

St. Barbara Orthodox Monastery

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*St. Barbara Monastery
February Friends' Gathering
February 25th, 2024*

4 pm Presentation:

*Unseen Warfare:
Living the Orthodox Life
in the Modern World*

*Speaker: V. Rev. John Tomasi
Pastor, Joy of All Who Sorrow Orthodox Church
Marina del Rey, CA*

5:00 pm Vespers

6:00 pm Potluck



Dear Friends of St Barbara Monastery,

As we write this, Valentine's Day— a day of the celebration of love— has just passed. Notably, Valentine's Day this year occurs in a leap year wherein— fortunately for us!— we gain an extra day (Feb. 29, St. Cassian's Day). Love and time— both are gifts of God, are they not? However, how Christians understand love and time is quite different from how the world understands them. Moreover, how Christians understand the relationship between love and time is also quite striking.

What is love? To us Christians, it has been revealed that “God is love.” (1 John 4:8) God the Holy Trinity— Father, Son and Holy Spirit— is the very foundation and source of true love. As we think about it, we realize that even before anything came into existence—even before time began (for time is an aspect of creation)— a perfect, dynamic and inexhaustible communion of divine love already existed between Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God. Hence, the Holy Trinity is the only foundation and source of love— a love which undergirds all of creation! This love is holy, personal, self-emptying and unconditional, and its source is none other than God existing eternally in three Persons in perfect, unbroken communion.

And what of time? Time began when God, in His perfect eternal love, spoke the universe into existence. God not only created time but Himself entered into time (without forsaking His eternity!) in a dramatic act of loving self-emptying, taking on our human nature, in order to redeem that very nature by assuming it. Thus, God offers us His love by entering into time and our existence, but how do we respond?

Here is where the eminent theologian, Fr. Dumitru Staniloae (of blessed memory), makes a beautiful connection between the concepts of time and love. According to Fr. Dumitru, from God's perspective, time is the interval between God's offer of love to us and our response to this very love. He explains that love, as a gift of oneself to another, always awaits a response from the other. Time is that interval that awaits a return of divine love. Thus, within God Himself, there is no time (only eternity), as the interval of waiting is reduced to zero, each Person of the Trinity loving the others immediately, perfectly and completely. However, for us humans living in time, God gives us the gift of time precisely in order for us to struggle and grow into His love. Viewed in this way, every moment of time is both a gift as well as an invitation! We are invited to taste eternity by receiving again and again this divine Love.

Love, in this sense, is the only true reason for the time we are given here on earth. If this is the case, let all of us always strive to grow in our response to God's divine and healing love all the days of our lives!

— The Sisters of St. Barbara Monastery

WATER, WATER, EVERYWHERE...

We have had many people enquiring how the monastery was affected by the recent rains, so we decided to give you an update on how we fared. Last year our Sisar Creek became a raging river. Nights of rain sounded with cracks like thunder from large boulders crashing down the stream. During the rains we had a flow of water, rocks and mud coming down a crevice in the hills north of our property, which ran through part of the lavender field and cut through our meadow, finally running on down to the stream. Based on last year's experience, we went into high gear this year before the predicted rains to protect potentially vulnerable parts of the property, trenching to divert the water and sand-bagging to slow the water down in places and to add height to the banks of the stream.

We did have a repeat of the “giants’ bowling alley” this month, with the massive boulders again crashing down the stream’s corridor. The waters raged again and nature showed off her force. The morning after the big rains, we walked the property to inspect the damage. To our surprise, the property fared quite well. The trenched areas served their purpose, having kept the water from eroding vulnerable areas. Thankfully, the creek waters did not crest any banks; in fact, there was a good distance between the water level and the top of the banks. The exception was where our creekside tire swing hangs, where the land is not much higher than the adjacent waters. (We had moved the tire swing to make sure it was not in harm’s way. After all, it would not do to have the “county’s best tire swing” washed away!)



Our homemade footbridge, submerged and partially bent out of shape in the recent deluge.

Also, our foot bridge was submerged in that tumultuous water (see photo). As of this writing, however, it is above water, but buried in part in sand and rocks—a bit bent out of shape, and looking very small, since the creek has temporarily doubled its width!

Walking further, we also found that what was, last year, a debris field of rocks and mud, was now just beautiful greenery. No problem there. And the ditch that diverts the water away from the house did its job, taking the water harmlessly down into the stream. God has been merciful to us and we are grateful. Hearing horror stories emerging out of these recent torrential rains, we do indeed count ourselves protected by God.

READERS' CORNER

*For those who care to read along with the sisters, we will resume our patristic book discussions at the end of February as we discuss *On the Mother of God* by 6th C. Syriac writer, Jacob of Serug, and after Lent we will discuss *On the Apostolic Preaching* by St. Irenaeus of Lyons.*

HEAVEN SENT HELP



Luke from a local parish works on our ailing water tank.

There are times when the sisters simply scratch their heads and wonder, “How will we do x, y, or z?” Perhaps we don’t have the expertise to tackle a fix-it job, perhaps there are just not enough hands available to help, or perhaps we simply don’t have the time to do what needs to be done around the monastery. As we pray (and even sometimes before a prayer forms in our hearts!) God sends helpers our way who come alongside to fill in the monastery’s pressing need of the hour. It happens time and time again! While some of those helpers come to meet a specific need, others make it a point to come at regularly scheduled times to help us with whatever needs are urgent at the moment. To all of our helpers, in whatever category they fall, we thank them all for being Heaven’s helpers to us!

BAY LEAVES

Ever since moving the monastery to the banks of Santa Paula's Sisar Creek where we are blessed with an abundance of California bay laurel trees, the sisters have shared bay leaves with a few of the local parishes, which use them on Holy Saturday as they proclaim Christ's victory over death.

However, in recent years, the requests for our bay leaves have skyrocketed, and processing each pound of bay leaves requires a great many nun-hours. We beg your understanding and help this year so that we can continue to provide bay leaves and also meet our other Lenten obligations:

- 1. Order early.** Orders received after the 5th Sunday of Lent (April 21) are unlikely to be fulfilled.
- 2. Limit quantities.** We provide leaves in quantities of a 0.5 lb, 1 lb, 1.5 lbs, or 2 lbs. The larger sizes are for larger temples!
- 3. Send a work party from your parish to help clean your leaves.** A good handful of volunteers can help save the sisters several days of work.
- 4. Grow your own leaves.** Consider planting bay trees near your church!

LITURGICAL SCHEDULE

There will be no Divine Liturgy at the Monastery on the following Sundays:

** March 3rd*

** April 7th*

** April 21st*

Fr. Jude and the sisters of the Monastery are scheduled to be at St. Herman Church in Oxnard on these days. Please check the monastery website in March for more scheduling information especially regarding Lenten services.