

The Hundredth Day

A Father's memorial letter about his son.

+Daniel



Monday, Sep 5/18, Holy Prophet Zachariah and Holy Righteous Elizabeth

(<http://www.orthodox.net/daniel-after-a-hundred-days.pdf> <http://www.orthodox.net/daniel-after-a-hundred-days.html> [Word](#))

Monday, September 18th is the 100th day since my son [+Daniel](#) reposed. He drowned in the river Spree in Berlin, June 11, 2017, ns. Since that time many things have happened: hard things, and many good things. I wanted to write a letter on the day of his 100th day because for some reason we humans mark things by numbers. The church considers the first day after death, and the 3rd, 9th, 40th and yearly to be important days for commemorating the dead. There is nothing special about 100 days, but it is a long time, and I wanted to write to you for several reasons.

First of all, I am writing to you because you are on [Daniel's list](#) (or I should be putting in you on [Daniels list](#) and I'm behind in doing so). [Daniel's list](#) is a list which I thought of almost immediately after his death.

Daniel in many ways was a unique 20-year-old, and in other ways he was just like almost any other twenty-year-old. A unique aspect of Daniel is that he was attentive and kind well beyond his years. Dozens, perhaps close to a hundred, have voiced remembrances of Daniel, and a common theme was his kindness and his presence, and his ability and even enthusiasm to listen to someone before he spoke, his being charitable, and those sorts of things.

We must remember a loved one not only by recounting stories, and not even only by prayer, but also by emulating their good qualities, and offering them in our daily actions for his soul and ours, in a kind of collaboration. Since +Daniel died in a sudden, and a hard way, we began to collect names of others who have lost loved ones in sudden ways, and also those who died suddenly. Our family now has “members” of this “club” in both categories.

We also experienced great kindness when we went to Germany to retrieve our son's remains. This started with the rector of Holy Protection Russian Orthodox Church, which is on the banks of the Spree river, and has

always considered herself to be the “Protection of the Spree” (as her famous predecessor is the Protection of the Nerl river in Novgorod - *Church of Intercession upon the Nerl River* (Russian: Церковь Покрова на Нерли, *Tserkov Pokrova na Nerli*)). Fr Andrei was enormously kind to us, in ways that are difficult to fully explain. There were many others, absolute strangers, who listened attentively to our sorrows (just like +Daniel would listen), and even brought us into their homes. Because of this, we have a category of those we pray for who were kind.

The most important category (to me) in Daniel’s list is those who have agreed to pray for +Daniel. I don't believe in asking people for something without giving something back. I think the most precious thing that I can give to someone is to care about them and the most important way to show that you care about someone is to pray for them (at least, and in addition to anything else you might do for them), so I promised people that if they would pray for my son +Daniel daily (which is my preference of course) or at least have him commemorated in every Liturgy, I would write their names and those in their immediate family in Daniel's list and I would pray for them every day and commemorate them in every liturgy.

This I have done with very rare exceptions such as one time when I was up at 3 in the morning to go to a prison and didn't get back until 14 hours later and was not able to say those prayers for everyone that day. But except for very rare exceptions such as that, I have prayed for those who pray for +Daniel faithfully every day. By “faithfully” I mean consistently. My personal prayers are poor, but I am also a priest, and the prayers of a priest at the altar, even a sinful one, are very powerful. This is our belief, and it is corroborated by experience.

I am very grateful for your prayers for my son +Daniel. I will always be grateful, and my gratitude is not just words on a page, but also daily prayer.

I must admit to you that I am writing you partially to remind you to pray for +Daniel because, human nature being what it is, sometimes we forget and sometimes, perhaps we grow tired or perhaps you didn't write down Daniel's name and you prayed for him for a while and then you forgot. I'm not judging; that was something that was very common in my life until I made an effort to write down someone's name immediately if I said that I would pray for them. There are still many people that have promised to pray for Daniel through email, texting, and Facebook messaging that I have not yet gotten into Daniel's list because there are so many, but my intention is to get everybody on Daniel's list and to pray for them without fail every day for the rest of my life in exchange for them praying for my son.

