

*St. Barbara Orthodox Monastery*  
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A photograph of a church interior. In the foreground, a person wearing a black hooded garment is seen from behind, looking towards a religious artwork. The artwork features a central figure, likely a saint, in a purple and red robe, holding a staff. To the right, another figure in a red and blue robe is partially visible. The background shows other religious paintings and architectural details of the church.

*St. Barbara Monastery*  
*Friends Gathering*  
*Sunday, October 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022*

*4:00 pm Presentation:*

*Judgment, Repentance and Resurrection*

*Speaker: Archpriest John Tomasi*

*Priest of Our Lady Joy of All Who Sorrow Mission,  
Los Angeles, CA*

*5:00 pm: Vespers*

*6:00 pm: Potluck*



Dear Friends of St. Barbara Monastery,

The Sisters have been known to chuckle to themselves when driving along some road and encountering the construction zone sign: *Slow Men at Work*. The actual road sign itself contains no punctuation at all and, hence, is subject to interpretation: Are *slow men* at work? Or should we slow down because men are working?

What if we altered this well-known road sign as follows? Instead of “Slow Men at Work,” imagine encountering a sign that read “Slow God at Work.” How would we most likely interpret this phrase? Perhaps if we were honest with ourselves, many of us at some point in our lives would interpret this sign to mean “God sure is taking a long time to do X, Y or Z!” or “God’s timing seems to be off. Why is He not doing X right now?”

Despite our impatience with God’s timing in His work in our lives and in the world—whether to bring to pass some much longed for desire in our personal lives or to rectify some terrible wrong in society, for example—God is *never* slow, *never* late to show up, or even early, for that matter. He is, in fact, always precisely on time. Rather than God being slow, it is often we ourselves who are slow to comprehend the reality that God’s will is accomplished in His precise and perfect timing with the good of all who love Him in mind. If we reflect, perhaps many of us would be able to name a time, whether in history or in our personal lives, when indeed God was at work precisely when He needed to be. We just didn’t perceive it to be so in the moment.

What is needful from us then is to slow *way* down in our lives—even in our very prayers to God—to be still before Him and to bow in silence before His holy will in our lives and in the world. In other words, “Slow: God at Work.” Are our thoughts racing away at a million miles an hour because of unforeseen or distressing circumstances? Are we distracted and dispersed in our thoughts and unable to know His Presence with us right now? We can pray to Him and He will help us: “Bring together my scattered thoughts, O Lord, and cleanse my hardened heart.” (Tone III, Aposticha, Monday Matins).

The prayer *par excellence* that the Church offers to us to slow us down is precisely this: *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner*. If, amidst the bustling swirl of life, we find it impossible to focus and stand still in our hearts before God, let us at least try to take up the work of uniting our hearts with the words of this simple but powerful prayer. In so doing, God will surely confirm in us the unshakable truth that He is at work right now in every circumstance—difficult as it may be—and that His timing in our lives is spot on for our salvation.

The Sisters

of St. Barbara Monastery

## **SUMMARY OF LAST MONTH'S FRIENDS GATHERING TALK**

“*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.*” So Fr. Yousuf Rassam might have begun his talk given at the Friends’ gathering a month ago. Father showed us how, in medieval Christianity and in Christendom before that time as well, the culture around death was interlaced with the call for mercy for the departed. At the time of death, the departed’s body was washed. It was then taken to the church where a psalm vigil was kept, and a Divine Liturgy served for the departed (much as Orthodox Christians do now). He contrasted that to current American culture, where death is hidden away and made as sanitized as possible when it must be faced. Americans tend to emphasize celebrating a life, rather than stressing how the departed need our prayers and remembering that we too will be in need of those very prayers in due time.

Five hundred years ago in Europe, people were not afraid to portray death in shocking terms. This was not to frighten for fear’s sake, but to bring people to repentance and sobriety and to soften their hearts to be merciful. A striking example of this is the *Danse Macabre* (lit. “Dance of Death”). In this art form, skeletal images of death are depicted—coming for the living, mingling among them, tugging on their sleeves. Death is seen as the great equalizer—for whether Pope, noble or peasant, death will take us all.

