

*St. Barbara Orthodox Monastery*

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*ST. BARBARA MONASTERY  
FRIENDS' GATHERING  
September 29th, 2024*

*4 pm Presentation:*

*The Centrality of the Cross  
in the Gospel of John*

*Speaker: Rev. Thomas Miller  
St. Peter the Apostle Orthodox Church  
Pomona, CA*

*5 pm Vespers*

*6 pm Potluck*



Dear Friends of St Barbara Monastery,

During the season of the Elevation of the Holy Cross which the Church just celebrated, we prostrate repeatedly before the Cross which is decorated with flowers and sing the hymn:

*Before Thy Cross, we bow down in worship,  
and Thy holy resurrection, we hymn and glorify!*

It's easy to forget at times that the beautifully adorned Cross in the center of the Church is, in reality, an instrument of suffering and violent death. At the same time, however, we hear our Lord Jesus Christ telling us "Take up your Cross and follow Me." If the Cross is a means of suffering and death and we are told to take our own Cross and follow Christ, what might that mean for us in practical terms?

The meaning of taking up our own Cross can hardly be touched on in any depth in such a short space. However, at the very least, to bear our Cross means that we live this life mindful that we and everyone we will love will eventually die. Death will come to all of us at some point. If we are to carry our Cross and follow Christ, we carry in our consciousness an awareness of the brevity and fragility of this precious gift of life. Contrary to what it seems like on the surface, keeping our own death in mind is not an exercise in morbidity, but rather an exercise in sharpening our focus on what really matters in life.

While the world insists that life is all about "me"—that I should strive to live the most self-fulfilling, self-realized, self-expressive life, filled with as many different interesting experiences that I can possibly cram into my brief existence (while posting lots of "selfies" along the way)—Christ tells me to deny myself, take up my Cross and follow Him. He who loses his life for My sake and for the Gospel's will find it, says our Lord.

Instead of life being all about "me", Christ shows us by His own life and by His death on the Cross that true life is to be found in giving up myself for others—that is, in self-sacrificial love! Thus, to take up our Cross and follow Christ, in part, means that even while we feel weak, scared and powerless in the face of the difficult Crosses we are called to bear, we ask God to help us to still love those around us self-sacrificially. While taking up our Crosses, even while we are hurting, we ask God to manifest His power and glory by drawing others to Him through our witness. Such requests from our hearts to His will not go unanswered! And all the while as we bear our Cross in this way, we will know that He is with us as we hear Him say, "My grace is sufficient for you and My strength is made perfect in weakness." (2 Corinthians 12:19).

—The Sisters of St. Barbara Monastery

## ***METROPOLITAN ANTONIOS OF LEBANON***

The monastery was blessed this month by a visit from a very special visitor from Lebanon: Metropolitan Antonios of Zahle, Baalbek and Dependencies, formerly the abbot of Our Lady of Bkaftine Monastery in Lebanon. It brought great joy to our community when we realized that His Eminence oversees the territory of Baalbek (formerly Heliopolis), where St. Barbara lived and was martyred!

In a visit arranged by Fr. George Ajalat of St. Simeon Church (Santa Clarita), His Eminence was joined by Fr. George Katrib of St. Mark Church (Irvine), Fr. Jude Lepine, our monastery priest, and a handful of pilgrims.

During lunch, Metropolitan Antonios answered questions and shared with the sisters and visitors his heart-felt thoughts on the theme of repentance.

He reminded us that the first words of Christ were “Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.” and that we are to be engaged in continual, life-long repentance. He talked to us about repentance as a joyful sorrow that cleanses and purifies the heart. He touched on other means of purification such as the habitual and prayerful reading of the Holy Scriptures and consistent prayer. He brought to our minds how the Desert Fathers teach us that we must force ourselves to labor in the spiritual life when they exhort us to “Give blood and receive Spirit.” As Christ says, “The Kingdom of God suffers violence and the violent take it by force.”

In the end, everyone was greatly edified by the visit of this genuinely warm and joyful man of God. We thank God for giving the monastery a new and precious friend in His Eminence and we ask you, our readers, to pray for him and his people in Lebanon.



## ***SPANISH ORTHODOX BOOKS AVAILABLE***

### **Libros Espirituales en Español**

*Libro de oraciones. \$15*

*El camino del peregrino. \$10*

*El misterio y significado de la batalla de Kosovo. \$20*

*Vida y enseñanza de san Silouan el Athonita. \$25*

*Escritos de san Silouan el Athonita. \$25*

*Padre Arsenio: Sacerdote, prisionero, padre espiritual. \$27*

Please contact the monastery to purchase.

### ***SNAIL MAIL OR EMAIL?***

If you would prefer to receive this newsletter via email rather than physical mail (or vice versa), please contact the monastery.



## ***ST. ANDREW LADIES RETREAT***

14 ladies and a few nursing babies from St. Andrew Orthodox Church in Riverside spent a day of retreat at the monastery on Saturday, September 21st. Not a few of the women were first time pilgrims. After a 2-hour drive, they were eager to walk around the monastery before joining the sisters in church for the noon service. A luncheon followed the service— provided generously by Zaid Arraya with contributions from the sisters— after which the ladies listened to a talk on the Prayer of the Optina Elders. Even though this visit was meant to be a retreat, the ladies gladly helped around the monastery with several important tasks.

As the point of such pilgrimages to the monastery is to touch a bit of heaven together, as it were, we thank God for blessing this entire day with His grace!

### ***A SURPRISE VISIT FROM HIS EMINENCE***

On Sunday, September 8th, our beloved hierarch Archbishop Benjamin, stopped by the monastery for an informal visit with the sisters. He happened to be nearby, having just served Liturgy at St. Herman Church in Oxnard. During the visit, his assistant, Leo, rescued a baby woodpecker whose mother was no where in sight. He lovingly coaxed it to drink water and ended up taking the bird back with them to Santa Rosa. The sisters thank His Eminence for his brief but memorable visit and for his loving archpastoral care for us.

