

St. Barbara Orthodox Monastery

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St. Barbara Monastery
July 2024 Newsletter

NOTE:

*We expect
the Friends of the Monastery
Gatherings
to resume in August
(see inside)*



Dear Friends of St Barbara Monastery,

The Sisters have been musing recently about how things around us at the monastery seem to be falling apart, wearing out, leaking (we've had a recent battle with a leaky water tank!), etc. It was decided that a good bit of what we do at the monastery often falls under the category of “pushing back against the creeping chaos.” Perhaps many of you can relate!

If we do not put the time and energy into maintaining the things we own, sooner or later they will fall into disrepair. Less often, there are emergencies that arise because we have been unaware that something needs attention until the thing in question breaks down—sometimes with unintended serious consequences. However, on a smaller and almost daily scale, everything that can be categorized as usual “maintenance”—doing the dishes, tidying up our rooms, vacuuming the carpets, watering the plants, decluttering, fixing broken things around the house—can be thought of, in a sense, as “beating back the creeping chaos” and a struggle to maintain order. We know that if we fail to exert energy to maintain things in our lives, those things will most certainly slide towards unwelcome chaos and disorder.

The same applies to our spiritual lives as well! Our spiritual lives do not do well with neglect but thrive when we invest energy and intention into cultivating those practices that put us in contact with the grace of God. Have you noticed that it requires energy to pray with attention and intention? Sometimes it requires a real effort to dive into the Holy Scriptures or to gather the entire family for a mid-week church service, let alone a regular Sunday Liturgy. It can be genuine struggle—a *podvig*. Still, we are reminded by the Desert Fathers that we must “give blood in order to receive the Spirit.” (Abba Longinus)

The same natural law that moves physical things in the universe towards chaos and death also holds true in our spiritual lives. If we do not invest *intentionally* in cultivating our inner life with God, we will eventually find ourselves given over to spiritual disorder and the passions. However, unlike the upkeep of physical things, tending to our life in Christ ought not devolve into a mere “maintenance checklist”: Do X, Y, Z. Rather, our goal should always be to “be with Christ”, seeking communion with Him through the means He has given us!

A battle against the naturally creeping disorder in this life is ultimately a battle against death—even spiritual death. While we live in this fallen world, this battle will be ongoing, and it will require firm and constant labor on our part.

Thanks be to God, however, who has given us the victory in Christ Jesus, the Conqueror of Death! United to His Life which reigns in us, His children, we have divine help not only merely to “maintain” our spiritual lives, but to flourish and grow into His very likeness.

—The Sisters of St. Barbara Monastery

VENTURA COUNTY GREEK FESTIVAL

At the end of June, the Sisters brought their wares to sell at the Ventura County Greek Festival, hosted by St. Demetrios Church in Camarillo. After a decade of holding the festival off-site, it was a blessing to have the festival at the St. Demetrios Church property itself. Having church tours available for the general public added a beautiful spiritual dimension and a reminder about why we were there in the first place: to be the Light of Christ to the world.



Service with a smile

Besides selling a good number of books and icons, we sold out of honey once again and certain lavender products such as lavender hydrosol. In addition, the fresh bouquets of lavender we harvested sold like hot cakes this year. The monastery's booth attracted not only a good number of customers but also a great many bees: We joked with customers that the bees came free with the lavender. (They were "free bees"!)

Most of all, we prayed that during our participation in this year's Ventura County Greek Festival, we would be a presence pointing people to Christ and His Kingdom. We thank Fr. Constantine Trumpower and the parish of St. Demetrios for their gracious hospitality and wish them continued success with future Greek Festivals!

A TALE OF TWO BIRDS

This summer the Sisters are bird-sitting Bella, a cockatiel belonging to our priest, Fr. Jude, and his wife, Matushka Brigitte. The monastery also has a cockatiel—a semi-blind little guy we call BB. Not long ago, BB lost his long time best friend, another cockatiel, who died rather suddenly. When Fr. Jude and Matushka Brigitte brought us Bella, we placed BB's and Bella's cages together and opened the doors in between. To our delight, it wasn't long before the two bonded. Now they regularly preen each other and whistle merry tunes back and forth. Bella is also very protective of BB; she hisses and screeches when she feels he is threatened. Will there be babies?? We will keep you posted.



Front: BB; Back: Bella

A PROJECT, A PRIEST AND POWER TOOLS

We thank Fr. George Ajalat and his 7 helpers for recently completing the construction and installation of 4 new raised garden beds for the monastery. Fr. George, in addition to being the priest of St. Simeon Church (Santa Clarita), is an avid carpenter and loves his many power tools. He had 16,000 lbs of soil donated and delivered for the raised beds he personally built for us. Thank you, Father, and all who helped with this blessed project!

BEAR WITH US

It's not every day that your neighbor knocks on your door and greets you with a friendly "Hi! You have a bear outside!" That's exactly what happened this month when our neighbor, Dan, spotted a juvenile black bear on the bridge leading to the monastery. Incidentally, we had just called Dan to invite him over to the monastery to take back some of our bountiful fruit harvest (see below). When he opened his front gate, he was not a little startled to see a California black bear on our bridge!

Quietly following the bear, he watched it amble across the bridge, cross the monastery parking lot, go behind the garage and saunter into our front garden. He was half expecting it to climb the stairs of our front porch when it turned away and trotted up the hillside.

When the Sisters saw the bear, it was not too far away and close to a tree on the hillside. What a sight to behold! This was clearly a juvenile bear, sporting big fuzzy ears and a jet black coat. It seemed to be aware of our presence and behaved perfectly peaceably and gently while we stood and admired it. It did at one point hide behind a tree and peek out at us as if it were rather shy. What a blessing to encounter such a magnificent creature with such a demure demeanor. It was perhaps—for a few brief moments—a little taste of Paradise to come!

MID-SUMMER FRUIT HARVEST



This summer's fruit harvest is well under way: The apricots and apples have been harvested and the plums and peach trees are laden with ripening fruit ready to be picked. The grapes are developing nicely. Unfortunately, all of our cherries were stolen this year by a fruit thief— whether human or beast, we cannot say!

***Left: Fruit anyone? Right:
Hanging out in a plum tree.***



MUDSLIDE UPDATE

Although we announced in our last newsletter that our next Friends Gathering would be at the end of July, just to be safe, we are postponing the gathering until the end of August. Even though the last few communications from Caltrans to the public seem to indicate that one lane on Ojai Road/ Highway 150 would reopen by the end of July, this may happen only after the scheduled date of the gathering—the last Sunday of this month. Construction of an immense retaining wall to hold back the hillside is almost complete and, hopefully very soon, one lane will be made available from Santa Paula past the mudslide.