

St. Barbara Orthodox Monastery

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*ST. BARBARA MONASTERY
FRIENDS' GATHERING*

January 26th, 2025

4 pm Presentation:

Trial by Fire:

St. Nikolai of Zica on Suffering

Speaker: V. Rev. John Finley

St. Athanasius Church

Santa Barbara, CA

5 pm Vespers

6 pm Potluck



Dear Friends of St. Barbara Monastery,

Although we are sending out this newsletter at the end of January, this is our first chance to wish you HAPPY NEW YEAR! As old Fr. Dmitry of Santa Rosa used to add to his new year's wishes, "New patience, new joy, new peace, new repentance, new...!"

One of the sisters recently came across a thought-provoking twist on the tradition of making New Year's resolutions: A husband and wife shared that every year, in addition to making resolutions for themselves, they have the practice of making one New Year's resolution for each other. Each spouse enters into this agreement of their own free will, doing their best to fulfill the resolution given to them by the other throughout the year. Imagine that!

This novel idea can be explored in many interesting directions. However, at the very least, it may prompt us to consider: If those nearest to me could make one resolution for me to try and keep this year, what would it be? The answers we may come up with, depending on the depth of our self-reflection, could range anywhere from small behavior modifications to tackling seriously damaging habits. All of us have blind-spots that may be glaring to others but mostly hidden from our view. Viewing ourselves from the perspective of another gives us the opportunity to "zoom out" on our lives, examine ourselves from a different angle, and perhaps gain some clarity on what exactly we need to work on which we wouldn't normally recognize. Perhaps we may see a weakness in ourselves but have yet to recognize the magnitude of its impact on others, and we brush it off as unimportant. Perhaps a weakness in our character or behavior remains totally invisible to us— in our blind spot, as it were— but glaringly visible to those around us.

The question remains: Are we willing to see ourselves as we really are? Are we willing to see ourselves as others might see us? Ultimately, are we willing to see ourselves as God sees us? For in fact, even though He sees us completely through and through—He loves us yet, infinitely, intimately, unconditionally. Borne aloft by this unrelenting love from God that never fails, how can we *not* be motivated to take steps to change our ways? It is never too late to repent— not even at the eleventh hour—as we see from the good thief on the Cross. No doubt, we will falter, fail and fall time and again in our efforts. But let's bear in mind that the opportunity for transformation beckons, not simply once a year, but every moment of our brief lives.

—The Sisters of St. Barbara Monastery

BOOK REVIEW:

THE PURSUIT OF GODLINESS: FIVE CENTURIES ON SPIRITUAL ASCENT by Bishop Irenei of London and Western Europe (ROCOR)

This book is patristic in form as well as in content. Many of the Fathers wrote in the form of "centuries": collections of 100 short paragraphs that are to be read and contemplated individually, but add up to a complete essay. The five centuries in *The Pursuit of Godliness* add up to the answer to the question of many contemporary Christians: not only how, but why, to live a Christian life in the world. We know the right words to say. Depending on our audience, we might use the word *theosis*, or we might say, "communion with God." But what does that mean? Bishop Irenei unpacks this shorthand into an answer the heart can grasp.

- 1. A Century on the Kingdom of God and Its Attainment*
- 2. A Century on Love*
- 3. A Century on the Acquisition of Knowledge*
- 4. A Century on the Church*
- 5. A Century on Worship and Prayer, and the Ascent of Humanity to God*

Let us allow the text to speak for itself:

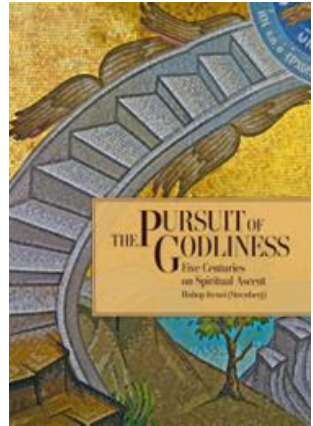
Century I, #3

The human creature is created for glory! Let no demonic lie or worldly despair rob you of this profound hope. In your heart is the Lord's vision of creation, and within you all creation is united. The same heart that you hold in filthy hands, debasing it with every passion and whim, is a heart that can contain the living God--a heart that can become a diamond in which all the beauty of the cosmos is visible.

Century V, #97

So, Christian, strive to attain what is attainable! Though we are weak, God may make us strong. Though we are sinful, God may render us pure. Though we are feeble, God may grant us strength. Take courage always in this: that it is the longing and will of the God of All that the whole of creation be perfected in you, and that you--the precious and utterly unique work of His hands--may add to the beauty of creation that irreplaceable element for which He fashioned you from the dust. All of creation sings to God, but He longs that it sing together with you, and you with it, in a chorus of praise that never ends.

Bishop Irenei's other books of spiritual guidance are *The Beginnings of a Life of Prayer* and *Strength in Weakness*.



THE FEAST OF HOLY THEOPHANY

The Feast of Theophany is one of our favorite feasts here at the monastery. We love the theology and hymnody of this particular feast, which places the revelation of God as the Holy Trinity squarely before us. Themes of light, water and fire—primal elements of creation—are woven throughout Theophany’s beautiful festal hymns. We see once again Christ’s *kenosis* (self-emptying), as He bows his head before the hand of the Forerunner and Baptist John, standing naked and vulnerable in the waters of the Jordan—naked and vulnerable as He once was at His nativity in Bethlehem, and as He will be at His Crucifixion. He endures nakedness that He might clothe us with the garment of light, making us children of Light through holy baptism. Going into the depths of waters, He “burns the heads of the dragons” hidden therein and sanctifies the water and all of creation with it, transforming all of it for our salvation—water for our baptism, oil for our chrismation, wine and bread for our Mystical Food.



Each year at Theophany, the sisters anticipate with joy the blessing of the waters—in our case, Sisar Creek, which wraps around our monastery. Most years, like clockwork, the rains come shortly after we bless the waters. This year, however, devastating fires broke out in Southern California and our hearts broke for its victims. Still, as we chant at Vespers every evening, we are reminded that even “fire, wind, snow, ice, blast of tempest perform His word” (Psalm 148). God’s will vis-à-vis human suffering very often remains a mystery and, if ever, is only revealed in His good time. What we know, however, is that just as He transforms the nature of water and all of creation through His baptism, so likewise—in due time—He will sanctify and transform *all things* — even the most painful ones— for our good and, ultimately, for His glory. This is our sure hope and consolation!

COWBOY'S CORNER



Above: Ready for take-off!

Right: Clean, warm laundry...just for me!