I also pray for those who have died suddenly as a sort of barter regarding my son. We should expect God’s mercy when we show mercy.

You can see Daniels list here: <http://www.orthodox.net/daniel/dyptichs-daniels-list.html>, and you can even check to see whether or not your name is on it or not. If it is not, remind me please. I am not offended when people say: “you said you would do this and you didn't do it yet”. I am a very poor secretary. So, I need your help. If I promise you that I will pray for you, I mean to follow through on that promise and if you don't see

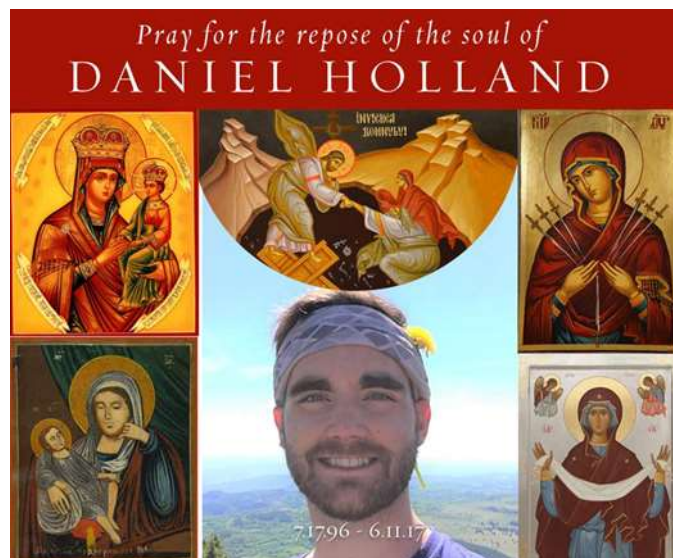
your name, or perhaps the names of your children or spouse on the list, please tell me. I will not be offended and I will endeavor to make sure that your name is on Daniel's list.

I will tell you a few things about Daniel now, partially in order. Some of this is so that you know my son, and some of this, to be honest, is because, well, sometimes I need to remember and meditate upon these things myself. Not every moment is a good moment, even after 100 days. Remembering the consolations God has given us is always helpful to get me to stop difficult thoughts.

As I said above my son was exemplary in many ways as a twenty-year-old but in some ways, he was just like a typical college student. We knew very little of his life at college and we know so much more now after his death because many loved him. College students sometimes do crazy things, because they are young, and strong, and “bulletproof”. +Daniel wanted to do something grand before leaving Berlin, and so, with a friend, he jumped in the Spree river in downtown Berlin in order to swim across it. Before he jumped in the river they looked at each other and said “here's to being young”. Only a minute or two later he got tired, because he had been up so long, and he began to drown. Two lifeguards, who were vacationing, saw him, and jumped in the river to try to find him but he had already gone under.

A person can call this random, or a tragedy. I would disagree. This was not a random day, when a random tragedy happened to my son. All that happens is under the providence of God. God chose for my son to enter eternity on the Sunday of All Saints, June 11, 2017, at about 6:00 am, in Berlin, Germany. If we are Christians, we do not argue with God’s choices.

I do not make this claim idly. There have been many consolations and indicators that this day was +Daniel’s time.



The day of my son’s repose was not only the *Sunday of All Saints*, but also a day in which four particular icons of the Mother of God are commemorated (“Surety of Sinners”, “Unbreakable Wall”, “Softener of Evil Hearts”

or “Seven arrows”, “Non-slumbering eye”). We are particularly comforted by the icon “Surety of Sinners”. Six weeks before my son died, I was in my favorite Monastery, the [Hermitage of the Holy Cross](#), of course knowing nothing whatsoever of the future was, but the Mother of God knew. The room I was staying in had this icon just outside it. We were being prepared for everything.

I'll be honest with you; my son's death is the hardest thing I've ever encountered. It is also one of the most beautiful things I've encountered, or shall I say the aftermath of his death has shown the grace of God in many ways that I otherwise would not have understood. I've said many times and I repeat again that although the death of my son was quite difficult, if an angel came down from heaven and spoke to me and said “Seraphim you can have it all taken away”, I would refuse because I believe that it was the will of God to take my son at the time that he was taken and Mother of God was watching over him at his moment of repose.

