

VICTORIA FLUERARU- A ROMANIAN TEACHER – CONFESSIONS ABOUT HER MEETING WITH SAINT JOHN MAXIMOVITCH

LOOKING FOR THE PATRON SAINT

A few years ago I wanted very much to find my patron Saint. However, I couldn't figure one which to choose, being a few Saints having the name "Victor", so, I was doubtful who of them I should choose when my confessor told me that I could choose any Saint to pray for me at the Throne of THE HOLY TRINITY, not only the one whose name I also have. The only kind word for me was the one that my protective Saint would meet me sometimes.

THE FIRST LETTER WRITTEN TO A SAINT

At the end of May 2008, after performing an ultrasound, I received a diagnosis which brought a lot of fear and despair to me. Both my breasts were full of nodules of various sizes, up to 3.5 cm. The oncologist advised me to go to have a surgery, explaining me that any treatment would be of no result. I was afraid of being supposed to a surgery, of the possible malignant nature of the nodules, and because of the fact that the shape of one of the breasts could have been modified after the intervention. On the other hand I thought that this couldn't have solved my problems because the small nodules were supposed not to be able to be destroyed.

Later on, I had a dream in which I saw Saint John Maximovitch in his monastic clothes, but he didn't tell anything to me. I was very happy for that as I have never dreamed any Saint. I read about all the miracles of this great hierarch of God, being astonished by the stories of those who cured after praying for his help.

So, I decided to write myself a letter to the Cathedral of San Francisco, in which to tell Saint John about all my fears concerning my disease, to ask for his protection, for a little oil and his icon blessed at his relics. Since I wrote in Romanian, I was a little worried that the answer would be late. As I knew that Vladika loved the children and he himself was a teacher for a while, I decided to send him a photo made with the occasion of celebrating Christmas in our school.

Seeing that the months were passing without a response from a priest serving at Saint John's relics, one day I expressed my sorrow: "Have you forgotten me, oh Saint John?" Maybe because of the thoughts I had that day, I'm not sure, the following night I dreamed that I received a letter. Great was my joy when I found Saint John's icon in the envelope together with two little bags of holy bread, as I wasn't aware that it was holy oil in them. I had this dream in summer and the autumn came without any answer. Still my hope reawakened on the 2nd of September, the commemoration of father Seraphim Rose. I took part to a boring meeting with my colleagues at school when one of them brought me back the book about Father Seraphim Rose's life. I opened it and started reading.

How wonderful do the Saints work! They give us the right words just when we need them. When reading in the book about father Seraphim, I became aware of the fact that he wanted to tell me that Saint John was never going to forget me. Here are father Seraphim's words concerning Saint

John: “ I know that whenever somebody used to write him letters, that person always received quick responses in his or her mother language, so he was very careful with such things”.

Later on, I remembered the witness of one of Saint John’s disciples, Zinaida Julem: “He never let someone else to put the letters in the postal box. Day or night, rain or snow, the Saint used to cross the street barefoot, in order to leave a letter”.

During the same month I had frequently visited an Orthodox forum. There I “met” A., a Romanian woman who settled abroad. On that forum, she expressed her joy she had had a week before, when being a pilgrim to Saint John’s relics. I told her that she was a blessed person and I asked her to pray for me, in case she would reach there again. And the miracle happened! I realized that Vladika answered to my letter through this woman.

Without asking her or knowing about my letter written to Saint John, A. offered to send me what I had exactly asked from Vladika: holy oil and a holy icon blessed at his reliquary. You can imagine my happiness after seven months of waiting. I received the package around Christmas celebration in 2008, enjoying the holy icon and the two bottles of oil put in some bags identical to those I had dreamt a few months before. Also I enjoyed the photos received from A. (I sent only one to Saint John and I received a lot of photos with his reliquary, the Cathedral and the city of San Francisco).

I also had a month of waiting until my surgical intervention. I decided to cope with my fear, with all the consequences of such a complicated surgery. A advised me to read Our Lady Paraklisis for a period of 40 days. With my confessor’s blessing, I began to ask the intercession of the Virgin Mary before going to the hospital. On the 39th day of reading the Paraklisis, (investigating the mammography and the ultrasound), I was announced by my oncologist surgeon that the nodules were not dangerous and we could postpone the intervention until the next summer. Meanwhile, I was advised by other doctors to give up to any surgery for a period of time and to follow a hormonal treatment. Thus, with the intercession of the Virgin Mary and St. John, I gave up to an inappropriate surgery.

