

Prison Ministry is just like Marriage!

No, Really!

Priest Seraphim Holland

Talk given at the St Herman Youth Conference for the Diocese of Chicago and the Midwest, held Dec 28-
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Audio presentation at: http://www.orthodox.net/sermons/herman_2015+prison-ministry-is-like-marriage+priest-seraphim.mp3

These notes at: http://www.orthodox.net/sermons/herman_2015+prison-ministry-is-like-marriage+priest-seraphim-notes.doc, http://www.orthodox.net/sermons/herman_2015+prison-ministry-is-like-marriage+priest-seraphim-notes.pdf

This is basically the outline for the presentation, with some references added.

Introduction

- I have no idea why they asked me to do this, but I am rolling with it.
- Since our theme is marriage, I am somehow going to shoehorn marriage into a talk on prison ministry.

How I got into prison Ministry

- 18 years ago
- Hackberry tree
- Ft worth jail
- catechesis
- Visiting in Hughes unit - using the telephone, like in prison movies
- Becoming a volunteer chaplain for "contact visits"
- Baptism
- Guy waiting and praying for me to come for 2 years
- Michael unit.
- 3 units now
- Visit first 4 wed of month, alternating Hughes and Michael/Powledge
- Could be more prisons, not enough time
- Letters to 40 people
- Liturgy in 3 different units each month
- Baptized 12

- 5 catechumens

Principles of Prison Ministry

- **Pray**

- Might seem OBVIOUS, but it is not, if we look at our daily life
- Please learn from my mistakes
- How to do it.

- Dyptichs** (a list of names to pray for)

- Jesus prayer:** *Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on _____*

- Prayer of St Silouan:** I pray Thee, O merciful Lord, for all the peoples of the world, that they may come to know Thee by the Holy Spirit.

A long prayer of intercession, based on this prayer, is at:

<http://www.orthodox.net/trebnic/prayer-for-all-peoples-of-the-world-according-to-the-model-of-the-prayer-of-saint-silouan-of-mount-athos.html>

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- Old Believer prayer.**

To pray for someone more diligently: from Old Believer Prayer Book, with line 4 added

Save, O Lord, and have mercy on Thy servant(s) _____, **[bow]**

Deliver him (her, them) from every tribulation, wrath and need **[bow]**,

From every sickness of soul and body, **[bow]**

Forgive him (her, them) every transgression, voluntary and involuntary, **[bow]**

Teach them to pray and to live with purpose. **[bow]**

And do whatever is profitable for our souls. **[bow]**.

[To pray for someone more diligently... From the "Old Believer Prayer Book](#)

Also in [RTF](#) [PDF](#)

Also in 4x4 card format: [WORD PDF](#)

Go here to see all these things:

<http://www.orthodox.net/trebnic/index.html#INTERCESSIONS>

- I have never "seen" results, but I do it.
Do not pray for results. Pray to be in the presence of God.
I never "take credit" when something I pray for happens.

- **Just do it**

- Aggressiveness
- You need to notice stuff.
- You are never ready, so what?
- Flexibility.
- That prayer for patience.

- **90% of life is just showing up.**

- People need you, not your teaching, wisdom, counsel.

- b. This helps me to not be too demoralized when I am not organized.
- c. Very few people in life show up.
- d. That word is metaphorical too.
- e. Lay down your life for your friends.
- **Whatever crosses your path.**
 - a. Makes life easy.
 - b. You will never run out of stuff to do.
 - c. Takes away your self-will
 - d. God will see that you are sincere.
 - e. This is why I got into prison ministry - T crossed my path.
 - f. DO NOT MISS ANYTHING!
 - g. One of my favorite Scriptures.
 - i. Not a happy one.
 - ii. Gergesenes demoniacs
 - iii. Mat 8:34 And, behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus: and when they saw him, they besought him that he would depart out of their coasts. Mat 9:1 And he entered into a ship, and passed over, and came into his own city.

Prison Ministry and Marriage

- Kinda rolls off the tongue? Not.
- What is marriage for?
 - Salvation of the soul.
 - Learn to love as God loves.
 - God is love, we are made in his image, we must learn to love.
 - God is 3 similar persons loving each other perfectly.
 - Marriage is 2 dissimilar people learning to love each other perfectly.
- All the principles apply. We focus on:
 - Just do it
 - 0% of life is just showing up
 - Whatever crosses your path.
- First year of marriage you learn: You aint such a nice guy.
- You learn to adapt, to compromise, to put another human being first.
- Examples: I just have bad ones.

