



A JOURNAL OF ORTHODOX FAITH AND CULTURE

# ROAD TO EMMAUS

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## *Orthodox World View: Questions from our Readers*

### **How Should I Face Terrorism?**

Your many requests and questions in response to the interviews with Fr. Artemy Vladimirov in Issues 3, 4 and 5 encouraged us to introduce a new column, where we will periodically invite various priests and theological writers to answer readers' questions of general interest. The following very timely question was addressed to Father Artemy, and he has been kind enough to answer it for us.

*Dear Father Artemy,*

*I have read your interviews in Road to Emmaus and I hope this letter will reach you and that you will be able to answer it. My name is Anna, I am thirty-eight years old and the mother of three children. My husband and I are Orthodox converts. We attend services regularly and have tried to raise our children in the Church. My problem is that the recent terrorism in America and the threats of bombing and biological attack have left me very upset. I know the Orthodox answer to everything is repentance and prayer, and although I've never had anything to do with political decisions, my own sins nevertheless affect others. My actions are part of all the drops in the common cup and I must repent of them for this reason. But how do I face the possibility of sudden death?*

*I've been an Orthodox Christian for many years, and have felt God's presence when there have been great difficulties in our family and also during the illness and death of old parents and friends, but when I hear of these possible coming catastrophes on television, I begin to panic and find myself wanting to move out of the country or to stockpile food and gas masks to save my family and those I love. People are now talking about simple preparations like vaccines and storing water, but also about making sealed-off rooms in their homes in case of biological warfare. I don't know what to think about this and wonder if it is somehow a lack of faith.*

*Also, Greek friends at my church have been telling me about prophecies by St. Cosmas, St. Nilus the Myrrh-gusher, and Fr. Paisios of Mt. Athos, and although I try to be calm and pray, my fears sometimes make God seem far away. This instinct for survival is like a cloud over my emotions. I ask myself what I will do if something terrible does happen. Will I just lose all faith in God, or will I understand that He is close? Can you give me some advice?*

*Anna  
Cleveland, Ohio*

### *Father Artemy's Response:*

I am not a political observer, and I am not a prophet, but as far as I understand the character of the mass media, this coverage seems to contain some artificial and even contrived elements. The media does not see itself as having the task of encouraging people, but only blows on the flames, causing more panic and fear. We aren't so naïve as to think that world events, outside of natural disasters such as earthquakes or tsunamis, happen haphazardly. If we investigate the gist of the September tragedy in America, we begin to see that this is a tangled political skein, and to find the ends and pull them free is almost impossible. I think that simple people like you and me cannot even guess at what is behind world policy involving weapons, armies, military influence and everything else – but we can guess that not everything in this conflict is accidental and that this atmosphere of panic may even be useful for those who deal with world finances, who work the lever of world policy.

Nevertheless, we Christians should ascribe all these disastrous things to demons, which is the reality. Certainly, they have no absolute freedom and they cannot realize all their intentions (even if they use the dark souls of sinners to carry them out), but only in the measure that is allowed by God Almighty. Our fight is not against people, against blood and flesh, but against *principalities and powers of darkness*. Therefore, our weapons are not missiles and bombs, but the holy Cross, church services, and unceasing prayer from our hearts. The demons would be very glad if pious people in America would become like frightened hares, trembling in their holes.

We are to understand that this panic is a demonic attack, an invasion of our inner selves, a sinful state which is to be pushed away by the activity of our mind and our believing heart. If feelings arise that Christ has either disappeared from your life or that He does not eternally guard us, just ask yourself, “Is Jesus Christ really so weak, that He cannot protect us?” Of course not.

We should calm our hearts with the thought of God's Providence and we should plead with Him, praying for ourselves and for our relatives, for all peaceful people, and try to abstain from any sin. As a simple priest I feel in my heart that darkness, evil, and human cruelty can overcome you and swallow you up especially when you don't resist spiritually – when you remain asleep in the poverty of your outer or inner comfort, when you are occupied only with earthly concerns and your mind is oblivious to God's commandment to *Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*

For me, it is very important to pray before I go to sleep and to ask Jesus Christ to cover with His gracious mantle, my country, my city, my family, and all those people whom I know and love; to ask God's angels to be close

and to protect us from demons; to make the sign of the Cross over the space around me in the four directions, “In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Here in Moscow, where buildings and street passages have been blown up in the past few years and many people died, some of us have the pious evening habit of walking around our apartment buildings and churches with an icon and a cross, praying the prayer, “Theotokos and Virgin Rejoice, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee, blessed art thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, for thou hast borne the Saviour of our souls.”

We have a very wise Russian proverb, “The deeper the sorrow, the closer is God.” These tragedies allowed by God are certainly for our sins, personal and social, and they give us the power to wake up so that we can feel our nothingness, our need for God and His protective hand. In these difficult circumstances people begin to pray, even if they don't know any formal prayers. Hearts open to eternity, and you understand that it could have been you in that place, and that earthly life is a serious matter. You begin to realize that there is only a thin wall that separates you from the invisible world. Who can guarantee you the following day? Who can say that you will be alive even this evening? *Memento mori* is the Latin for, “Remember death” and in the ascetic Church Fathers we read that this is an essential virtue. God's Providence uses even bad things and converts them to good consequences. Therefore, we shouldn't add another sin to the first. By this I mean that we shouldn't be frightened and horrified, but we should live in constant repentance and prayer for everyone everywhere.

We also shouldn't place all our hope in this life which is so cruel and devoid of consolation. We should aspire only to Christ and His heaven. This is our faith – either we strengthen it by obeying God's commandments and live with Him, or we accommodate the world by making our faith serve our earthly life. In that case we shall certainly come to despair.

