



308. April 1/14, 1981 St. Mary of Egypt

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Date : October 10, 2016

Dear Vanya [Danz, John D'Anci?],

May the blessing of the Lord be with you!

To be frank, it was a great relief for us to receive your two letters and hear that you had left the monastery in Boston, despite the difficult spiritual experience this may be for you. Just a few days before receiving your first letter I was expressing regret that I had helped get you into that situation, and if I were able to get a message through to you it would be: leave that monastery.

I say this not because of our “political” differences with Fr. Panteleimon and his 'monks—that is a secondary matter (but it is, of course, serious enough, since it is probably going to cause them to leave our Church). But Misha's letter to Fr. Herman was so spiritually wrong (for its presumption, criticism, “knowing better,” “being spiritual while looking in a mirror,” etc.) that we have finally been forced to a sad conclusion: there is something wrong with Fr. Panteleimon himself (it must be him, because all the letters from there breathe the same spirit, as if written by the same person—even though some of the writers we know personally to be not like that at all). We were afraid that out of simplicity and trust you would be molded by this atmosphere and end up sounding the same way.

Our acquaintance with Fr. Panteleimon and some of his monks (and some who have left him) has given us food for some sobering thoughts about Orthodox monasticism in the American atmosphere. I think one general conclusion is this: the idea of “super-strictness” in monastic training is really not workable in our times; it produces too much fakery and posing. It is much better to emphasize simple faith and love and the basic Christian virtues, and work on the monastic life a little at a time, even though this is accompanied by a certain looseness in discipline. This is basically what Jordanville is about, although it is not much emphasized or talked about there, which results in the fact that many there seem to be unaware of it and don't work much on it.

Fr. Gregory of Denver spent two days with us last year, enough to see his spiritual profile and warn you: STAY AWAY FROM HIM! He has disagreements with Fr. Panteleimon, but he has been completely formed by him, and there's something wrong: super-strictness without the loving flexibility our Russian monks have, even without a strict monastic “training.”

Don't give up on monasticism. You stuck it out a year in Boston, and that was a valuable experience in spite of the problems. Don't be in a rush to decide, but see how you like the life in Jordanville. If you're able to fit in all right, then probably you should stay there (if only to avoid the



temptation to “run” again). If not, you’re welcome to come to us (we’d love to have you)—but if you do, it should be with the resolve to spend a year here and then see what the next step might be. We have a little “monastic corpus” now with three cells, away from the main monastery buildings (where our younger boys and short-term residents stay). Our two ryassophore monks are living now in this “corpus,” but one of them will be leaving soon: Fr. Peter from Jordanville came last Pascha to spend a year, and he’s decided to return (he’s a little too “smart” for our conditions and he thinks we’re really not “monastic” enough for him). If you stay in Jordanville, Fr. Hilarion will cause you the fewest complications as a spiritual father, and Fr. Theodosius (a simply monk who teaches in the seminary) is a sober person to talk to.

Pray for us, and let us know how you are. Please remember us especially at Pascha, as we will remember you. God is with us!

With love in Christ,
Unworthy Hieromonk Seraphim