, crushed by the authorities for the sake of "obedience," who can be used by the church organization: the more hopeful ones as bishops, the less hopeful ones as hieromonks in parishes that can't afford anything better, and the complete fools to remain in the monastery and



tend the cows. Against such a perverted idea, both of monasteries and of “obedience” and the monastic virtues, we emphatically protest, and if God grants us to have a real monastery here, it will fit into this “accepted” picture only over our dead bodies. This is what V. A. has in mind (and Vlad. Vitaly also, who recently forbade an Athonite hieromonk to reestablish the skete at Grad Kitezha or anywhere else), and this is apparently what Fr. Fyodor thinks also. In this concept “monasticism” has become some kind of spiritual gymnastics (pokloni, obediences, etc.) which can be acquired by living for a while in a “monastery” and once you have it you can become an incidental member of any other “monastery” and offer others the fruit of your gymnastic experience — in the meantime rising in the hierarchy of church ranks until, if you’re lucky, you become a bishop and you can run your own show. No! Monasticism is a disposition and effort of the soul striving for salvation, and its coenobitic form is forged by living in community with others of the same mind and soul and coming to be one in aspiration with them, each one spurring the others on to salvation. This, from all signs, is what Fr. Panteleimon has, and the Greeks in general seem still very aware of monasticism in itself and not just as a function in the Church at the mercy of bishops. Fr. Nektas was shocked when we spoke to him of Fr. Panteleimon as a candidate for bishop; an abbot isn’t supposed to be “promoted” to bishop, but remain where he is for life; and if Fr. Panteleimon did become a bishop, except in an extreme emergency, he would lose all respect in Greece.

This concept, however, seems to be dying out among Russians, certainly among bishops.

Concerning your quitting your job: it would doubtless be best for your peace of mind (“economic security”) if you took a “leave of absence,” preserving the right to return to your job; this would be normal and we would not regard it as a lack of faith in us or anything of the sort. However, in this way you would not get your retirement money and so would not be able to take your trip?? or maybe a shorter trip?? Decide what is wisest, by normal human standards.

This will be background for the accompanying epistle. We hope to see you on Uspeniye, when you will see the fantastic invention being put into operation for us by our Redding Orthodox neighbors.

With love in Christ,