There were other indications that this was Daniel's time to enter into eternity.

Only 1-2 days after we learned of +Daniel's repose, a young child in our parish had a dream or vision (he was not sure) in which he saw Daniel drowning. He said it was hard. But then an angel came down and said, "I have a message from Jesus. You will be in heaven with Him." The boy's mother told us about the dream. The boy was accustomed to a little bit of Protestant terminology and so it doesn't sound exactly “traditionally” Orthodox, but he is a boy who is very pious and his story has elements that make it ring true. For instance, his mother thought that he was just making something up, so she asked him what the angel looked like. Of course, we've seen pictures of angels, these of these little cherubs with wings, and certainly he had seen those, but he told her: “I don't know”. When she asked for an explanation, he said he could not see the angel's face because “I could not see the angel because it was too bright, and “hurt” my eyes”. This boy had no understanding about the “uncreated light” and the brightness of angels. The day before the funeral. My wife Marina saw this child and asked him about the dream. He related it to her again, and then said, "and when we came to church to pray for him, I saw him in that picture on that table over there, and I recognized him from the dream." This child had never met Daniel. They'd only recently started coming. He knew in the dream that it was Daniel, somehow, and then recognized him in the picture from the dream.

There was also another parishioner who had a vision of Daniel on a hill, dressed in a resplendent robe, smiling, with a censer in his hand. There was another vision, of a sober person we know and trust, that was very comforting, but this person does not want us to relate it publicly. Are these things valid visions? Everyone can make their own judgments.



Perhaps we can make our own judgements about what others claim to have seen or dreamed, but there is something that is not private because it was at the funeral, and witnessed by many. As I was pounding the last peg into the casket after the funeral was over and we were about to go to bury my son, just as I finished the last blow with hammer, in cadence with the rhythm of the hammer blows, an icon flew off of the iconostasis, and clattered to the floor. It was the icon of the “Harrowing of Hell” – called also the “Resurrection Icon”. It didn't just fall off of the nail. We know this because there are witnesses that saw it, and also if it had fallen off the nail it would have hit the icon lamp and scattered oil all over or it would have hit the icon stand that was right in front of the oil lamp, or the palm tree behind the icon. It missed all those things. There were a hundred people that witnessed.

One of Daniel's dear friends from high school wrote about this event (in a comment on Facebook): “Honestly, not completely sure where I stand on "signs" ether and I wasn't going to share this until I saw your post, but while the nails were being put into the coffin, I was crying and decided to ask for a sign - fully aware it wasn't likely going to be granted. I know we aren't supposed to challenge God and I said before asking that I would believe regardless and I ask for forgiveness for even trying but I was scared and didn't know where else to turn. I asked if one of those icons would fall off the wall as a way of God showing me that Daniel is okay and is or would be with Him soon. About one minute later, I watched that fly off. I hope this isn't disrespectful to your beliefs in any way and I'm not 100% sure what to make of it but it gave me some peace of mind and after finding out which icon it was, I thought I'd share.”

These are some of the signs that have given us great consolation. I'm not trying to say that these signs are absolute irrefutable proof of anything but they certainly are comforting.

Something else that is very comforting to us, especially to my wife and I, is that we have had opened up to us a whole world of suffering after Daniel's death. Certainly, the death of a son is a terrible thing but there are worse

things. We have learned of suicides, and accidents and murders. Many of these people are on +Daniel's list (but, of course, their manner of death is often not given). We have learned people that have had terrible things happen to them and we pray for many people that have had deaths of loved ones in terrible way and we have actually talked with people and comforted people that have had terrible deaths in their family. Marina and I are able to speak with some authority now about what it feels like to lose a loved one in a quick, terrible, sudden way and because of this it seems that a new ministry is opened up where we are aware in a personal level of people that have lost loved ones.

I am very grateful for this because it is a great comfort to be able to share the pain of another person and somehow even though I feel deep pain over another's pain, my own pain over the loss of my son seems to be somehow smaller because of this, and somehow, the CUMULATIVE pain is less.

