

*Missionary Letters of Saint Nikolaj Velimirovic*

LETTER 137

TO A MASTER N.N. ABOUT THE BROKEN VOW

Something similar to an event from apostolic times has happened to you.

Your child was ill. In your anguish, you made a vow to God to donate a small field to the Church if your child got well. The church board wanted to buy that little field from you many times since it is next to the church property. But you demanded a high price. But in your travail, you promised to give it to the church as a gift. And the child did indeed recover. And then you abandoned your promise. Your wife kept reminding you to fulfill it. But you did not want to let go of the land. So finally, you came up with a crafty way to only partially fulfill what you vowed. You sold the field to some man, kept half the money for yourself, and went to give the other half to the church. But even that half could not leave your hands easily. You took some of the money from that half and spent it, and only then you gave the rest to the church, saying that that was the price of that field. But then your child got sick again and died. Now you write to me under the burden of heavy grief. You ascribe the death of your child to the breaking of the vow made to God. You say that some great fear has come over you; a fear of "something mysterious which without mercy brings bad luck to people."

Read the fifth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. A similar case has been described there. Remember the words of the Apostle Peter which were said to the culprit, "You did not lie to men, but to God." And something similar happened again in our time. In times of trouble, a man vowed to give an ox to a monastery. When the trouble was over, the man thought that an ox is too big of a gift and that he could redeem himself with something smaller. He sold the ox, bought a small calf, intending to give it to the monastery, and took the rest of the money home. Such were his thoughts. But returning home from the market, he lost the money. And the calf was attacked by another ox during that night and it died.

The Providence is not unmerciful. We are the ones who are unmerciful to our own souls. God does not need fields or oxen, but He does need sincere and honest souls. What the Master of life and death had done in your home is not a punishment, but is indeed an act of mercy. He took an innocent child from you in order to save it – from you, in Paradise, and He let grief come over you in order to make you repent, change, and finally make yourself worthy of Paradise and seeing your child again. Do not grieve over the child, but grieve over the sin. That grief is more unto salvation. If, for example, nothing had happened because of the broken vow, what would have followed then? You would have continued to commit sin after sin ever so carelessly, and your child would have become accustomed to your sinning. With time, both of you would have lost your souls. But this way, the Creator has turned your transgression unto yours and your child's salvation. So, do not murmur against the lack of mercy from the Most High, but thank Him for His mercy.

Blessing and comfort from the Lord to you.