Here in Russia, if we didn't believe in eternal justice we couldn't have lived a day with our Gulag camps and our millions of people killed by worldly governors and administrators. Innocent people lived and died worse than beasts, without even a piece of bread, sick, frozen and hungry. In Russia we live in this century only by our faith in heavenly redemption.

We must also remember the words of the Lord, *Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.* This is an appeal to the modern world to put an end to our perversions, adulteries, drugs, hatreds, egotisms, pride, lust, curses. We forget that hell begins on the surface of the earth. Our mood, our style of life has consequences, and we should think of this.

Let us also recall the fate of Babylon, Assyria, Egypt and other pagan

countries, the ruin of which was prophesied by God's servants of the Old Testament. What was the main sin of that people? Certainly, pride, oblivion of the kingship of God Almighty, a belief in their own strength and despising so-called weak nations. They considered themselves to be the masters of the world; they gave orders to everyone, but didn't obey anyone. The religion of self-sufficiency and earthly prosperity is to be crushed in our hearts in these days. Let us remember the words of our loving Father through the Apostle Paul: *My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him: for the Lord loveth whom He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.* If you remain without punishment, you are a bastard, but if you are punished, you are a son or a daughter. Be filled with awe and you will be preserved from harm.

For myself, I find very close to my constitution, the words of Jesus Christ, *Pray that ye enter not into temptation.* It is only the peace of your soul that will make the demons' works futile. We are to destroy their plans by being like pure candles, whose flame is clear and strong, not spreading smoke and soot. If you don't want to be harmed, don't forget the sign of the Cross. You are to make the cross over your food, your bed, your door, the envelopes that arrive in the mail, your car, the road you drive on. Before leaving the house, bless yourself carefully with a prayer: "I renounce thee Satan, and all thy works. I join myself to you, my Christ, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit."

We also have a very good prayer devoted to the holy Cross: "The righteous Cross, sanctified by the holy blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, is given to us as a weapon against all our enemies visible and invisible, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Then we make the sign of the Cross in the four directions.

As for preparations, of course, why not take some reasonable precautions in a time of danger? Things like vaccinations, why not? About gathering food in our homes, I think that this will be a joy, not for the Moslems, but for the mice. It is evident that our main protection is to be clothed in a garment of grace, by means of the Orthodox Church and its sacraments. If you have the protection of the Holy Spirit you don't need any clandestine rooms. We Russians say, "If God does not give a way, the swine will not eat you."

About prophecies, for twenty or thirty years some Christians repeated a fable about a gigantic computer in Brussels named, "The Beast," to frighten their children when they didn't want to go to bed. "If you don't learn to obey, my child, you will be registered in the Beast Computer." But we know now that this computer (if it ever existed) is totally out of fashion and is not even used any more. In every country we have departments, firms and organizations which use quite more powerful computers than this "Beast," which is now a museum piece. But if you don't know this fact for sure, you may still

be shaping your reality based on this kind of thinking. These ideas, together with demonic fears, can make you a slave of your dreams. But this is not a right way of thinking and feeling for an Orthodox Christian.

What about predictions and prophecies by God's servants? (If we are sure that they did indeed say such things) St. Paul says to the Thessalonians and to us, ... *Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto Him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as [if] from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand....*

The words of righteous, saintly men were pronounced, they were written down, and you can memorize them all by heart, but this doesn't mean that you understand them correctly. A spiritual word can be understood only when it is permeated with the Holy Spirit reposing in your heart. If you don't have this spirit of verity, purity and wisdom, you may be an encyclopedia of all the apocalyptic traditions, but this doesn't mean that you understand anything in them. Because we have the spirit, not of fear as St. Paul says, but of love for God and hope in His omnipotence, let us not distort reality by forcing it into the Procrustean bed<sup>\*</sup> of our anticipations of the future and our limited understanding of the mystery of the world and contemporary events.

Now, almost everyone has become either a prophet or a commentator on prophecies and world affairs, but I would like the remnant of believing people – perhaps you and me and the two or three others – to simply be children of God, who hope and pray, are grateful and tolerant and who don't allow demonic fears to crumble into their hearts. I believe that this is quite true in the eyes of God, Who says, *Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in Me... He who endures to the end will be saved.* The gates of hell will not prevail against the Church.

The last day is hidden, unknown even to our guardian angels, who cannot whisper this answer to us as do children in the classroom. But something in our hearts persuades us to think that there is still enough time to repent and to prepare our souls for the Last Judgement. Let us not waste time in these ceaseless apocalyptic talks, but pray and do good, purifying our hearts and settling them in the church of the Living God, who promises to give the Holy Spirit to everyone who asks and has faith in His love. In Russia we say, "It is not us who are to investigate and measure God's wisdom. Let us believe with a humble heart, and wait for the end with patience."

Let us also think of the birth of Christ, the Light of the World, who in His first earthly days had to flee into Egypt, pursued by those who wanted to kill

<sup>\*</sup> In Greek mythology, Procreates was a robber who forced his victims to lie bound in a bed to which he fit them by stretching or chopping off their legs.

Him. Our Lord's coming was followed by the horrific assassination of thousands of innocent babes who became the first martyrs for Jesus Christ. The anguish and fear in ancient Bethlehem and its provinces, when those crude warriors pierced these children with their spears or dashed them against walls is unthinkable. Thankfully, we can't imagine what took place in those days, but nevertheless, God's Providence triumphed. Those babies are venerated throughout the universe. They are alive before God's throne in heaven, and we must pray that God Almighty will give us a flaming faith that cannot be shaken by any earthly tragedy.

We are nearing Christmas. Let us pray to the Mother of God, who spreads Her holy mantle over the universal Church and invites all those who believe in her Son to come under it, with hearts open to heavenly grace for the salvation of our souls. ✚