DISTRESS, A HEAVY CROSS TO BEAR

One year later, I had to face a much more difficult challenge; however, Vladika brought his help to me, once again. For several years I thought that my vocation could be a monastic one. I used to consider that I was old enough and didn’t have any target to fulfill. I avoided the assuming of any cross: monasticism or marriage. In that period of spiritual turmoil, I had a dream, about bearing the spiritual cross. It was as if I had tried to convince some relatives from abroad that they had a great blessing having Saint John’s relics there. Suddenly, I was glad to find myself in front of Saint John’s reliquary. Looking at Vladika, I realized he began to move slowly, as if he couldn’t find his right position to stay. He was restless, wanting our attention concerning something he was displeased with. Without knowing the real reason of this fact, I asked him worried: “What is it, Saint John?” And then I heard his voice: “I cannot see the cross”! I

immediately understood that he spoke about the little towel which covered his face. It was a little limp, so that the Byzantine cross from the middle couldn't be seen well; he wanted us to put it in the right way so that those who wanted to come to the reliquary to be able to kiss the Holy Cross. When I woke up, I thought about the fact that everybody had to bear a cross. In those moments I believed that the cross I had to choose was that of being a nun.

Since my adolescence, I had a lot of troubles because of my anxiety and panic attacks, but only later I found that so were called those painful states of the soul, so, I had a lot of doubts concerning about my possible monastic life. However, trying to overcome my weakness and with my confessor's blessing, I went to the monastery.

The new program was inappropriate for me, from the beginning; however, I encouraged myself that I would get used to it. Even though we had time for resting ourselves during the day, I couldn't nap though we were waking up before sunrise for our common praying services. After two weeks in which I was waking up long before the established hour, I became very anxious and stressed. Everybody from the monastery was praying for me to cope with my situation, because the insomnia and the anxiety became more and more apparent, so that I was aware that I couldn't resist in the monastery any more.

During my establishing there, I was glad to receive two news: first- the confessor father of our congregation was going to make a pilgrimage at San Francisco to St. John Maximovitch, secondly- my resignation was rejected, so that I could return to teach the children at the school where I worked.

Immediately after the celebration of the patron of the monastery (Saint Paraskeva), after a month and a half of staying at the monastery, I went back home, with the blessing of the congregation's confessor. I didn't imagine that my mental problems would intensify at home. Every night I hoped I would manage to sleep for a few hours, but there still followed four weeks of Calvary in which I couldn't sleep at all. I couldn't go on like this because I had reached the limit. My eyes were red because of a prolonged restless, my face was like astonished of fear, I couldn't speak because I was not able to articulate any words and I lost a lot in weight. My fear was so clear that I began to be afraid of doctors, medicines, people, everything, so, I could have appeared a possessed or mad person in the others' eyes. The only grandma I knew died in that period, but I ignored everything what happened with a lot of indifference, and the thought of committing suicide was haunting my mind in those days. Immediately after her funeral, in early December, I began a treatment for insomnia and depression, helped by the blessing of my confessor.

My confessor from the monastery gave me a call to express his joy for going in the pilgrimage to San Francisco exactly when my situation began to worsen. Knowing my devotion to Saint John and my health troubles, he certainly prayed for me at his relics.

I think that it was St. John's intercession that I could go back to school and begin to teach children again, only after a month of treatment. Even my doctor was very surprised, given the fact that he couldn't communicate with me at the first consultation. Certainly Saint John intercedes for those who suffer "rising them from the pit of despair", being a fighter against this foul spirit, as we sing in his akatist. As I continued to keep in touch with the monastery I spoke of, someday I received great news! Asking for a blessing from St. John, unexpectedly the father from the monastery received a little particle of his holy relics and a part of the robe this great hierarch had been buried with. So, I was looking forward the summer vacation in order to go to the monastery and pray to these holy treasures.

THE SECOND LETTER

In the summer of 2012, I felt the need to ask St. John's help because I felt very tired in fighting against my passions. Due to my lack of faith, in the end of the letter I asked for a sign from the Saint so that I could find out that Vladika became aware of my problems. Fearing of a possible demonic interference, I asked Vladika to give me a visible sign, not in a dream. But now, I didn't expect for an answer from the fathers of the cathedral, as in the first letter. A month later my dear Saint was to bring me a lot of joys.

