



# MONASTERY OF SAINT JOHN OF SAN FRANCISCO

E-NEWSLETTER ❖ FALL 2014

## THANKFULNESS

HIEROMONK INNOCENT

As Americans we live and move in a particular culture. This culture influences us in everything we do and think—yet we are mostly unaware of it, like a fish unaware of the water it swims in every day. As individual people are often blind to their own passions, so we too, as a nation, are blind to our collective faults. Often we discover those faults only when we are taken “outside the fishbowl” and come to look at ourselves from a different perspective. I came to discover this after I lived as a missionary in Russia. Only upon my return to the United States after two years abroad was I able to see a little more clearly the water in which I was swimming my whole life.

One cultural fault that stands out most clearly is our materialism. I learned about this in a round about way. As missionaries, we sought to network with the leaders of the community. Thus, we arranged to meet with the mayor of Mirnyy—the Siberian town where we were based. We had decided, for this auspicious occasion, to present a gift of a painting to our town’s leader. Perhaps, in the back of our minds, we were thinking how impressed he would be with this beautiful painting. We were ushered in to a large, official-looking office where we met the mayor and presented our gift. He thanked us, and, with little more than a glance, set our gift aside. The usual, American custom of looking at the gift, admiring it, and thanking profusely was totally absent from the interchange. It took us a little by surprise, but, because we had

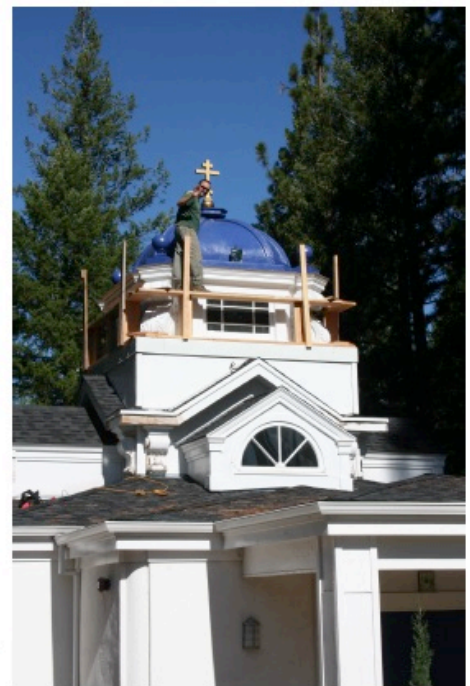
read a little about Russian culture beforehand, we knew the explanation: the giver is more important than the gift. To focus on the gift is to diminish the real significance of what had taken place: someone had shown you an act of generosity and that someone was far more important than any object he or she had given you.

American culture does, however, have some good points. One of them is our national day of Thanksgiving. In my family, during each Thanksgiving dinner, we would go around the table and each say what we were thankful for. This is a good custom and a correct response of a human being to his or her Maker: gratitude. As the years went by, and childhood vanished, my “list of things I’m thankful for” changed. “Toys” and “food” began to be replaced by “peace of heart” and “Church.” There certain things that we just take for granted, yet we learn to value the eternal only as we feel them threatened or swept away by the hectic life of a grown-up. As monastics, we voluntarily renounce possessions, married life, and freedom to live wherever we want or do whatever we want. This stripping away of material things and personal freedoms helps us set aside the gift and turn in gratitude to the One who forever gives. It can even lead to a deeper kind of thankfulness—gratitude for the painful and hard things that happen in life. “Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials,” (James 1:2). It is good to be thankful, and, as we look closely at the gift, let it remind us of the Giver. Knowing that the Giver is good, we can trust Him even when His gift is strange or difficult. As the gift leads us to the Giver, we learn that what we are ultimately thankful for is God Himself. ❖



## CHAPEL DOME REPAIRED

The dome on top of our chapel has leaked for the past few years whenever it rained, and repeated attempts to locate the problem and fix it proved unsuccessful. But recently help came from one of our pilgrims, Frank (Arseny) Edelman of Lebanon, Oregon, a member of St. Anne's Parish in Corvallis, who spent a considerable amount of time working on the problem and making sure that it wouldn't happen again. A thorough inspection revealed a hole in one of the seams, into which silicone was injected, and this was covered with roofing sealant. The entire dome was painted, and at this point Frank discovered a large blister in the roof at a spot where a rubber mat had separated from the adjoining metal. This was patched up with Snow Seal, and, as a final touch, the windows around the dome were sealed with silicone and glazed. Much of this work required scaffolding to be put up against the structure. A rain shower conveniently took place as the project was coming to an end, confirming its success, as there was no leakage. The brotherhood is very grateful to Frank.



