

St. Barbara Orthodox Monastery
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St. Barbara Monastery
June 2024 Newsletter

NOTE:
We expect
the Friends of the Monastery
Gatherings
to resume in July



Dear Friends of St Barbara Monastery,

Have you ever found yourself thinking, “I can’t believe I just spent X hours doing X,Y,Z. What a colossal waste of time! I could have spent that time doing something spiritual instead.”?

Perhaps we would consider as “spiritual” such things as reading the Holy Scriptures, the writings of the saints or a book of theology, listening to a podcast on some edifying subject, attending services at church, etc. On the other hand, we may consider other more “mundane” activities, especially dislikable activities, to be “unspiritual”, things to be tolerated, or simply a waste of time. Such thinking is so common among us Christians, that we hardly stop to reflect on the underlying assumptions that might be behind it.

All of us can think of an activity that we can’t avoid doing—something that our particular lives demand we do—that we can honestly say that we dislike, even loathe.

It is true that there may be activities that are a *genuine* waste of time. They may be completely unedifying, perhaps even ungodly or sinful, but more often than not, it is our state of mind that determines whether or not the things we do (if they are not sinful) end up being a waste of time.

Consider our state of mind when we do the things that we consider “spiritual”. It is not uncommon that we find ourselves in a wrong state of mind in the midst of what we consider spiritual activities. We may find our thoughts scattered or our hearts judgmental during church services (“The choir is horrible! The deacon just made a mistake! I can’t believe that lady is wearing that!”). We may find ourselves rushing thoughtlessly through beautiful and holy words of our morning and evening prayers, totally disconnected from their meaning (A word to the wise: Slow *way* down!) We may be motivated to study theological books in order to appear smarter in conversations at Coffee Hour or to simply gain knowledge rather than to draw closer to Christ. In these and other similar instances, such potentially grace-bearing activities may be a waste of time and even harmful to our souls.

On the contrary, when doing something that is necessary that we genuinely dislike and consider “unspiritual”, it is more than possible—in fact, we are called to it by God—to redeem the activity by offering it to God as a sacrifice of praise to Him so that every last corner of this universe—yes, even the highly dislikeable nooks and crannies of life!— are offered back to Him as a gift and, thus, He is glorified and we receive His divine grace.

This belief that there exists an external dichotomy between spiritual and unspiritual, between the sacred and mundane, is perhaps not as we had imagined it to be. With the coming of the Holy Spirit into the world—as we have just celebrated in Pentecost—*every* last aspect of our existence has the potential to be sanctified with the grace of the Holy Spirit! As St. Seraphim of Sarov reminds us: the only waste of time is anything done not for God but for some other reason.

--The Sisters of St. Barbara Monastery

VISIT FROM ST. SIMEON PARISH

Saturday, June 15th, was one of our hottest days of the year at the monastery thus far, but that did not stop a wonderful visit and workday of the faithful of St. Simeon Orthodox Church in Santa Clarita. Rev. George Ajalat, accompanied by approximately 25 of his parishioners, spent the day at the monastery laboring, attending services and enjoying each other's company.

Although, due to the mudslide still blocking the road from Santa Paula to the monastery, they had to take the scenic but much longer detour to reach us, this enthusiastic group arrived early and were eager to get to work. After some opening words from Mother Victoria, these faithful pilgrims started in on all kinds of good deeds: many labored under the intense sun weeding the lavender field (photo: right) and mowing the meadow, while others prepared lavender products for the upcoming Ventura County Greek Festival, helped out with our newsletter mailing and cleaned up our tool room.



The highlight of the day, however, was the installation of three large raised beds that Fr. George personally built in his woodshop and brought here with a U-Haul. It took several strong men to move the raised beds, weighing a few hundred pounds each, into position. Although the raised beds are not entirely done (but are nearly ready for planting), we are told that he has built another one for us in the meantime. How can we repay such generosity? (Perhaps with much prayer and many vegetables?!)

After a few hours of concentrated labor, everyone gathered in the church for the 6th Hour and memorial service, followed by a potluck lunch. After lunch, Mother Victoria gave a talk on Matushka Olga of Alaska—the soon-to-be glorified saint and a woman of true prayer—and on how we should turn all of our difficulties into opportunities for prayer. Overall, this proved to be a day of blessings and good memories. We sincerely thank Fr. George Ajalat and his hard-working parishioners and look forward to future visits from this vibrant and growing parish!

READERS' CORNER

Join us in July as we continue to read, study and discuss the writings of the Church Fathers as a community. Our next book selection, from SVS Press' Popular Patristics Series, is *On God and Man: The Theological Poetry of St. Gregory of Nazianzus*.

MONASTERY WILDLIFE REPORT

The wildlife activity around the monastery has seen a significant surge in recent weeks. 'Tis the season when nature is bursting with new life: a mama duck peacefully floating downstream with two ducklings in tow, a mother deer chasing away a coyote from her little ones, a little bird with her hatchlings on the rafters of our front porch (see cover photo), a growing family of squirrels scrambling about on a pile of boulders, waiting to steal eggs from the nearby chicken coop.



The sisters often mention how, although we have never had a TV, we have the daily Nature Channel that we watch right here in our own backyard!

This past month has brought an unusual amount of wildlife drama at the monastery. Unfortunately, not all of the animal sightings here have been happy ones. Although the sisters gushed over a newborn fawn (spots and all) as it took a few shaky steps down the hill one fine day, a few days later, a visitor found the remnants of the fawn's carcass after turkey vultures were spotted circling overhead. We suspect the little deer fell prey to a coyote. (We've had three coyote sightings this season!)



Sadly, the monastery also recently lost one of its roosters to a coyote—likely the same one that took the deer. We like to think that our young and handsome rooster, Patch Adams (photo: top right), died defending his hens.

To protect the remaining chickens from further attacks, we wasted no time in building a large enclosed chicken run with the help of some friends. Sam Galloro and two of our neighbors are pictured above, filling the newly constructed chicken enclosure with river sand.



Finally, there have been multiple rattlesnake sightings on the monastery grounds in recent weeks, including one that had just feasted on a large rat (photo: right). As you can see, it's been a busy month at the monastery—not only for the humans but for the monastery's wildlife as well.



Left: *Trixie—our skittish, fussy, wild feline—finally tamed by our friend, Margaret Griffin!*