

090. August 13/26, 1971. St. Tikhon of Zadonsk

Categories : [Letters](#)

Date : May 3, 2016

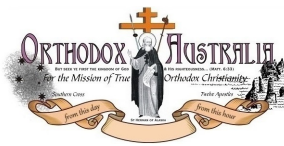
Dear Brother in Christ, Dimitry,
Rejoice in the Lord!

We were very glad to receive your letter and read it with great interest. We were touched at your defense of such “unpopular” ones as we. However, it would probably be best to discount a good part of what is said about our dire straights. Our last winter was a little harsh for the first month, but we were never in a very desperate condition; and after Christmas the weather turned quite mild. Fr. Cyprian apparently took too seriously some comments Fr. Herman made to him, which were not intended seriously. In January we received a letter from Fr. Cyprian: “immediately pack up and come to Jordanville by the beginning of Lent; we’ll send Holowka to help you move. Your situation is hopeless and you’ll fall into prelest, and besides Jordanville is dying off and in ten years there’ll be no one left to do the work, and if you don’t come nobody else will be inspired to come either.” Needless to say, we took this as another temptation, of which we’ve gotten quite a share since our tonsure (that, by the way, is supposed to be a sign that what we’re doing is good after all), and we stayed put. Last month we saw Fr. C. again in S.F, and his refrain how is: “You’re bezpopovtsi, you must get ordained or you’ll fall into prelest” (which logic is not too clear to us).

Well, in the meantime we stay put, do our work (which never stops piling up), and remain more convinced than ever that we are right where we should be. By the way, so you will know: we aren’t really trying to persuade anyone to join us. We didn’t come here to “establish a monastery,” but to save our souls and print the OW. If others are crazy enough to join us, perhaps God will bless a real monastery here; and if He blesses it, then He will give us the means of nourishing it, both physically and spiritually. Vladika John did tell us that he “believed” there would be a missionary monastery such as we dreamed of, but we wait to see what God’s will is for us. We told a few people (you, Fr. Seraphim, and 3 or 4 others) that in case of need or if your heart feels so moved, there is a refuge here; whereupon Fr. Seraphim started looking for “candidates” to send us — which we don’t need! If a monastery here is God-pleasing, then it will “build itself,” or so we believe.

But about you: you’re undecided, the clergy give you various advice.... Can I “advise” you too? If so — then don’t take any advice too seriously, not even (or maybe even especially!) from bishops; 9 out of 10 bishops are entirely preoccupied with their own problems, such as finding priests, etc. The fact that you are undecided means — that you’re undecided, neither more nor less. It doesn’t mean you want to be in the white clergy, for that is a definite decision in itself.

Vladika Andrey’s advice to join the white clergy is probably not a revelation. Fr. Herman, for all his



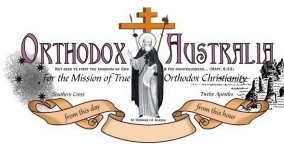
veneration for Vladika Andrey (he was his spiritual father), on several occasions found it necessary to go against his advice — once when he refused to bless him to go to the seminary, and again several years ago when word came through a third person: “if Gleb isn’t married yet, he should become a celibate priest.”

The most sensible advice right now, of course, is to finish the seminary. But not necessarily; there is something more important, and I don’t know if anyone else will come out and say it to you, so I will. We recall your discouragement about Jordanville last year; last week a visitor told us that you walk around the monastery with a very discouraged look; and your letter repeats that Jordanville doesn’t inspire you. Answer a question: Of that which was inside you two years ago and persuaded or inspired you to go to Jordanville, how much is left? Or another question: What (or who) does inspire you? The greatest mistake — or rather, sin — you could make would be to allow the spark that brought you back to the Orthodox Faith to go out. And if Jordanville is doing that to you — and it has been known to do it — then you had better get out. If you sacrifice everything to finish the seminary, and while doing it go around gloomy, accepting thoughtless mockery and humiliation for the sake of “humility” (while in your heart carrying not humility at all, but just fatalism), and not being inspired by anything — then you may finish the seminary, but you probably won’t be good for anything! -

Forgive me for being so bold, but I feel a certain responsibility for you, having known you since before the day when you said: “If I should ever become really Orthodox, I would want to be a monk.” In fact, your sister even tells me that my vague answer to your question about drugs led you to take marijuana — so maybe I can make up for that!

But what can one say by letter? We would like very much to have a good talk with you. But from this distance I will venture my opinion: down deep you are not undecided at all; it is circumstances, lack of inspiration, and no one to guide you that make you that way. Down deep you’re burning with a converts zeal and thirst for podvig, serving the Church, weeping and shouting for joy at what God has opened up for you — that whole undreamed of heavenly world which the Church gives you the means to approach, as compared to the filth and stench of the state in which you once were. Do I need to say more? We’re both converts too!

