

***St. Barbara Orthodox Monastery***

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***St. Barbara Monastery  
Friends' Gathering  
May 25th, 2025***

***4 pm Presentation:***

***Sign & Symbol in the Prayers  
of St. Nikolai of Zica***

***Speaker: Priest Symeon Halsell  
St. Athanasius Orthodox Church  
Santa Barbara, CA***

***5 pm Vespers***

***6 pm Potluck***



Dear Friends of St. Barbara Monastery,

Christ is risen! As we find ourselves deep into this Paschal season awaiting the Feast of Pentecost and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, everywhere we experience a general atmosphere of high-spiritedness and good cheer within the Church.

But what happens when difficult circumstances visit us during this season of Paschal joy? How are we to process external situations that threaten our inner peace while everyone else around us is celebrating? Apparently, the painful valleys of life visit us notwithstanding even the festive seasons of the Church.

It is perhaps helpful to remind ourselves that in the Body of Christ, when one weeps, all weep in solidarity (Romans 12:15). Likewise, we are called by God to bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of love (Galatians 6:2). Those finding themselves in difficult straits during these bright days of Paschaltide can lean hard on the members of Christ's Body who surround them. Our brothers and sisters in Christ are here to help shoulder our heavy burdens and walk with us through the painful valleys of life. Our Lord Jesus Christ gave His life up for the life of the world that we might lay down our lives for one another daily. We are all intimately connected in a mystical way in Christ through time and space—from the smallest and most helpless member of His Body to the most visible and esteemed hierarch, from ages past until the present. And let us remember the saints who have gone before us in Christ: they pray fervently for us and are ever ready to lend an invisible helping hand in response to our heartfelt cries. In the valleys of life, no matter what the season, we are never alone. Take courage. We have each other and, ultimately, God is with us!

—The Sisters of St. Barbara Monastery

## ***BOOK REVIEW:***

### **Walking on the Waves: An Everyday Guide to Nepsis, Bishop Emilianos of Meloa**

*If I could give you a gift, the most precious thing I could ever give you  
is the knowledge of how to ignore your thoughts.*

**Nepsis:** *A state of spiritual alertness, vigilance and watchfulness over the movements of the nous and the heart, guarding against harmful thoughts, temptations and distractions; enables one's will to align with God's will; to commune with the Holy Spirit.*

*Walking on the Waves* starts off with the above two quotations, which sum up this two-volume book so well that it is almost superfluous to add anything more. For context, however: this book consists of transcriptions of a series of talks by Bishop Emilianos, in

which he imparts the teaching of his spiritual father and first abbot, Elder Aimilianos of Simonopetra Monastery on Mt. Athos. It also includes an interview with Bishop Emilianos about his experience of learning from his elder. What makes *Walking on the Waves* notable is that it makes the teaching of nepsis intelligible for people living in the world. The talks are punctuated with plenty of down-to-earth questions from the audience. The original talks are available online, under the channel "The Fountain of Light." There are 37 talks, of which the book transcribes the first nine.

Let's say a little more about nepsis, and why it is important.

*Nepsis itself—vigilance—has to do with our thoughts. It is of course very important for monastics, because if monastics can't control their thoughts, if their thoughts are outside of their monastery or on material things, it is as if they are living in the world. But for people who live in the world, nepsis (vigilance and controlling your thoughts) is also very important, as all the problems in society and life occur when we follow the wrong thoughts. We become wrong ourselves when we follow the wrong thoughts.*

*I thought if I had something to tell the younger generation, it would be: how to find God by rejecting all the thoughts that keep them away from Him. Then they would not only find God, but who they are themselves. We were all created to achieve this....*

*This is the way out of a lot of issues, like anxiety and depression--of course, in their everyday cases. We are not talking about difficult clinical cases; but we all have anxiety and depression in our lives to a certain degree, and we all have confusion in our lives to a certain degree. Nepsis can give you clarity and teach you how to find God's will in your life simply by rejecting or controlling your thoughts and focusing on God, focusing on prayer.*

## ***SAGA OF THE WOODPECKERS***

Over the last several years, our visiting pilgrims have had the dubious privilege of listening to the loud rat-a-tatting of industrious woodpeckers drilling holes into the east side of our cedar house seemingly round-the-clock. From dawn 'til dusk, a flock of relentless noisemakers hammered away—storing up acorns, pecking for bugs hidden in the wood, and attracting mates in this way. Along with the noise, they have systematically compromised the wood of our house, now riddled with thousands of little holes. After years of patiently enduring their constant aural assault, a friend of the monastery took it upon himself to address the problem. He proposed replacing the damaged wood with cement fiber panels that would be impenetrable to woodpeckers. This work is now in full swing and ongoing. A portion of the side in question has been newly paneled and painted and is about halfway done. Thankfully, the woodpecker population has moved away since the project began. Perhaps they've finally gotten the message. Thank God for those who have come with the knowledge and skills to solve this problem and who have chosen to offer them to our monastery for the glory of God.





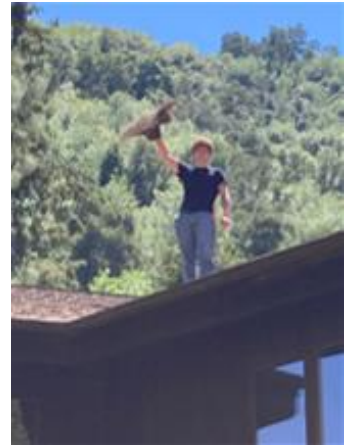
## KNIGHTS IN SHINING ARMOR

On Wednesday, May 14th, Reader Vitaly Efimenkov brought seven men with him from St. Innocent Orthodox Church in Tarzana to tackle some major outdoor tasks at the monastery. Actually, you could say these men were knights in shining armor coming to the rescue just in time.

Indeed, at this point, we were two weeks away from the annual June 1st deadline set by the local fire department requiring property owners to ready their land for the upcoming fire season. Knowing how devastating California wildfires have been, this involved meeting increasingly stringent requirements for tall grass, brush and debris clearance. Last year, firemen arrived precisely on June 1st for an inspection and generated an additional detailed list of fire prevention requirements for us to tackle. This year we wished to “get things right” the first time around. Our community had already begun work on this huge annual project; however, it was clear that we needed additional help.

It was a beautiful sunny day, when these men rode in (ok, drove in) ready to save the day. They dug into the work with a ready will. Some set to weed-whacking the hillside and meadow. A young man, afraid of heights, took his courage in hand and cleared the main house and garage roofs and gutters of debris. Others sawed off unruly branches impeding fire engine access around the property and, all in all, there was a whole lot of sawing, raking, blowing of leaves, and carting off of debris. Wielding a chain saw, one of the men tackled a large fallen oak tree on the hillside. Unfortunately, this task was stymied by an elusive rattlesnake which ensconced itself in the mass of the tree. Despite this one task that remains unfinished, much was accomplished by the men and our community

has great hopes that the fire department’s deadline for brush clearance will be met. After a well-earned supper, our knights rode off into the horizon with the rays of setting sun gleaming off their armor—well, in our mind’s eye, at least!



*Above: Conquering debris on the rooftop.*

