



098. Jan. 25/Feb. 7, 1972

Categories : [Letters](#)

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Dear Brother in Christ, Michael [Farnsworth?],

Greetings in our Lord Jesus Christ. We read your letter with great interest and sympathy. Glory be to God that you are on fire with love for the narrow path the truly leads to salvation. May God grant you in His time to take on yourself the angelic habit which protects and separates us from the world — yes, even us poor monks of the autumn (or rather winter) of monasticism. If St. Macarius the Great could say: “I am not a monk, but I have seen monks,” then what are we to say who dare to call ourselves monks and possess not one of the virtues of monks? And yet even we may dare to hope for mercy from God if we “love much,” if we keep alive the flame that brings us to the Orthodox Church, where in monasticism can and should be the surest way to travel the narrow path to salvation. Whatever you do or wherever you go, dear brother in Christ, do not let this flame go out. But know that you cannot follow this path without taking the cross upon yourself, the “chain of suffering” which the Christian life is. And so be prepared for trials, troubles, sufferings, and everything you might expect or want the least. There is no other path of Christian, and least of all monastic, life. Be firm in these trials, knowing that with them you are on the right path, and without them you are on the path straight to hell. “He that endureth to the end, shall be saved.”

About ourselves we must speak frankly to you. We must warn you that without doubt you have illusions about us. Our conditions of life, while somewhat simple, are by no means terribly difficult, especially now with our gas stove and refrigerator and our cistern with one faucet of running water (except when it breaks off after a deep freeze, as it did yesterday). Far from having left the world behind, our machines and visitors (who increase in number) and many cares, and most of all our own worldly selves, persuade us that we have nothing whatever in common with true “wilderness dwellers” except the technical fact that we do live in a wilderness. Our rule of prayer by prayer rope is very modest, and our concentration is on reading and singing the daily services (in English and Slavonic), which often because of our cares and work we barely struggle through. And there are obvious disadvantages, such as the fact that even in the summer we rarely have Liturgy more than once a month; that we constantly have not enough space and are having to build lean-tos; etc. And spiritually we are non-entities, and you can get more from any confessor in Jordanville (if you could establish contact with him) or from Father Panteleimon in Boston.

As regards Jordanville (and the rest of us too!), you should know that St. Anthony the Great prophesied that in the last days monasticism would so decline that monks would not be distinguishable from laymen — and yet, because of their enduring of the sufferings of those times, their reward would be greater than that of the early desert monks.



You ask for our advice. First, do nothing quickly (in any case, we are still snowed in, and getting in and out is a problem). If you are in a place where it is possible to serve God and to work on yourself (you aren't required to eat so much are you? — you'll find we feed you too much too!), then get the maximum benefit from it, with patience and without judging anyone else. Make any move only after due consideration, and bring with you to any new place what you have acquired in the old place through patient enduring and learning.

Finally: we ourselves came to this place to serve God and to save our souls, not with the intention of acquiring novices. If anyone wants to be a novice with us, it is his choice — we will not persuade him. If, after sufficient reflection, prayer, and advice from whomever you can get sound advice, you choose to come here, we will welcome you to w[armly?] and do the utmost to give you whatever we can give you. But you cannot come here to do what you please, or to reach for spiritual heights on your own before you've put the foundation under your feet. We will demand of you obedience, trust, and openness.

Please forgive me if this sounds abrupt. I write praying God that I may say something of use for you. Whatever you do, we would hope to hear from you. And please pray for the worthless monks Herman and Seraphim.

With love in Christ our Saviour,