

*St. Barbara Orthodox Monastery*  
*15799 Ojai Rd, Santa Paula, CA 93060*  
*(805) 921-1563*

*St. Barbara Monastery*  
*Friends' Gathering*  
*February 23rd, 2025*

*4 pm Presentation:*

*The Life & Sayings*  
*of St. John Cassian*

*Speaker: V. Rev. Michael Laffoon*

*Pastor Emeritus*

*St. Mark Orthodox Church, Irvine, CA*

*5 pm Vespers*

*6 pm Potluck*



Dear Friends of St. Barbara Monastery,

Below is a pre-Lenten reflection offered by our monastery priest, Fr. Jude Lépine:

### **THE RELEVANCE OF GREAT LENT FOR OUR TROUBLED TIMES**

What is the goal of Great Lent? The goal is simple: "To release the love of God and our neighbor from the bounds of our passions". These simple and compelling words were written by St. Silouan in his *Diary*. And how do the practices and services of Great Lent help us do this? They help loose us from our "benign" passions, such as our distractions and self-indulgences; they help us let God, by His grace, loosen the grasp of our "darker" passions on us and they teach us how to fight them through repentance and humility.

The liturgical services of Great Lent, each of them with its particular tonality (its "radiant sadness", as it is sometimes said) are there to lead us towards the goal. They are peaceful stopovers, moments of refreshment in our journey towards Pascha. Besides the services of Great Lent, there are resources such as The Art of Prayer, (an excellent book that condenses many of the ideas expressed in the Philokalia) and The Ladder of Divine Ascent by St. John Climacus (which treats the passions in a more thorough way), to supplement the Lenten services. I also cannot recommend highly enough the book by Metropolitan Anthony Bloom, Meditations on a Theme, which is based on the Gospel readings of this season.

As a Christian, obviously my hope is in the Kingdom which is not of this world. But this can sometimes lead to the notion that the "Kingdom which is not of this world" is irrelevant to our daily needs and lives. Although like many other Christians, I am torn apart by the events happening throughout the world and in this country, it is still true that there is no Christian hope, ultimately, in a political party or program— though the temptation to believe in such an illusion is a very insidious one and can take any ideological color. That does not mean that we cannot or should not, in good conscience, work to solve the problems we see around us. But ultimately, our involvement must be undergirded by prayer and an understanding that, for all of us Christians, "our political program is the Trinity" (as the philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev noted). The community where we can and should invest ourselves to live together is the community of the Church. Too frequently we allow our human differences and perspectives to tear us away from each other, and we find ourselves building the human *polis*, the city built by the limitless and ultimately destructive passions of men.

So, back to Great Lent: our home, on earth and in heaven, is finally the Church. We need this Lenten journey which culminates in the celebration of the Resurrection of Christ, to remind us, through its liturgical anticipation, of our resurrection in His Kingdom. It is a time of retreat from worldly matters and centering on the meaning of our ultimate destiny, individually and as humanity. It does require effort on our part, so that when we "return" to the world after Pascha, we do not find ourselves just continuing our lives "as usual", not having been changed by our Lenten experience, but just experiencing the continued dissolution of our hearts into what Shakespeare called "a tale [...] full of sound and fury and signifying nothing."

Rather, may our Lenten experience grow our love for Christ and His Church. Here we learn to call on the Lord, to trust in His power, grace and saving work on our behalf. Where there is a love that reaches the level of self-sacrifice for the other, God is present. This is what all our liturgical life is about. The liturgy is the time and place where the veil is lifted, where we are invited to see, feel and taste the meaning of our efforts to build a "better world", a community as the image of the Kingdom of God, at our very modest level. This love is also called to radiate beyond the doors of the Church to include the least among us.

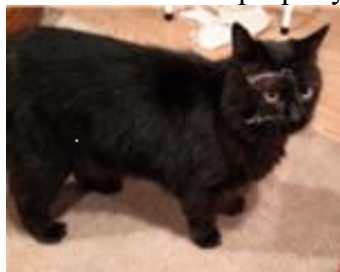
### ***LOCAL BEAR MAKES THE ROUNDS***

*Thou appointedst the darkness and there wast the night,  
wherein all the beasts of the forest go about...— Psalm 103:20*

Apparently, California black bears are excellent climbers. Although the photo below was not taken by our next door neighbor, she *did* capture on video a fully grown California black bear (*Ursus americanus californiensis*) high up in her hachiya persimmon tree just a few nights ago. With the help of a spotlight, she managed to film its antics as it moved about among the branches, enjoying a whole treeful of perfectly ripe persimmons.



A few days later, one of our friends discovered bear tracks in the mud on our property—right outside our church! Unfortunately, we weren't able to take any good photos of these imprints before the rains washed them away. Some of the sisters decided that it was this same persimmon-loving night visitor, whom we named "Misha", who came to church to thank God for its recent fruity feast. So far, we've named all the monastery bear visitors "Misha". Suggestions for more imaginative bear names are welcomed!



***Left: Blackberry: Black bears have nothing on me!***

## ***BAY LEAVES***

One of the benefits of being on the bank of a creek— in our case, Sisar Creek— is that the monastery has been blessed with an abundance of flourishing California bay laurel trees. Each year, we share our bounty of bay leaves with churches who keep the Orthodox tradition of jubilantly scattering these leaves on Great and Holy Saturday, symbolically proclaiming Christ’s saving victory over sin, death and the devil. (In ancient times, emperors and victorious athletes wore crowns woven with bay laurel leaves.)

In recent years, there has been a surge in requests for our bay leaves. Unbeknownst to many: harvesting, cleaning and processing each pound of leaves (about 1000 leaves/lb!) requires a great many nun-hours. As such, in order to continue to provide bay leaves and also meet our increased Lenten obligations, we ask for your understanding and help:



*Above: Cleaning bay leaves, one leaf at a time.*

1. **Order early.** Orders received after the 5th Sunday of Lent (**April 6th**) are unlikely to be fulfilled.
2. **Limit quantities.** We provide leaves in quantities of a half-pound, 1 pound, 1.5 pounds, or 2 pounds. Please choose 1 pound or less unless your temple is exceptionally large.
3. **Take branches or stems and clean them at your parish.** We will provide whole branches if you are local, or cut down the branches to a smaller size and mail you a large box. This is a good way to get more than 1 pound of leaves!
4. **Send a work party from your parish to help clean your leaves.** A good handful of volunteers can save the sisters several days of work.
5. **Grow your own leaves.** Consider planting bay trees near your church.

To order, please email [sbmonasterystore@gmail.com](mailto:sbmonasterystore@gmail.com). Donations are welcomed.

## ***TAX LETTERS***

If you need a “no goods and services” letter for your donations to the monastery in this past year, please email us at [sbmonastery@gmail.com](mailto:sbmonastery@gmail.com). We won’t be sending out tax letters this year unless requested. Thank you for your understanding!