The medieval culture around death had merciful sharing as a theme throughout. Sweet bread might be handed out at the funeral with requests for prayer. A simple memorial cross asked the passer-by to remember the sorrow of the family and pray for the departed. Mercy—our need of it and a call for it—was a particularly strong theme on All Souls’ Eve (Halloween), when the bell would toll throughout the night, saying, “Remember your own death and pray for all the dead, whoever they are.”

Where is the call for us to have mercy on each other voiced in our society? Rather, we passionately fight each other over our differences. What happened to All Souls’ Day—that great call for mercy—in American secularized culture? It became Halloween! We still remember the dead, but with no call for repentance and mercy; we still hand out sweets, but with no prayer for the dead. Fr. Yousuf urged us to put Christianity back, at least in our own minds, into Halloween. We can reclaim Halloween. As we drive past grimly decorated houses, we can pray for the dead; as we hand out candy to our neighbors, we can remember merciful sharing.

Let us end this article with Fr. Yousuf’s call to us to remember that we are all “pitifully mortal.” Keeping in mind the *Danse Macabre*, he had us think of the people we most care about and most resent, the famous whom we love or judge. “Because in our mortality, the best of us and the worst of us, rich or poor, are *pitiable*.... I want you to think of Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton holding hands. I want you to think of Patriarch Bartholomew and Patriarch Kirill holding hands. I want you to think of those that you resent and you holding hands. I want you to think of death holding both your hands together. And I want you to know that is true. What was depicted in the *Danse Macabre* art form is the truth of our human condition *and it increases our charity, our pity, to remember it*, because we remember that we ourselves are mortal and in need of pity.”

## READERS' CORNER



*The law of the Lord is blameless, converting souls (Psalm 18/19)*

We all know how far we are from truly being converted, and so we dedicate our eyes and ears to the Scriptures and the other writings offered us by the Church, hoping to learn the law of the Lord and to be conformed to His likeness.

It is a challenge, however, to know what to read! And in the case of the Scriptures we have read again and again, it is a challenge to see their depths, to hear them speaking fresh words of life. The sisters have begun a patristics reading group in order to learn from the holy Fathers of old and from our contemporary brothers and sisters. We have begun with the excellent Popular Patristics series published by St. Vladimir's Seminary. These are small books containing topical selections from the works of the Fathers, translated into modern English, with an introduction and a few helpful footnotes. Our method is to read the text (or part of it) on our own time during the course of a month, and then to meet for a Socratic discussion. Everyone gets a chance to ask their questions, and everyone gets a chance to offer their thoughts and interpretations. The hardest part of the discussions so far has been to stop when the time is up!

So far we have read the following:

St. John Chrysostom, *Six Books on the Priesthood*

St. Theodore the Studite, *On the Holy Icons*

St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Lectures on the Christian Sacraments*

Our next discussion will be on St. John Chrysostom, *On Marriage and Family Life*. Our November reading will be St. John Chrysostom, *On Wealth and Poverty*.

Some of you, the Friends of the monastery, may want to start your own reading groups, with the blessing of your spiritual fathers (or read along with the monastery by yourself). The Popular Patristics books are portable and not too difficult, perhaps a good way to replace part of the time one might spend on social media, watching TV, or doomscrolling. Some helpful tips: Keep your selections fairly short, remembering that your fellow participants have busy lives too. Jot down summaries, striking ideas, and questions that arise as you go. And always think about what in your life might need to change as a result of your reading.

As the angel said to St. Augustine, precipitating his conversion, "Pick up the book and read!"

**SAVE THE DATE: FEAST DAY OF ST. BARBARA, DEC. 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup>**

**+Archbishop BENJAMIN presiding**

*Dec. 3, Saturday, Vigil, 4 pm*

*Dec. 4, Sunday, Divine Liturgy, 10 am*

*(Followed by festal meal)*

*Dec. 4, Sunday, Presentation, 4 pm*

*Vespers, 5 pm*

*Potluck, 6pm*