

# Spiritual Lessons from the Gulag: *He Leadeth Me*

Barbara Harrington, PhD  
St. Stephen Martyr Mystagogy

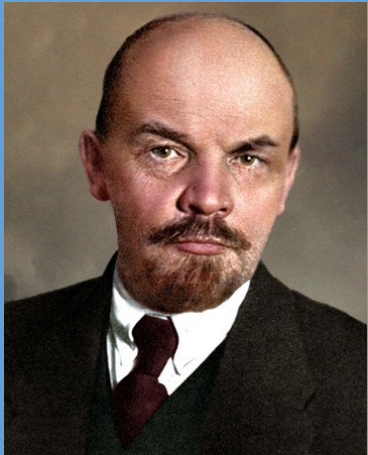
“This simple truth,  
that the sole  
purpose of a man’s  
life on earth is to do  
the will of God,  
contains in it riches  
and resources  
enough for a  
lifetime.”

*HLM, Ch 12*





The Extent of  
the Gulag System:  
“Re-education  
Through  
Labor”  
*(Lenin)*



# Glavnoye Upravleniye Ispravitelno-Trudovyykh Lagerey, GULAG (“Chief Administration of Corrective Labor Camps”) 1919-1956

- A network of 30,000 concentration camps with between 2,000-25,000 prisoners
- Included camps in the Soviet block after WWII - Poland, Romania,
- Estimated numbers of those confined are from 18,000,000-40,000,000
- At least 1,200,000 people died in the camps
- Prisoners were “class enemies” (the wealthy, cultural leaders), violators of Art. 58: “counter-revolutionaries,” and POW’s returning from WWII.





# Drawings of Eufrosinia Kersnouskaya Prisoner 1942-1952







## Women in the Gulag

“The night search, the most degrading procedure, was frequently repeated. “Get up! Get undressed! Hands up! Out into the hall! Line up against the wall.” Naked we were especially frightened...Our hair was undone. What were they looking for? What more could they take away from us?”

# Children of the Gulag

- As many as 25,000 a year born into camps. Taken from their mothers and sent to state orphanages. They had no legal rights;
- Children of the arrested were taken and institutionalized, or sent to reeducation camps to work with adults;
- Most ended up in the criminal element, failed experiments of the Great Soviet







## Servant of God, Fr. Walter Ciszek, SJ

- Born in 1904
- Shenandoah, PA to Polish miners
- Member of a Breaker Boys street gang
- Shocked everyone when he announced at 24 that he wanted to be a priest.









Enters the Jesuits at 24,  
in 1928.

In 1929, volunteers to  
go to Rome to be  
trained for the ministry  
to Russia.

Ordained a priest for  
the Byzantine Rite in  
1937.



- 1937, sent to a parish in Eastern Poland.
- 1939, enters Russia.
- Arrested in 1941 and sent to Lubyanka Prison, Moscow







1947 – Sent to Siberia on a 15 year sentence.

1955 – Freed from camps but kept in probation in Norilsk, Siberia.

1963 – Freed by a deal made by JFK (on month before his assassination.)



*“I felt I had learned much during those years of hardship and suffering that could be of help to others in their lives...”*

# He Leadeth Me

FROM THE AUTHOR OF  
*With God in Russia*

**Fr. Walter J. Cizek, S.J.**

WITH  
**Fr. Daniel Flaherty, S.J.**

— IGNATIUS —



## Conformity to Divine Providence

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- The Body
- Work
- The Priesthood
- The Meaning of the Mass
- Retreats
- Fear of Death
- Freedom
- The Kingdom of God
- Humility
- Faith
- Humanity

