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Don't Accept the Status Quo

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I am not going to read you a sermon. I don't possess any special knowledge on which to base a sermon. I am just as lost as all of you. I am just as unsure about who is to blame and what needs to be done.

In my view, the only people with a right to preach are those who know what's good and what's bad and what can bring peace to our hearts. It is well and good if God can do that, but all too often arrogant and self-interested people are the ones who annoy us with their preaching.

The outlook appeared a bit brighter during the winter protests, when it felt like we were moving forward and it seemed as if honest and intelligent Russians would achieve their aims.

But once again politicians have deceived us. Even those who used to be more easygoing

and liked to say, "Relax, take life as it comes and accept the status quo," have become infected with the growing mood of despondency and now make statements ranging from "It's time to get the hell out of here" to "You just have to accept that this is life in Russia." The decision of whether to stay or leave is a personal one, and I cannot give any advice in this regard.

But as for the idea of accepting the status quo, my nanosermon consists of just three words and an exclamation point: Never accept it! If you deliberately, albeit reluctantly, accommodate yourself to evil and lies, if you try to find moral justification for your own cowardice and pliancy with an obviously flawed system, you lose your self-respect.

Even minor compromises and collaboration are too much. Karl Marx liked to say that it is impossible to be "a little bit pregnant." Likewise, it is impossible to be "a little bit of a scoundrel." This certainly applies to the self-serving sycophants and cunning double-dealers of Russia's spineless cultural elite.

The struggle for freedom can take the form of organized political activity. If you place your trust in the opposition leaders, then by all means grab a flag and join their marches.

But protest activity can also be individual, and it doesn't have to be painted in party colors to be effective. Whatever the form of the protest, the slogans should be: "No Buckling Under a Feudal System!" and "No to Crooks and Thieves!"

If a convoy of official automobiles pushes through rush-hour traffic, honk your horn and shake a fist at them.

If government officials overstep their authority, gather witnesses and evidence and file a claim against them with the law enforcement officials. If you are a witness to corruption, post a video of it on the Internet.

We encounter corruption and lawlessness everywhere, and yet we all too often accept this behavior as a social or cultural norm. This inertia and apathy is destructive, and this is a particular pity when you consider that there are ample opportunities in Russia to organize grassroots movements.

Even if it is unfamiliar and difficult at first, it always feels good. We are just trying to live our lives. But there are many millions of us, and if we are courageous and steadfast, we will overcome. That is guaranteed.

This is my message, but it is by no means a "message in a bottle," tossed to the winds with little hope of an answer.

Artemy Troitsky is a rock journalist and music critic. This comment appeared on "From the Pulpit" ("Проповеди"), a joint television project between Dozhd TV and The Moscow Times. "Проповеди" can be seen on tvrain.ru.

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