- The couch.
- Talking about our day.
- Visiting her family.

Prison Ministry Stories

(All names are pseudonyms, but everything here is true.)

- Confession with Jay
 - Not Orthodox, wanted confession.
 - Of Course! Just do it, and whatever crosses your path.
 - Big guy, knew how to fight.
 - Reflective listening does not always work.
 - After he stormed out, I wrote a letter. Fell on my sword. He came back.
- D and the white guy.
 - Forced to share a cell.
 - White guy racist, profane.
 - Slept on floor
 - Gets wet during rain.
 - Told him to take his spare linen
 - Became friends.
- Kimmy.
 - Gigantic, flaming gay Black guy
 - Profane, racist, loud
 - Jay hated him
 - I told J to pray for him.
 - One day Kimmy needed to write to family because of emergency.

- Did not have stamp.
- Jay gave him a stamp
- Became "friends"
- I found out from one of my guys that Kimmy is released, and has formed friendships with White guys.
- Could it be? Because of prayer? Because of a stamp?
- Willy being baptized
 - Confessing him naked. Flexibility!
 - He was trembling
- Guy running up to me
 - Isolated, maybe a fight.
 - Are you a Wiccan?
 - Talked about doctrine
 - Was depressed, suicidal
 - Wrote to him , see him sometimes.
- V and the pagan amulet.
 - I baptized him, later, he had many setbacks, stopped coming
 - So I came to him
 - Told him to pray Jesus prayer
 - He did not have prayer rope anymore
 - Told him to use the pagan amulet
 - After several years, he is back now.

Letters from Prisoners

I asked my guys to write anything they wanted about how Orthodox prison ministry has affected them.

These are verbatim.

"Sam"

Re: thankfulness

Thank you again for your tireless love and devotion for all of us who are incarcerated.

Seldom do I feel the true love of our God in this place, so it is such a joy to know I am loved when I am at the Orthodox services. Although I'm not Orthodox, I enjoy your service more than any other because God is real to me when I am there. You ask us today to write how Orthodox service has affected us individually so that you can share it with your prison ministry youth talk. This is weighed heavily on me since you left, because of the importance.

First and foremost, I expect others will say that the youth should learn from their past mistakes because this is not a place to spend their lives. I will not. I was one of those youth who was told by many others to not follow in their footsteps and this caused me to go down paths that I had to travel to become who I am today. I am NOT saying to ignore good advice, but we all have to choose our paths in life. It is the outcome of those choices that determines our destiny.

For me, my destiny was to come here prison so that I could see the love of God. My whole life I could not feel or understand what love was. I rarely felt I was loved by my parents, so I thought to gain attention from anyone, usually in a negative way. Coming in and out of prisons across the country (One state, another state, and now Texas) was the result of my acting out.

I am now 50(something) years old with no children. I have felt for years that I would die alone and that was the end of things. Today, although I still struggle with everyday things in life, I know that I am loved by God. I am NOT alone. I sought Him out. He has always been there. Some say that my life is hopeless. I have said it for years. So be it. I have made the choices in life and now face the consequences of those choices. The difference now is that I know I am loved and God is never going to leave me alone. Because I finally realize this, I surround myself with those who God sends my way for comfort.

It is for this reason and many others, that I continue to attend the Orthodox service. I see God in everything that you say and do and I can now see that God has wanted me for what God has wanted for me my whole life. PEACE. Thank you for always being you, and sharing the love of God constantly in both word indeed.

May God's will be done through our humble prayers always.

In his perfect love, N

This letter, and some comments about it are at: "How Has Orthodox Prison Ministry Affected Me" -

http://www.orthodox.net/full-voice/prison-ministry-visits_2015-12-04-letter-from-inmate+how-has-orthodox-prison-ministry-affected-me.doc

A LOT of letters to prisoners, and reports of prison visits are at:

<http://www.orthodox.net/full-voice/index.html#Letters>

and http://www.orthodox.net/full-voice/index.html#Prison_Visit_Reports

"V"

Dear father Seraphim: I am writing in response to your request of 11-25. To me, since becoming part of the Orthodox Church I have become whole. Despite the setbacks I place myself through I have found a home! When I lost many family members due to illness the church helped me survive by never giving up and your continued love and support as my priest and friend has kept me sane even when I fought against it. This is what the blessings of the church have meant to me

I hope this will help with your talk. I also want to write some things (included) that I hope you'll be able to use in your ministry if you have troubled youngsters. If my writing helps even one youngster in trouble then I feel I have done what God put me here for. I have spoken several times of becoming either of monk or a priest and well I don't know if that will ever happen I do hope that I can help someone avoid the traps that I have fallen into.