Down deep you want the full uncompromising Orthodox life. You want not merely to “serve the Church” or find a place in the Church establishment” (probably you don’t want that!), but you want to give your whole heart and soul and strength to God. But what form does this take? Apparently you have no one to point the way or inspire you. And you’re faced with an atmosphere wherein the Church has become a habit, even a career, a clique with its own jokes and vices — and worst of all, the means of deadening a living soul and putting out its spark. It’s wrong to douse this spark in the name of humility, patience, obedience, or any other Christian virtue; these too can become habits and deadening. The spark of Christian faith must be nourished; it can survive for a time with little nourishment, but if there is nothing to inspire it, it will not survive long. You were stupid enough (let me be frank) to fall for Nikita’s line, disregarding good advice and falling behind in your studies by



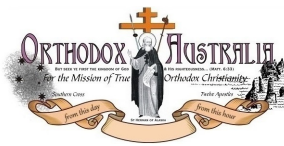
doing so; but now if you let your disillusionment leave a scar on your soul, and you go around as an embittered, complaining, bored zombie, you will be no good to anyone, and it will be your own fault.

Your heart will say whether all this is right. But what to do? I'll tell you what I've felt for a long time, since the time when what we have now was still a dream and you didn't know what you believed: that if God opened your heart to Orthodox faith, you would think and feel as we do, and you belonged here with us. But you have to have something more definite than that to guide you, and our existence here is, frankly, so precarious that we couldn't ask anyone to join us who didn't come to it by himself. And we couldn't accept you without first having a good long talk with you and presenting to you the real difficulties that face us, which are somewhat more serious than firewood and "prelest." But first of all comes your own heart, which must find a place where it can be nourished so that you can produce fruit. If that place is with Fr. Panteleimon, we would be more than glad for you, because we believe he can nourish the "spark" as few others seem to do.

We fear most for you that "public opinion" will force you into a category into which you don't belong, and that you will be weak enough to accept this and get stuck in it for life — or even worse, as happens too often, get bored with the whole thing and quit the Church altogether. You're probably not in high repute in Jordanville — a weakling who thinks too much, gloomy, behind in his studies, knows English better than Russian, with some kind of shameful sins in his past; he won't amount to much — put him in the korovnik, and maybe we can find a parish or some such place for him. If this is anything like the truth — don't accept it! You're called to more than that. You still have the "spark" — and you're called to keep it alive and communicate it to others, producing fruit on Christ's harvest, perhaps in an unconventional way. Don't forget it! And don't let anyone tell you to be "humble" and "obedient" and let someone else — who doesn't see your heart or care who you are — fit you into a conventional mould that doesn't fit you.

Keep in mind Vladika John; pray to him. He's our guiding star, and when we sometimes get gloomy and begin to think that it's pointless to go against the conventional view, that after all the Church is supposed to be a career and not something to get inspired about and inspire others with, that what we're doing is too risky, that it's better to let our enthusiasm die out and let someone else tell us where we can be of "humble service" to the Church — then we bring to mind Vladika John and somehow everything makes sense again, and the "conventional" view doesn't make sense at all and if this attitude continues to prevail among Russians abroad they will fulfill the threat of Vladika John in 1938 and *uzrezhetrcr* _____. And then we go back to our lives of Saints and Holy Fathers and get our inspiration from them.

Our relationship to Vladika Nektary, by the way, is quite good, and in fact, although Archimandrite Spyridon (and not Fr. Mitrophan) is officially our "starets," we do not get to see him too often, and this function is actually performed for us by Vladika Nektary, who has comforted us greatly in our trials, and who tells us: I (Earlier he tried to persuade us to join him at his podvorye in Alameda (not Burlingame), but our soul was just not in the kind of monastery he wanted, and it would have placed our mission of the printed word in a decidedly secondary position, which we viewed as



dangerous. And besides, we have always been very sensitive of the rule of St. John Cassian: “It was the advice of the Fathers, an advice always in season, that a monk should at all hazard flee the society of bishops and women; for neither women nor bishops permit a monk to remain at peace in his cell, nor fix his eyes on pure and heavenly doctrine.” Monks and bishops are of most benefit to each other and to the Church when they are independent of each other, we’re thoroughly convinced!

We’ve already heard about the Coptic service in Jordanville, and are only puzzled how it could have been allowed. But then, we ourselves were thoroughly chastised by Fr. Panteleimon and the Greeks about our Zeytoon article, although our minds are still open on that subject.

Fr. Theodore Tenkevich I knew for several years before he went to Jordanville, and was well acquainted with some of his strangenesses. We somehow thought he had “outgrown” them, but alas.... He was one of the original “founders” of our Brotherhood, and when he returned from Greece and wrote us he wanted to come to us, we had hopes; but Fr. Panteleimon painted us a dismal picture of him, and his sporadic correspondence with us only confirms it.

Pray for us. Write. We would love to see you, but will wait and see what God sends. Local folk tell us we're in for a real winter this year, but we go forward blindly. The Post Office recently tried to take away our 2nd Class mailing permit on a technicality, that we don't have an office in the city in which we mail. But the outcome was happy: now we mail in Platina instead of Redding, and if the snow is deep, our winter OWs will go down the hill on sleds! (Don't tell that to Kippie!)

With love in Christ our Saviour,
Seraphim, monk