Marina and I returned recently from a memorial at OU (University of Oklahoma) where Daniel attended for three years. He made an incredible impact on that University such that even the president of the University knew him. He interacted constantly with people in many walks of life and was obsessive about doing works of mercy. We have many personal anecdotes.

He was president for the [Rotaract club](#) (a part of the Norman Rotary Club community) for a year and a half, and during his tenure they did many charitable works and he made such an impression on people that: "members have started a tradition called **Do It for Daniel**, in which cards are passed around encouraging them to take part in random acts of kindness. On the back side, it simply asks what act of kindness are you going to do today and gives a space to write it down" (quote from Dennis Brigham, club advisor, from an article in the Norman Transcript - http://www.normantranscript.com/news/university_of_oklahoma/ou-honors-student-with-posthumous-degree/article_f49ce86d-a177-5256-ad11-8a02e95b3c06.html, accessed 9/19/2017)

I have become somewhat obsessive about praying while watching sunsets or sunrises, and for some reason, I also associate then with the sea. The waves of the sea are very consoling to me. They never stop. They endure. My son's body did not endure past 20 years, but he impacted many, and I think his legacy will endure. Perhaps some will find the fullness of truth because of acts of kindness, inspired by Daniel's example. Hearing about such acts of kindness truly is a great consolation to us.

I have a saying (which Daniel heard many times): "If you cannot stop sinning, at least be kind". There is no Christianity, no life, without kindness. Daniel's life has inspired people to be kind, and even to modify their behavior. This is an amazing thing, and more important to me than signs and dreams.

I will give you one more example. It is a "small thing", but our perfection in life is made up of many such small things.

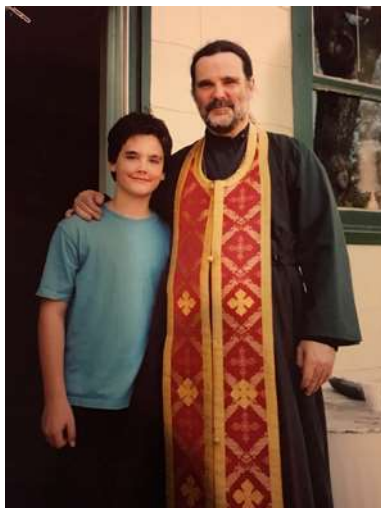
My daughter recently wrote: "We had an open house at (name's) School the other night and they'd written me 'about me' papers in several classes. One of them started 'my name is (N), and I am an Orthodox Christian'.

And then she came home today with news of 'mean girl' problems but she handled it so well, and asked for my advice, and said 'I thought to myself this is a chance to **be like Uncle D** and I wasn't mean back'.

In my family, and the Rotoract club, and only God knows where else, some people are trying to **be like Uncle/Son/Brother/Friend +D**. This is an outstanding legacy, and despite our sins and his, I believe that God will help us to have a collaboration, and bring us to perfection.

Part of remembering a loved one is to do acts of mercy in his name and do almsgiving in his name. So, we don't only pray for Daniel. Some of us actually talk to Daniel and pray to him and that are two occurrences that I know of that someone felt great relief when they prayed to Daniel.

Please understand me: I'm not trying to tell anyone that my son is a saint. I pray for my son every day because this is what Christians do. But I am happy that God has given our family these small consolations and that there were so many people that loved my son.



I am sad that I didn't know my son so well he was 20 years old and often times with fathers we know our son better when they get older. God didn't allow my son to get older. Now he sleeps eternally and does not age. But we age and the question is what are we going to do as we age. As for me I'm going to try to be better. I'll continue to pray for my son. I will continue to pray for those who pray for my son. I will continue to try to do things for my son. I hope you do the same. I hope that we can all see each other in Paradise.

God bless you.

Many things about +Daniel, including +Daniel's list, journal articles by his mother, teaching about death and prayer for the dead, and more is on [+Daniel's Memorial page: http://www.orthodox.net/daniel](http://www.orthodox.net/daniel)