



146. Monday, Feb. 19, 1974

Categories : [Letters](#)

Date : September 2, 2016

Dear Sister in Christ, Nina,
Greetings in our Lord Jesus Christ.

From the sound of your letters, you are in need of an “epistle.” I really can’t give it, but being a like-minded American Orthodox dreamer, I must give you at least a paragraph or two.

Yes, the Church situation in San Francisco is gloomy, and you can’t even pretend that you “fit” into it. You can’t help but feel discouraged by this — and so here is where your virtue begins to be tested. You’re not about to relapse into being a “moody, immature convert” — but how strong is your positive attitude? You know that it is not “chance” that you are where you are, even though it may not be so much by deliberate plan, either. Perhaps you begin to think that deep down the whole thing is “crazy” after all? When such ideas arise, my favorite question is: What’s the alternative? Does anything else make sense? It doesn’t seem to. Then endure, and thank God that you are being tested.

In order not to be submerged by the petty “Church” world, YOU MUST BE LIVING IN A WORLD OF YOUR OWN — and that is the real Church world of ascetics, desert-dwellers, and all those “queer birds” who inspire and keep the spark alive inside us. Especially the desert-dwellers speak to us today, when the desert has all but been banished from the Church. Does that mean we think we can be like them? No, it just means that we love them and more than anything else we want to have even the tiniest reflection of their kind of life, if only God will have mercy on us and not destroy us in our sins, our self-opinion, and the rest of our darkness.

Thursday, Feb. 22

Since this letter was started we received your letter of joy on seeing a little light in your seemingly dark situation. Glory be to God for that! But don’t let it make you light-headed, as many trials are yet in store for you! Spiritually rejoice, and use God’s gifts to you for spiritual profit; but be prepared for whatever the devil will send you next. And rejoice also that you have trials, which prove that spiritual life still exists and that there is hope even for the wildest dream, if it is dreamed with real hope in God!

On Tuesday morning VI. A. himself paid us a surprise visit, together with our starets, Fr. Spyridon, and Deacon Nicholas Porshnikov. Glory be to God, we received Holy Communion, for which we are grateful to VI. But afterwards we had a talk — which revealed, despite our almost tearful entreaty, that he does not understand not only us, but any of the young idealistic priests or monks,



and talks a totally different language, fitting everything into a set “Synodal” pattern. Alas, he will be presiding over empty parishes without priests in a very short time. How many of the young zealots will survive if such attitudes continue at the top? Nonetheless, precisely because the situation seems so hopeless, let us hope in the Lord and continue on the path God has given us — to love the desert- dwellers and keep the desert in our hearts.

Different subject: so you are a “peacemaker?” Where do you get your license? Don’t you realize that in such a role you will begin to get answers that the other party thinks you “expect”? If there are misunderstandings, it is better not to think you can “patch them up,” but rather just don’t get involved in them yourself. About the “Shroud,” Alexey just plain made a mistake, and he got it pretty hard from us for it too. The “Greeks” also made a mistake, however, in making such a big issue of this and beating people over the head just because they don’t agree with a certain opinion. That hurt Alexey, but it was also extremely good for him spiritually. At present he seems to be at peace with everyone as far as we can see. As for the angry exchange of letters with John Johnstone some months ago, we can’t comment, not having seen them, but we know Alexey is upset at having written in this tone, but after all it is Dr. Johnstone who refuses to continue the correspondence, and not Alexey, who deep down is a very loving and meek and forgiving person. In the time ahead the devil will be using every chance to get true Orthodox Christians upset at each other over matter big and (mostly) small. We must firmly try not to take the bait, but [page ends]

This is already becoming too much of an “epistle” and much too “teachy.” Forgive me. Fr. Ephraim sends us the Troparia, and we already have Feb. and March. In his last letter Fr. E. asks if Alexey would be interested in receiving the service material from the Monastery, and I wrote back, definitely yes. We are sending Alexey Feb. and March, and presumably he will receive the rest from Boston.

Do you ever get to the UC Berkeley library? We have some research projects which we would love to give you!

Pray for us miserable sinners, who have the name of monks without the deeds.

With love in Christ,
Seraphim, monk

P.S. Marina the Starosta’s wife is my god-daughter, and in fact she married her husband with my blessing! Until a year or two ago we were on the best and closest terms, but since then something seems to have happened, as I haven’t heard a word from her, even in answer to my namesday greetings to her and her son Alexander, also my godson. Apparently something is cooking, very likely in connection with the fact that she is (or at least was) quite close to Sarah Hoffman. Speaking of whom, as a principle one must be very kind and forgiving of all converts, but at the same time one must realize that some of them can be “dangerous,” so watch out! Sarah seems to belong to this category — she is very friendly with you until she discovers that you hold some



“dangerous” view, when she quite suddenly drops you with never a word, and what she says to others who can say? First she dropped Fr. Panteleimon, then when we defended him she dropped us, then when Alexey defended us she dropped him, etc. She also dragged Alexey’s name into her “heresy” epistle, which I’m afraid for the Boston Fathers to thinking Alexey was part of a plot against them, which he certainly wasn’t. All of this is supposed, not to make us upset, but to keep us sober and not to spread tales and rumors ourselves, or believe them. We suspect the tales about us in S.F. are something fantastic, and we are only thankful that we don’t hear most of them.