

CONCERNING SORROWS

Advice from Elder Ephraim of Katounakia

I saw the pain in your soul, and that is why I feel compelled to write you this letter.

Christ says: “In the world you will have tribulation; but take courage, for I have overcome the world” (Jn. 16:33). You know very well that this present life is temporary. All of us witness people passing away one after another. We see and sense this clearly with the entire power of our soul when we attend funerals. Then we comprehend just how transient we all are, how everything is vain and fake—especially when the deceased happens to be a family member.

“Vanity of vanities. All is vanity!” (Ecc. 1:2). Where do we go in following? Certainly we proceed to the place that we have prepared with our works. We will not live here on earth eternally. It is in the next life that we will live forever, without ever dying; and we will be fortunate if we will live there without the sorrows and afflictions that we experience in this life.

The question then arises: How should we spend this present life? What must we do? Which road should we follow in order to attain happiness in the next life? Which path will bestow happiness to us both here for a short time and in the next life infinitely?

Each one of us, to various degrees, tries to lead a life pleasing to God in order to be deemed worthy of the blessed next life. “Good paradise!” as we say. Each one of us selects a path that seems appropriate to acquire Paradise. However, this path unquestionably is not without thorns and snakes.

No person ever found rest in this present journey, in this present life. No matter where you turn your glance, no matter where you turn your ear, all you will see and hear are bitterness, afflictions, and sighs. Even Christ Himself stated, “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful unto death” (Mt. 26:38), as He ascended to Golgotha.

We must shed many tears, we must feel a lot of pain in our soul in order to succeed in our goal; that is, to save our souls. The Holy Scriptures from beginning to end cry out: “It is necessary for us through many tribulations to enter the Kingdom of Heaven” (Acts 14:22).

But let us put aside the other paths, and let us focus on your personal path, because this is the one that interests us. The path that our All-good God has appointed for you, which is full of bitterness, sorrows, and grief, is your husband. Nonetheless, he is the one who will save you, and you in turn, with God's help, will in the end save him as well.

When you endure a sorrow from your husband or from another person, realize that you have acquired something for your soul. A person wins during times of sorrows, not during times of happiness. Happiness is in store for the next life. All the saints were tested to see if they loved God with sorrows, never with happiness.

“Blessed are they who cry now for they will rejoice (in the next life).” Examine the life of any saint you want, and you will see in practice that it was sorrows that rendered him a saint.

“Abolish sorrows, and no person will be saved,” attest the holy fathers. The more sorrows a person endures, the more payment is in store for him.

If tyrants had not existed, there would be no holy martyrs. And they who were tortured a little are called “martyrs;” however, they who were tortured more are referred to as “great martyrs.”

Therefore, we must be patient. Then we will also be blessed, because at a day and time unknown to us, we will be crowned with an incorruptible crown.

You may say to me, “I have many sorrows and problems.” And I will reply, “All the better for your soul.” God who gives you these sorrows and problems knows that you are able to endure this amount; your soul can lift this weight. If He gives you more, you will collapse; if He gives you less, He is being unfair to you. He is depriving you of eternal earnings, of eternal happiness!!!

If you had a plot of land, would you sow the entire area or half of it? If you had \$100,000, would you want to receive interest on the entire amount or half of

it? This is how things are when it comes to spiritual matters also. Since your soul has 10 degrees of virtue, our All-good God will send you 10 degrees of temptations. He will sow and plow the entire field of your soul.

Who is the person who does not want to be happy? True. However, sorrows give rise to joy. When gardeners prune grapevines, the vine suffers, it tears, and it cries from the pain. The gardener of course does not prune it in order to make it suffer but in order to produce fruit. If he leaves the grapevine unattended without pruning for 2-3 years, that will be the end of the grapevine. It then becomes good for nothing other than firewood.

Now, since topic has come up, I will make a small confession to you. Since becoming a monk in 1933, I have only seen three years of happiness. During that time I felt so much happiness that I said, “there is no other person on earth as happy as I am. I am the most fortunate man alive.” However, all the other years I have been drowning in sorrows, to such a point that I said, “There is no other person worse off than me. No one suffers more than I do. I am the most misfortunate person.” Often times I said, “God has abandoned me.” Experience, the bitter experience of life, has taught me to neither rejoice excessively when things are good nor to despair and be disheartened in times of difficulty. God knows what He is doing. He wants to save me.

Therefore, take courage and God is with us and will help us. How many times did our teacher blessed Elder Joseph tell us, “My entire life has been a complete martyrdom.”