

St. Barbara Orthodox Monastery
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St. Barbara Monastery
September Friends' Gathering

Sunday, September 24th, 2023

4:00 pm Presentation:

*Our Heavenly Patron,
St. Gerasim of Boldino:
A Parish Story*

Speaker: V. Rev. Lawrence Russell
Holy Annunciation Orthodox Church
Santa Maria, CA

5:00 pm Vespers

6:00 pm Potluck



Dear Friends of St. Barbara Monastery,

In our adventures raising chickens, the sisters whose obedience it is to care for them have discovered a simple trick to calm down their feathered friends who panic when picked up: Make friendly eye contact! This simple act works especially well with frightened baby chicks. When held at eye level and gazed at—with peaceful intent—they calm down almost instantly.

Perhaps the key is to look the frightened chicken in the eye with “peaceful intent”. Making eye contact establishes a connection with an animal who is able to sense our intentions—for better or for worse. As experience reveals, it is not simply animals, however, that are sensitive to our inner intentions and thoughts, but the people around us with whom we interact.

The beloved Serbian elder, Thaddeus of Vitovnica (whose sayings are collected in the book, *Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives*), teaches us this reality: Our very thoughts, even if unexpressed in words, can create harmony or disharmony, wage war or make peace with those around us... What a profound (and frightening) truth to ponder!

Considering then the power of our thoughts, we can ask ourselves: When we look at another person, what do we see? Do we see someone made in the image of God, one for whom Christ gave His very life? Do we see someone who is intimately loved by God Himself, whose very hairs on his head are numbered by Him? Someone created with the potential to become a saint someday, radiant with the light-bearing grace of the Holy Spirit?

With God’s help, if we begin to view those around us with some semblance of the eyes of love and good will with which Christ beholds them, we may yet find our interactions with even the most troublesome people in our lives becoming ever more peaceful and less abrasive, more fruitful and less frictional. We may yet begin to see even the hardest of hearts around us begin to soften inexplicably. Indeed, what seems impossible with man is always possible with God!

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God.

- Matthew 5:9

--The Sisters of St. Barbara Monastery

BACKYARD BOUNTY GIVEAWAY

Are you overrun by an excess of fruits or vegetables from your bountiful backyard harvest? Do you have produce a-plenty? Bring your extra fruits and vegetables to the next monastery Friends’ Gathering. We are hosting a Backyard Bounty Giveaway at the September Friends’ Gathering. Everyone is welcome to share what they have and take what they need, free of charge.

BRIDGING THE GAP

As some of our readers may recall, a creek separates the properties belonging to the monastery. The sisters go back and forth between the two properties frequently. In prior years, a small bridge constructed from fallen tree trunks and 2x4s spanned the area of Sisar Creek and enabled the sisters to cross. Not surprisingly, that homey little bridge washed away in a storm last year. After the bridge was lost, some of the sisters took to rock hopping across the creek. However, after several torrential rains (“atmospheric rivers”) that changed the contours of the creek—not to mention, widening and deepening it—it was no longer safe for the sisters to cross the creek.

For a long time, we weighed the pros and cons of various ideas about how to build a bridge over a much wider body of water than we previously contended with. In the meantime, sisters drove from one property to the other along Highway 150 and risked life and limb by walking along highway’s edge with vehicles whizzing by at high speeds.

What was the solution? Interestingly, the solution was right under our noses for months: a cattle gate! In His providence, the Lord gifted us with a cattle gate in the very same storms that caused our dilemma in the first place. As it turns out, in the chaos of the storm, this gate floated downstream along with other debris, lodged itself in some boulders, and remained an eyesore for quite some time. One fine day, someone decided to dislodge the gate and see if it could perhaps span the creek. Lo and behold, it was the perfect length! For several weeks, the sisters took to traversing across this “upcycled” cattle gate like cautious ducks—with feet akimbo— inching gingerly along the braces of the gate. This worked somewhat but, admittedly, their balancing skills were put to the test, threatening a sudden and unwelcomed plunge into the creek.

Recently, with a little ingenuity and inspiration, a few pieces of plywood and concrete pier blocks (“pylons”), our good friend and first-rate engineer, Doug Jones, constructed a much safer and sturdier bridge using this very gate sent by God (see photo above).

Whoever heard of a bridge built out of a cattle gate?! The sisters thank God heartily and are not a little amused at the unexpected ways in which He provides for us!



TWO NOTEWORTHY ICONS

On the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, the monastery was graced with the arrival of two very special icons. They were a particular blessing as they both contain a martyric element, appropriate to the feast day on which they were gifted to us.

One is an older icon of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker, still bearing gash marks on his head from someone's attempt to deface him.

Eugene Solonin, who brought it to us, called it a "martyred icon". The other is an icon associated with the Kiev Caves Lavra, depicting the Mother of God in the center flanked by Sts. Anthony and Theodosius, 11th C. founders of the Kiev Caves Lavra, on either side. This latter icon is adorned with a beautiful metal cover (*riza*) and dates to 1827. It is especially meaningful today as it reminds us to pray for the brethren of the Kiev Caves Lavra and all those in the Ukrainian Orthodox Church who are currently being persecuted for their Orthodox faith.

These two beautiful icons are gifts from our friends Eugene Solonin, Helena Solomaho, Tatiana Vaganova and Lyubov Ganchenko. Eugene regularly 'rescues' old icons from international auctions (these two came from a Brussels auction), arranges for their restoration, and donates them to churches and monasteries. According to him, he prays about where to place these sacred objects, and the icons themselves indicate where they wish to be. We are grateful for this generous gift and that these icons have chosen to make their home here at St. Barbara Monastery.



SACRED ARTS FESTIVAL

The sisters have marked their calendar for October 6th -8th, when St. Athanasius Church in Santa Barbara will be hosting their sixth Sacred Arts Festival. The following are just a handful of the events being offered:

- Fr. Turbo Qualls, an iconographer and the rector of St. Mary of Egypt Church in Kansas City, MO, will be speaking on "My Journey to the Ancient Faith -- the Royal Path" and "Wonder as Worship in Orthodox Christian Art."
- Valerie Yova will be directing a special Festival Choir in the Sacred Music Concert.
- Iconographers Dorothy Alexander and Kh. Cayce-Marie Halsell will offer a workshop on various aspects of iconography, including egg tempera and gilding.
- Fr. John Finley will offer a workshop on prosfora baking.
- Mother Paraskeva and Sister Photini will offer a workshop on weaving prayer ropes (limited to 8 participants).

If you wish to attend, you might visit St. Athanasius' website and reserve your space for any and all of these events, as well as others not mentioned here.