

St. Barbara Orthodox Monastery

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*ST. BARBARA MONASTERY
FRIENDS' GATHERING*

October 27th, 2024

4 pm Presentation:

*The Beatitudes
and the Pursuit of Happiness*

Speaker: Abbess Melania

Holy Assumption Monastery

Calistoga, CA

5 pm Vespers

6 pm Potluck



Dear Friends of St Barbara Monastery,

In our last newsletter, we highlighted a joyous visit by Metropolitan Antonios of Lebanon to our monastery. During this visit, he asked the sisters to remember him and all the faithful in Lebanon in our prayers every day. The territory His Eminence oversees includes the city of Baalbek—the ancient town wherein our very St. Barbara was born and martyred in the 4th century. This is one of the reasons why we sisters feel a deep connection with this man of God. As such, we have been greatly saddened by the recent spate of bombings in Lebanon, including Baalbek. Just today, we learned that Baalbek was struck by missiles, killing 6 people in a residential building—one of whom was a child. Our thoughts and prayers flew immediately to Metropolitan Antonios and his flock in Lebanon.

The holy fathers have referred to our faith as a “suffering faith” and reminded us that it is often through suffering that God chooses to reveal His most precious truths to the human heart. *A heart that is broken and humbled, God will not despise*, the Psalmist tells us. A heart that is crushed by suffering, and yet strives to remain loving, is a heart that is primed to receive divine grace, consolation and —yes, even unexpected gifts from God.

Time and again, both in history and in the lives of those near to us—or perhaps even in our own personal experience—God proves that he does not abandon the suffering heart that cleaves to Him, that clings to the truth of the Faith, that remains open to the revelation of love in the midst of great pain and loss. There opens up the possibility of things genuine and true—gifts from God—that are bestowed by God to the human heart in the midst of such suffering.

As someone once pointed out: Gaze at the eyes and at the face of one who has just returned from war and you will see nothing false or fake, only genuine honesty. There, and likewise in the faces of all who have suffered, is an unmistakable transparency.

It is in this state of transparency and vulnerability that a suffering heart can be most receptive to a revelation from God—the revelation of the possibility of rebirth and resurrection, of hope and healing, of grace and a path to godliness. This is the reality of the Gospel and it is indeed the hope of every Christian! For it is Jesus Christ alone Who, as God, has taken on all the horror of our human suffering on the Cross, experienced death, and defeated it roundly by transforming its nature and filling it with His very life.

Let us all remember to pray often for those who are suffering in this world. There are those who, for reasons known to God, cannot pray for themselves. As Christians, we can bring these and others before God, asking Him to reveal Himself to their hurting hearts in the midst of their suffering. For there, the seed of life and resurrection ever abides and awaits awakening only by God Himself.

—The Sisters of St. Barbara Monastery

REFLECTIONS ON THE CENTRALITY OF THE CROSS

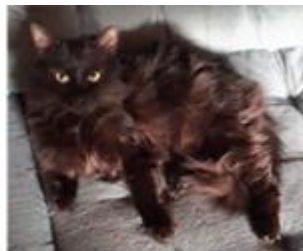
Last month, Fr. Thomas Miller from St. Peter the Apostle Church (Pomona, CA) spoke at our Friends' Gathering on "The Centrality of the Cross in the Gospel of John." To make his point, he distributed a handout in which were listed all the passages in the Gospel of John where the words *glory* or *glorify* appear.

Does it seem incompatible for the glorified Christ to be essentially equated with the crucified Christ? But Christ Himself does so. "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." (John 12:16) This statement by Jesus is immediately followed by His talking about the need for wheat to fall to the earth and die in order to bear fruit. This is further reinforced by the Lord's comment to Peter: "When thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee and carry thee whither thou wouldst not." "This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God." (John 21:18b-19) Fr. Thomas noted that this alludes to the similar glorification of Peter, who died by crucifixion.

Still, one may wonder how the scene of such rejection, suffering and humiliation can be the place where Christ is most glorified, and where we also, as we pick up our Cross, will be most glorified. But if we see "glorification" as where the character of God and His love for us is most clearly shown forth, the Cross is it, *par excellence*. And we, as gold tried in the crucible, also will shine as we allow our old man to perish, dying day by day, surrendering our will by grace to the will of God.

Why did Christ become a man, living among us and dying His death on the Cross, if not to free us from our stubborn refusal of His love which brought death? What did He intend but that by taking up our Cross, we would let go of our own self-willed independence from Him and let the old man that refuses to be in communion with Him die? His free-will offering of Himself and solidarity with us in our humanity can only be answered adequately by our response to that love by repentance. He came to make that repentance possible. He came to cure our heart of its refusal of His love and to heal our will of its inclination to seek deification apart from Him. God grant us the grace to see what He has done for us and to respond in kind! Glory to God!

MONASTERY MASCOTS



Left: Paz Center: Blackberry the Beautiful Right: Happy dogs!



YOUTH VISIT FROM SANTA MARIA

A few outstanding young men and their chaperones from Holy Annunciation Church (Santa Maria) spent a day of retreat at the monastery on October 5th. Led by their youth group leader, Madeleine Nantze, these fine young gentlemen, first-time visitors to the monastery and ranging from 8th grade to college-age, impressed the sisters with their seriousness and commitment to the pursuit of the truth within Holy Orthodoxy.

The day began with a presentation by the sisters on the rules of the Church and their relevance in our lives. The sisters knew that they had a special group when they asked the opening question, “What’s the point of all the rules of the Church?” and the youngest of the group—not yet Orthodox—piped up in reply, “Communion with Jesus Christ.” Indeed!

After 6th Hour and lunch, the group reconvened for a general Q&A session with the sisters. This time proved to be yet another blessed time of engagement as we had a chance to listen and learn from each other.



As there was still time remaining for a little work after the session, the boys and adults rolled up their sleeves, tackling two different work projects to help out the monastery. While one group moved a mountain of sand into a chicken run with shovels and wheelbarrows, the other worked on processing lavender florets from numerous dried bundles. This blessed day ended with Vespers prayed together in church.

In the last few years, our monastery has seen a notable increase in visits from young men—inquirers, catechumens, newly baptized Orthodox Christians. Along with others, we note this significant trend with thankfulness to God.

MEMORY ETERNAL: JERRY REICH

The monastery recently lost a long-time friend. Many who have visited the monastery may remember Jerry Reich as a semi-permanent fixture around here, often seen with a rake, chain-saw or some other tool in hand, diligently tidying up this little corner of paradise.



It is hard to believe that 15 years have passed since the sisters first met Jerry and his best friend, a German shepherd named Shadow, at Many Meals—a food ministry for the needy in Santa Paula. He has worked for the monastery ever since! Although he had his ups and downs in life and was at times “rough around the edges,” the sisters remember him as someone with a good heart who loved the monastery and tended to it as if it were his own.

Although we are saddened by his sudden departure, we thank God for his many years of faithful service to the monastery and pray for the repose of his soul. May his memory be eternal!