

Journals of a mother about Daniel #6

Tue June 20 2017 Daniel's 10th day

(See <http://www.orthodox.net/daniel> for more journals from Daniel's mother.)

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Written on the plane, waiting for departure, from Berlin to Chicago, on Tuesday at 9:30 am Berlin time

Well, here I am again, after all. We had some amazing events yesterday afternoon. Having waited all day to hear from Anika, we finally learned that Daniel will leave later today, Tuesday evening I think at 11:20 pm. He will go through London with a significant layover, and then arrive in Dallas at 3:45 pm. This is such a blessing, as the previous arrangements put him in Dallas at 9:30 pm. It would have been perhaps close to midnight by the time we got him to the church, and could only then begin preparing him and praying at his side. But now he will be home by 5:30 or so. We can prepare him, and pray the Pannakhida one more time at his side. Everyone at church this evening can see him and pray for him with him there beside them. What a consolation that will be for those who haven't had the blessings and benefits the three of us have had this past week. We will keep watch at his side throughout the night, praying the psalter.

In the meantime, we discovered we could get into Daniel's phone. Jack remembered that his password had something to do with a password from middle school. I knew that password! I had used it many times over the years to load money onto his lunch account and to see his grades! I confess it was with much fear and trembling that we entered his phone. It felt like a tremendous invasion of his privacy. And what if we saw things we would wish we could un-see? What about other peoples' privacy? It seemed propitious that we even could get into it, so we forged ahead. Glory to God, our boy was such a good young man. His pictures were friends, places he'd been to, things we could tell were there because he looked ahead to looking back at this trip, and wanted to be able to remember so many things. Turns out, they are there for us to know about his trip. Messages were of Daniel and his friends connecting with love, caring about each other, arrangements and plans. And then we discovered a file he wrote back in December of 2015. He would have been 18 1/2 at the time, at the end of his third semester at OU. What 18 year old does this? How many 50 year olds do this?

It had emergency contact information, and then he said...

He left a message for us. A message of profound love and respect. Things that he said, in so many words, that he wanted to be recorded as his last words to us, in the event he cannot say them to us himself. Oh, dear God. Such comfort from our old soul son. What 18 year old does that? But we already know, he was no ordinary 18 year old. God bless you, my son, for your forethought and thoughtfulness and for what I dare to believe was your help to find this message on your locked phone.

The message itself I will not write here, as it is a personal message to his family members, and this journal is being shared with others. FS and I have read it. We will read it to the family all together tonight or tomorrow, when we are all together. But, my loves, know that there is a message from Daniel, coming to you soon, a message that he wrote in anticipation of not having had the opportunity to tell us verbally himself. A beautiful, sweet message full of consolation and hope and love and beauty.

Big sigh.

Moving on. We had made plans to visit with Fr Andre Monday evening, at the church, we thought. I felt torn: visit with this dear man one more time, or stay behind to tell of the message on Daniel's phone. I decided to stay behind, with some guilt for the wrong priorities. So FS headed out to the car himself when Fr Andre arrived. "But where are the others?" he asked. "We are having dinner together. My wife cooked." So, of course FS called Christina and me, and we quickly gathered our things together and ran out to join them. Yes, I had had the wrong priorities. The kids would have to wait to hear about this message from Daniel, which I had sent a teaser about, till later.

Fr Andre toured us around a little, and we saw huge, impressive Olympic venues, built back in the 30's for the 1936 Olympics. Still in excellent condition, being used regularly. German engineering, facilities still strong and useful, more than 75 years later.

We arrived at Father's house, where we met his children, David and Elizabeth. They had run out to the driveway to greet their dad, and immediately asked the blessing of FS. Then they greeted Christina and me. So polite and respectful. We saw M Tamara, Father's wife. "How can I help?" I asked. "Not at all. The children are learning to serve. Please let them do it." And they did. May God preserve them through the difficult, fraught-with-distractions-and-dangers, years ahead. But we are all beset with distractions and dangers, are we not? God preserve us all. The kids were impressive, switching fluidly between German and Russian and French and English. I felt shame for us Americans.