I went for the first time to his relics, there I received a lot of support from the Saint and a wonderful Byzantine wood cross with Saint John's figure on it. It was specially carved for me and let for an entire night on the little reliquary to be blessed by Vladika for me.

I realized that the cross was exactly the sign I had asked St. John for in my letter, and it was offered to me to give up to any sign of doubt about the fact that he knew all the pains of my soul. When I left the monastery, I was given a documentary movie dedicated to the great hierarch and his mission in America. Exactly on that month (August) I finished my treatment began a winter before.

Sometimes I think of the dream I have once, that in which Vladika was worried that I wouldn't have seen the cross. Now I know that it has not been that of the monasticism, but of that of the distress that I had to bear for several months. Recently, I burst into tears being so impressed of the fact that Vladika's most important activity was to take care of the mental diseased people who were so silent and peaceful when in his presence.

Thank God and His beloved Saint John, because I had no more mental problems which plagued me for years, since the end of the treatment. Great is God amongst His Saints!

FACTS SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES

Two details about Saint John's life were to reveal him as my patron Saint from my birth. Vladika had a special devotion to Saint Triphon, the Martyr, celebrated exactly at my birthday, the 1st of February. A student from the Orthodox Seminary confessed that Saint John was wearing an orthopedic shoe having a leg shorter than the other. The same problem I had to cope with because I had a pelvian birth, but for Vladika's prayers who knew about that locomotor

deficiency, the doctor noticed my problem in time. Thus, after three months of being fixed into a special chair, my leg was set back and healed. So, it was no need to wear any orthopedic shoe for the rest of my life.

SAINT JOHN'S VARENNIKI

In June 2009, the church of our village was consecrated. According to the tradition 40 Liturgies, I was going to enjoy Saint John feast, on the 2nd of July. A day before his celebration, I remembered that Vladika liked to eat a special Russian dish called varenniki, a kind of boiled cheese muffins. Something inside my soul told me to prepare such a dish to give to the Christian come to Saint John's celebration. But I didn't have any recipes so, I searched on the internet for them and I found out that they could either be cooked in the oven or boiled. In order to be given a piece of advice, I called N., my colleague who was Russian according to the maternal line. She told me that varenniki refers to some boiled cakes; I also found out that her birthday coincided with that of Saint John. I decided to prepare both kinds of varenniki to be sure that my saint would be glad for it. The night before Vladika's feast I dreamt him blessing me, I even felt his hand on my head blessing me, but I didn't see his face. However, I remember his voice telling me: "God bless you!" The celebration was one full of spiritual joy and I knew that Vladika liked my cakes. I even received Christ's blood and body as a coronation of the event. (Even though Saint John often appeared into my dreams, I always had a kind of doubt because I know that we can be deceived by the devil and because I know that I'm not perfect for a saint to appear to me).

SAINT JOHN GUIDE AND PROTECTOR OF THE PILGRIMS

When I returned from a pilgrimage at the monastery where sometimes went thinking to remain forever, I was going to remain in Bucharest for one more day, to a lady met at the convent. I arrived in Bucharest early in the morning, so that I could go to more churches and monasteries from the capital in order to pray at the relics of the saints. Only in the evening I had to take my train to Constanta, travelling alone. Mrs. C., the woman met in the pilgrimage, couldn't accompany me to the holy places in the capital as she was waiting for some guests that afternoon. So I had to go alone but I was afraid to walk by myself in the crowded city. Honestly, I didn't feel myself able to be on my own there so, I started to pray to Saint John telling him: "Oh Saint John, take me by the hand and guide me to the saints I want to visit, like a child of yours". After a few minutes Mrs. C. who invited me at lunch before my departure received a call in which she was announced that her guests postponed the visit and that she would come with me into my journey in Bucharest. In a few hours we visited the relics of Saint Demetrius Basarabov, Konstantin and Helena, Nectarios, Spyridon, and St. Mina for the first time in my life.

In the evening, she accompanied me to a subway station and explained me how to get to the railway station. The miracles went on as I met a faithful young woman who offered herself to guide me towards my destination, deviating her path. To my surprise, she decided to stay with me until the arrival of the train and even helped me climb my luggage in. May God reward her love for me because I really felt myself as a child carried by hand, as I asked Saint John in my prayers.

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