I hope that the following will open the door to show your young people to see my mistakes as a one-way ride. I was just like you or at least facing the same things. I know you have heard that before and believe me I had too, but really I have!

I was a young man being raised in a single parent home and I started drinking at 12, tried weed at 13, and was headed to prison for murder at 17. I was a gang banger who honestly did not care. I didn't want to live to see 30 or even 20 for that matter. I saw the streets as my home and drugs as my life. I was a practicing Satanism. I thought to live was to be evil as they are the same spelled backwards. There was no sin that I wouldn't try once or generally do twice.

Then came two occurrences that changed my life. My girlfriend became pregnant and I killed a 16 year old boy. I should say three occurrences but prison proved not that different than I was living before: drugs and gangs at cetera.

When my son was born I began wanting to live! BUT I didn't know how. That was 1992. I spent years down here in the same cycle then in 2007 I met Fr Seraphim who has been teaching me to live ever since.

I don't think this letter should be preaching I guess you've heard all that but let me quote some things for you to look up on your own and if you wish for Fr Seraphim has my info and I'll answer any queries. But remember I'm going to be straight with you! **God is the only chance any of us have for happiness and freedom.** (note: He listened! I say stuff like this all the time. fs)

Read Luke 15:11-32

John 10:7-30

Acts 9:1-18

Luke 15:15-32 And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. (16) And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him. (17) And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! (18) I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, (19) And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. (20) And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. (21) And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. (22) But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: (23) And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: (24) For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry. (25) Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to

the house, he heard musick and dancing. (26) And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. (27) And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. (28) And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him. (29) And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: (30) But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. (31) And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. (32) It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.

John 10:7-30 Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. (8) All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. (9) I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. (10) The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. (11) I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. (12) But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. (13) The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. (14) I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. (15) As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. (16) And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. (17) Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. (18) No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father. (19) There was a division therefore again among the Jews for these sayings. (20) And many of them said, He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye him? (21) Others said, These are not the words of him that hath a devil. Can a devil open the eyes of the blind? (22) And it was at Jerusalem the feast of the dedication, and it was winter. (23) And Jesus walked in the temple in Solomon's porch. (24) Then came the Jews round about him, and said unto him, How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly. (25) Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me. (26) But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. (27) My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: (28) And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. (29) My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. (30) I and my Father are one.

Acts 9:1-18 And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, (2) And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem. (3) And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: (4) And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? (5) And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. (6) And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. (7) And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. (8) And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. (9) And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink. (10) And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. (11) And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth, (12) And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight. (13) Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: (14) And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name. (15) But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: (16) For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake. (17) And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. (18) And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized.

There is nothing that God cannot or will not forgive us for and there is nothing that will make him stop loving us

'Saint Ambrose'

He loves St Ambrose so much that he calls himself "St Ambrose". I do not correct him.

He is very wise, but not well educated, and writes simple and profoundly.

Dear Fr Seraphim

Well you tell your wife and children Saint Ambrose send a prayer to them and may you all be bless always.

I do all you say and the other side want me back but I want God to be my master and I walk with Jesus and the Holy Spirit until my Lord comes back to get us.

Well I'll cut your letter short so you can rest yourself cuz I know you get a lot done and you got a lot of prayer and that is a good thing. Well until I see you again take care. St Ambrose love you all.

Write when you can

Merry Christmas and happy new years

Questions

After the talk there were many questions. Some are hard to hear, but I tried to repeat the question.

Topics:

- What is it the "atmosphere" like in prison? (47:17)
- Do I go to county jails, and federal prisons, or state prisons? (48:38)
- Are prison conditions really terrible? (48:52)
- Have you been to death row? (50:03)
- Do they wear uniforms? (51:06)
- Do I wear my sandals too? (51:22)
- How do make time for "everything"? (51:57)
A VERY important question, which I took very seriously. There is important stuff here.
LISTEN TO THIS!

- When you baptize them in prison, do you change their name? Does the prison change their name? (54:08)
- Do you go to women's prisons? (55:38)