



154. CHRIST IS RISEN! St. Thomas Sunday, 1974. April 9

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Dear Sister in Christ, Nina,

Here I promised you an “epistle” in Bright Week, and I’m sending you instead half an epistle the next week. Please forgive my negligence and pray for me and us all so that we won’t be entirely fruitless servants of Christ our risen Saviour.

Glory be to God, the last days of Passion Week and Pascha itself were good for us and joyous. Soon, of course, Misha’s “problems” began to make themselves felt, and even I am beginning to despair for him. May God have mercy on us all.

Thursday of Bright Week I was approached in the Redding Library by a young bearded “seeker” who felt moved to give me a sack of bananas which someone had given him in Safeway. (I later learned he had almost no money when he did this.) He left, but then returned in five minutes, wondering if he could find out what religion I practiced. After talking with him for a while, I saw he was sincere, and finding that he had no home but was just passing through California as part of his vain search for something to believe in, I invited him to come and stay with us for a while and find out about Orthodoxy, which he had heard of only through Dostoyevsky. For 3 days he attended our services, read and worked, and listened in some kind of open-mouthed amazement as we tried to open up Orthodoxy to him. Having come in despair, he left in hope and with tears, still not knowing what had hit him, on St. Thomas Sunday — the significance of which was apparent even to him. Somehow I have a very good feeling about him, and he seems to me to be part of that “normal America” which is thirsting for Orthodoxy without knowing. (He’s all mixed up, but from his life story I can see that he’s a very “normal” person and probably won’t be a “crazy convert.” Pray for him — Gary. We gave him the addresses of Fr. Nektas and the Russian churches in Seattle and Vancouver (he’ll be working for a while north of Seattle). Seeing an “outsider” like this who is absolutely stunned on encountering Orthodoxy, one clings all the more tightly to the precious treasure which we unworthy ones have, and which is not for us alone.

“New” Sunday has come and now we begin the spiritual year renewed and fresh, ready for apostolic labors as God gives us strength.

You wish a rule? Then let it begin simply and according to your strength: In the morning: 6 300-knot prayer ropes silently (half of what you have been doing), followed by one kathisma of the Psalter (start with the first Kathisma and go to the next one every day; if you find this fruitful, later a way can be found to join your reading to the Church’s rhythm of reading the Psalter). This assumes you have a copy of the Boston Psalter; if not, continue the 12 prayer ropes until you get one.



In the evening: Little Compline, with the Akathist to the Mother of God in place of the canon. Then 100 Jesus Prayers with bows (slow, Optina style — that is, one prayer for each bow, with the sign of the Cross each time). Then, if you have strength, the Akathist to St. Seraphim (or on the bus in the morning). No prostrations until Pentecost.

On Saturday night-Sunday morning, and on vigils and days of great feasts, no Rule required (if you go to church), but you can do whatever you feel like.

This rule shouldn't be too demanding; but don't worry if it seems too small. See what it feels like first. If there are questions or problems, say so. Remember that you are not a great ascetic, and hardly even a feeble struggler. Do a little bit regularly, according to your strength, and God will show what more you are ready for.

And what will you do all day in the wilderness, you ask? — if God is so merciful as to grant you this dream? Well, you'd better not imagine that you will be praying all day, or you'll fall flat on your face. You'll weave baskets — “baskets” like ours, “missionary baskets,” which in our case will probably have something to do with Orthodox texts in English. God will show. Also, you will have to live self-sufficiently, which means some kind of practical hard work. God will also show this. And prayer according to your strength and thirst. In our days it's all an “impossible dream,” and therefore practical and hopeful. Is that logic clear?

Forgive me. Pray for us all.

With love in Christ,
Seraphim, monk