We had a lovely dinner, and lovely talk, where we exchanged stories about how we found the Faith, the true source of life and wisdom and comfort, of our Church. God is good. Fr Andre is a piece of history himself, it turns out: he escaped over the Berlin wall! But he said he would save that story for the next time we see each other, for we all agreed, we must plan another trip. Daniel spawned a beautiful relationship with kindred spirits.

We got home a little past midnight. We had planned of course, again, to go to bed, for we were all quite tired. The most sleep we have gotten in one night I think was 5 hours. But once again, "Let me just check my messages and emails a minute..." led to another late bed time, I think 3 am.

I woke to a knock on the door from Christina. "Are you up?" It was 7:00! How did that happen? The sun rises here around 4, and we haven't slept much past 4 this whole week! We jumped up and threw our clothes on and brushed our teeth and stuffed the last few odds and ends into our bags. Fr Andre was picking us up at 7:30. We ran to the front desk to check out at 7:25, stepped outside and a minute later Father's car pulled up.

He could have dropped us off. We could have said our goodbyes there on the sidewalk. But he parked and came in with us and saw us through all the way from checking our baggage to security, just in case there was a language barrier. He doubled checked multiple times that there were no problems with our flight. A mother hen, our Father Andre is! Are you familiar with the Berlin bear? There are large bear statues all over the city. It is supposed to be a play on the "bear" part of "Ber"lin, but apparently historically "Berlin" comes from the Slavic word for swamp, as I recall. Fr Andre is a very big man. He is our personal Berlin bear!

We settled in the waiting area, then boarded, then sat and waited. A 15 minute delay was announced. Then another 15 minute delay. Then they said there was a problem with the engine starter, the repair of which would take a couple of hours. Could we please deplane in an orderly fashion? Poor woman one row over. Her crying ten month old had finally just fallen asleep. Her two year old sat on the seat beside her, playing a game on her ipad. She had no one with her to help. I tried communicating with her in German, and I was pretty confident in my effort, but she didn't seem to understand. I tried to express sympathy and a willingness to help if she needed help. But she seemed too tired to try to understand. Maybe she didn't speak German. I decided not to try English; her baby was asleep now, so just let her rest. I'd keep an eye out for her, though.

So here we sit, waiting, and typing. This morning was hard, in the sudden rush, feeling like we couldn't say a lingering good bye to Berlin, and to Germany, and a temporary good bye to my son, whom I would have to leave behind for a few hours. This delay has actually soothed me a little, as we haven't yet left Berlin, and Germany. And I am still in the same city as my son for a few hours extra. Our minds are funny that way, as we find significance in mundane things. But there has been nothing mundane about this week. God is good.

Written Wednesday, 8:02 am Texas time

We are home. We missed our connecting flight, but Kevin had made arrangements for our new flight. Everything was ready when we deplaned. Thank you, Kevin. So we arrived at DFW last night around 8:30. Natalie and Kevin picked FS and me up, and Tim M and the kids picked Christina up. We hugged and cried and talked, then we made our way to the church where we prayed another Pannakhida.

We got home, and I went to bed pretty quickly. I think it was about 5:30 am the next morning for my body. FS stayed up to visit more with Natalie and Kevin, and Fr Joseph, who has been staying at our house to do the services in FS's absence. Thank you, Fr Joseph.

We learned that Daniel's flight was delayed...but the plane finally has finally left. It should land around 5pm, so our schedule for this evening is pushed back 2-3 hours. As God allows.

I received a beautiful email from one of the Deans at OU. She was very fond of Daniel, and had great respect for his integrity and academia and character. She is working to gather Daniel's papers he has written, just because she knew we might want it. She is working for Daniel to be granted his Bachelor's degree posthumously. He was set to graduate with a double Bachelor's and Master's in December of 2018. She is also looking into the possibility of other ways to honor Daniel at OU. Thank you, ma'am, for your kindness and love. She wrote with great feeling, as a mother to a mother. We discussed our children...

I am feeling a little numb and a sense of dread at the same time...a heavy weight in my stomach, knowing what lies ahead. God, help me. I know you will, for you have been ever-present throughout this whole time. Most holy Theotokos, help me, by your prayers. Help us, and help Daniel. Stay with my son, when I cannot.

Journals of Daniel's mother. All words are from Marina Holland except lines in Italics (such as this).

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