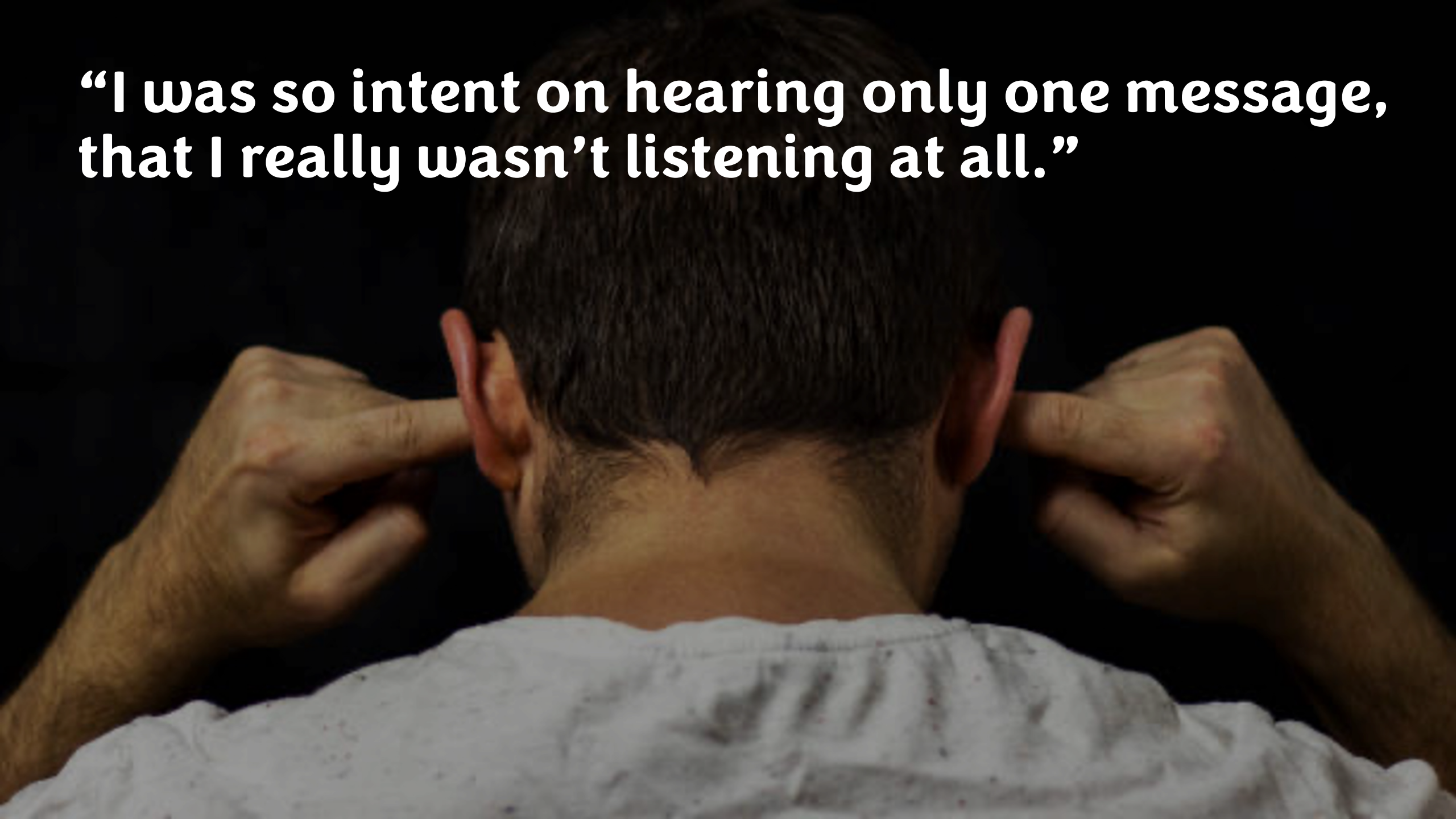


“And I learned soon enough, that prayer does not take away bodily pain or mental anguish. But it does—provide a certain moral strength to bear burdens patiently.

Gradually, I learned to purify my prayer of self-seeking.”



**“I was so intent on hearing only one message,  
that I really wasn’t listening at all.”**





“(Our tendency is) to set acceptable conditions on God, to unconsciously make His will for us coincide with our desires...”



**“Every true prayer  
begins precisely  
here: placing  
ourselves in the  
presence of God.”**





**“We all too easily  
come to associate  
being comfortable  
with a sense of  
well-being;  
and so we seek  
our comfort in the  
pursuit of the  
comfortable.”**





“There is always the temptation (in trials) to say, ‘This life is not what I thought it would be. This is not what I bargained for. It is not at all what I wanted. If I had known it would be like this, I would never have made the choices I did. I would never have made this promise. You must forgive me, God, but I want to go back. You can not hold me to a promise made in ignorance.’”



**“(In my failure...) I did not spare God from these reproaches. Why had He failed me at this critical juncture? Why had He not sustained my strength and my nerve?...I had trusted in Him and His Spirit, but I found myself totally broken and confounded.”**





"God's will can be discerned by the fruits of the spirit it brings. Peace of soul and joy of heart are two such signs when you pray for guidance trusting in Him alone."



*Rev. Walter J. Cizek, S.J.*



“Slowly, reluctantly, under the gentle proddings of grace, I faced the truth that was at the root of my problem and shame. The answer was a single word: ‘I’.....I realized finally that I had asked for God’s help, but had really believed in my own ability to avoid evil and to meet every challenge.”



**“God’s Will was not hidden somewhere “out there” beyond the situations in which I found myself. The situations themselves where His will for me.**

**What He wanted was for me to accept these situations from His hands, to let go of the reins and place myself entirely at His disposal.”**







Between God and the individual soul, however, there are no insignificant moments; this is the mystery of divine providence.

Walter J. Ciszek



LIBRARY OF MODERN RUSSIA



Mark Vincent



# CRIMINAL SUBCULTURE IN THE GULAG

Prisoner Society in the  
Stalinist Labour Camps, 1924–53



B L O O M S B U R Y

“And somewhat like Moses, the first thing I discovered was the presence of evil. Not as an abstract idea, but as an ugly reality: brutal, harsh, uncompromisingly cruel.”

**“Good men were no match for those who would lie, steal, bully, best, curse, and even kill without scruple.”**

Man is created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save his soul.

The other things on the face of the earth are created for man to help him in attaining the end for which he is created.

Hence, man is to make use of them in as far as they help him in the attainment of his end, and he must rid himself of them in as far as they prove a hindrance to him.

Therefore, we must make ourselves indifferent to all created things, as far as we are allowed free choice and are not under any prohibition. Consequently, as far as we are concerned, we should not prefer health to sickness, riches to poverty, honor to dishonor, a long life to a short life. The same holds for all other things.

Our one desire and choice should be what is more conducive to the end for which we are created.



St. Ignatius'  
First Principle  
and  
Foundation:  
Holy  
Indifference



"A spirituality based on complete trust in God, therefore, is the surest guarantee of peace of soul and freedom of spirit." --  
Fr. Walter J. Ciszek,  
S.J.



## **Prayer for the Canonization of Fr. Walter Cizek**

We adore You, Most Holy Trinity, and we thank You for the exemplary life of Your Servant, Father Walter Cizek.

We pray that his strong faith in Your loving providence,

his great love for You, and his kindness to all people be recognized by the Church.

If it be Your Will, may he be proclaimed to the world as a saintly model of these virtues

so that we too may be better motivated to dedicate our lives to Your greater honor and glory.

We commend our petition through the prayers of the Holy Mother of God, and to St. Ignatius of Loyola.

For the glory of the Most Holy Trinity, now and forever. Amen.

