



283. March 13/26, 1980 St. Nicephorus of Constantinople

Categories : [Letters](#)

Date : October 10, 2016

Dear John [Hudanish],

May the blessing of the Lord be with you!

I have received your letter with its news and its various accusations against Father Herman and myself. It is rather an insulting letter —something I don't think you understand; you probably think you were just being "honest," without seeing that an Orthodox Christian expresses his honest in an entirely different tone. This Christian tone is what you are lacking in your life in general, as I see it.

There would be little point in attempting to answer all your accusations, except to say that in some points you are mistaken, in others you don't "get the point," and in even in those cases where you may be "perfectly right" you do not show the basic forgiveness and compassion which Christ our God expects of us Orthodox Christians, if we are to attain His forgiveness.

What can I say? Obviously I have failed you as a spiritual father, not communicating to you even the basic ABC's of Christian spiritual life. In this past year you have gone from bad to worse, alienating even more than before, through your un-Christian behavior, the Old Believers, the Orthodox community, visiting priests, and even your own son—who is surely to a large extent what you have made him, apparently more unconsciously than consciously. The blame for all of this rests squarely upon your shoulders. You are not behaving in a Christian way to any of these people, and you seem totally unaware of the fact. (Judging from your past misinterpretations of words like this, I must add: of course, you may sometimes act in a Christian way towards them, and may God grant you more such occasions; but the sum total of your behavior, and the reason why you are driving people away from yourself, is precisely your un-Christian behavior.) You act like a spoiled child who has no intention of growing up.

If you wish to be an Orthodox Christian you must begin now\ from this very day and hour and minute, to love God and your fellow men. This means: not to act in an arbitrary or whimsical way with people, not just saying the first thing that enters your head, not picking fights or quarrels with people over anything, big or small, being constantly ready to ask forgiveness of them (and to ask it more than you think is necessary), to have compassion for them and fervently pray for them.

If you still accept my authority as a spiritual father, I am giving you a different prayer rule: instead of the Jesus Prayer, say every night 100 prayers by the prayer-rope, with words something like this (or the equivalent in your own words): Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on my brother (name)... going



by name through all the people close to you, starting with your immediate family. With each petition make a bow (prostrations for members of your immediate family). Stop at 100 (repeating names if necessary), and let the last petition be for everyone. By this I want you to wake up and start loving your brothers and sisters, both of the household of faith and those without. You are building on your property an immense project which makes absolutely no sense if at the same time you are chasing away the people for whom, supposedly, it is being built. Build first on love and compassion for your fellow men, and then the building of earthly materials will make sense and be completed safely.

I am sad to see that you have “missed the point” on so much that Fr. Herman has tried to tell you, so much so that you have used his benefactions to you, which you don’t understand, into slanders against him. People like Father Herman who try to help others to see their own shortcomings and overcome them literally turn gray when their good words are returned to them as a slap in the face. That is very crude of you. When Fr. Herman tells you that you act out of pride in your good deeds (which is so obvious I shouldn’t think it would need proof), only a totally insensitive person could draw the conclusion that it is the good deeds that should be abandoned and not the pride. But let me repeat it for you in simpler language: Many of your good deeds, indeed probably all of them to some extent, are spoiled because they are mixed with pride; continue to do good deeds, but pray God to make you humble so you will not spoil them. The effect of a good deed done with humility is 100 times greater than the effect of a good deed done with pride—first of all inwardly, but then outwardly also. It is just a slander, caused by spiritual insensitivity, to say or imply that Fr. Herman told you not to do good deeds; you are probably thinking this just to justify your anger against him, which is caused by the fact that he tells you the truth about yourself.

About David, I will repeat the advice which you have misunderstood: no one has said he is a parasite, but only that he very easily falls into this pattern (as he has in the past) if those around him do not act wisely. He needs to be constantly pushed in the direction of being independent and responsible, and not babied, or else there will be disaster, first and foremost for himself. You probably do not realize that one big reason for his positive behavior at this moment is that he is “scared”-» scared at being in a new place, scared of failing at work, scared of Father Herman.

This is a very good thing for him, and Fr. Herman has helped him with this far more than you can understand. When and if David ceases to be “scared,” there will be trouble. Father Herman and I both know him much better than you do. If I lose “credibility” (such a heartless expression!) with you for saying this, so let it be.

From the tone and content of your letter, I would judge that you are tired of me as a spiritual father. If you do not change this attitude there is nothing I can do for you, and I will certainly not press you. It is not a question of seeking for a “starets” in your case, but of an honest attempt to understand the most elementary principles of Christian spiritual life. You are doing very poorly at this understanding, and I grieve that I have failed you so much by not giving you this understanding in a way you could receive it. Your failure is not because you are incapable. You have the mind to



understand, and I think you have the heart also; but you are ruining this golden chance (with a church right in your back yard and more than one priest who is willing to help you) which you have to learn what Christian spiritual life is, by your stubborn self-love and by just not caring for those around you. Start caring and being sensitive to those around you, and you will see how your life will change (you may think that it is the others who have changed, but first of all it will be yourself).

I make a prostration before you and beg your forgiveness for my many sins and failings towards you. May God forgive and have mercy on us all. I send you heartfelt greetings for the approaching Pascha—may it be a time of spiritual renewal for us all! And I assure you that, whatever your attitude may be towards me, mine towards you has not changed in the least.

With love in Christ,
Unworthy Hieromonk Seraphim

P.s. Are you reading any spiritual book? You should read Unseen Warfare. Do you have a copy?

P.p.s. May God reward you for your deed of compassion to the poor Mexican. But how could you think that Fr. Herman would want you not to do such things? You must listen more when he speaks to you of love and compassion; if you had had such compassion for your own son, on a regular basis, he would not have left you. He loves you, in case you don't know it.

The Slavonic Gospel was sent to you last week, and you should have it by now. We don't have an extra prosphora seal, after all, and you will receive one sooner from Boston than we could get you one.