This dome has historic significance, since it had been atop the bell tower of Holy Trinity Cathedral in San Francisco, which was constructed in 1910, just four years after the 1906 earthquake and fire. In the seventies it was decided to remove the dome as part of an expansion of the church's interior and place it atop the separate St. Sergius Chapel that was being built at St. Eugene's Hermitage. Two decades later our brotherhood inherited this chapel, and so it remained until the chapel in Manton was built and the old chapel was dismantled, with the dome being transported to the new location and being integrated into the new structure. ✦

## NEW ICON CYCLE INSTALLED

### AT THE MONASTERY CHURCH

The monastery has recently blessed and installed seven icons on the iconostasis of the monastery church, which is dedicated to St. Sergius of Radonezh and the Martyr Eugene. The icon project was a collaborative undertaking by Monk Silouan, a monk of St. Tikhon's Monastery in South Canaan, PA, on loan to our monastery for a six-month period, and a long-term guest, an accomplished artist, who wishes to remain anonymous.



The icons represent seven scenes from the life of Christ and are located on the upper register of the iconostasis, which had been expanded in height and width in recent years. The central icon, the largest of the seven, placed over the royal doors, depicts the Last Supper in a vivid nighttime background, with traditional motifs and a meditative expressiveness. Flanking the Last Supper are two medium-sized icons: on the right, the Transfiguration with a dazzling Prussian blue radiance surrounding Christ that harmonizes with a golden sky and muted earthen tones; on the left, the stark pensiveness of the Crucifixion with a dark charcoal sky.

The right side of the iconostasis continues at the south deacon's entrance with two smaller icons depicting the Baptism of Christ and the Nativity of Christ, both with bright and vivid colors irradiated with heavenly light from the golden sky above. The left side of the iconostasis continues at the north deacon's entrance with two counterpart icons of the same size as the two on the extreme



right. These two icons depict the Resurrection and the Ascension of Christ. Prominent in the Resurrection icon is a deep warm scarlet mandorla surrounding Christ, contrasting with a black backdrop above brown mountainous terrain.



The icons were written using egg tempera pigments and reflect a combination of traditional motifs drawn from a variety of sources, including Theophanes the Cretan's 1546 cycle for Stavronikita Monastery on Mount Athos. Striking lines, contours, contrasting lights and colors, and compositional spacing reveal an originality of insight and harmony. Before he returned to St. Tikhon's Monastery at the end of May, Fr. Silouan and the visiting artist planned the whole series, studied examples from various schools of iconography, and completed most of the three largest icons. Fr. Silouan sketched the drawings for the final four icons, which were executed by the other painter in accordance with their common vision.

The icons present a visual encounter with the Biblical events in a deeply spiritual manner. As windows to eternity, they open up the wide inner space of contemplation to the prayerful believer. We invite everyone to come and see these wonder-filled additions to our monastery church and devotional life. ✦

## ON RETREAT AND PILGRIMAGE

**B**oth retreat (or withdrawal) and pilgrimage are both aspects of the God-revealed truths and Faith we have been given in both the Old and the New Testaments. It would often be referred to as separation from the way of life lived by those who were unbelievers, whether objectively (that is, by articulated beliefs and ideas) or subjectively (that is, those whose way of life was not that which believers were called to). Other than separation or withdrawal it was also sometimes known as exile.

But though withdrawal, exile or retreat is good and necessary in and of itself, it cannot end there. As the book of Psalms says, we must "turn away from evil and do good" (Ps. 33). In other words, we must have something very specific we are joining ourselves to, always have a very specific place in mind where we are going, where we are journeying or traveling. The Apostle Peter summarizes this very well in the second chapter of his first epistle, where he says "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims..." and in the epistle to

### OPEN RETREAT

"Everyday Saints: My Personal Encounters  
with Holy People"

Archpriest Basil Rhodes

November 14-16, 2014

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to meet a Saint or even a saintly person? We come in contact with many people in our lives. Each makes an impression on us, and sometimes such encounters are unforgettable and even life-changing. Archpriest Basil Rhodes has had the unique opportunity of meeting many remarkable people. In this retreat, Father Basil shares his first-hand account and impressions of holy people he has met. To name just a few:

- ❖ Fr. John Krestiankin, archimandrite of the Pskov Caves Monastery of the Russian Orthodox Church—known as a clairvoyant and a wonderworker
- ❖ Fr. John Karastamatis of Prophet Elias Church in Santa Cruz, CA—an exceptional priest who died a martyric death in 1985
- ❖ Fr. Seraphim Rose, co-founder of St. Herman Monastery in Platina, CA—whose writings have influenced many seekers, both in this country and especially abroad
- ❖ Fr. Ephraim, former Abbot of Philotheou monastery on Mt Athos, currently at St. Anthony's in Florence, AZ—a known clairvoyant and spiritual guide and elder



the Hebrews it declares that all the saints “confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.”

Holy Tradition states that the first to make actual pilgrimages (in the spiritual sense that the practice would later acquire) to locations associated with Jesus Christ was the Most Holy Theotokos herself. It became common after that among the newly converted Christians, both amongst those who were Jews (for whom pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem was already a familiar pattern) and those who were Gentiles (wherein traveling to sites or temples associated with the pagan gods was already common).

“Pilgrimages by Christians were first made to sites connected with the birth, life, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus. Surviving descriptions, such as that by the pilgrim Egeria, of Christian pilgrimages to the Holy Land date from the fourth century, when pilgrimage was encouraged by church fathers like St Jerome. Pilgrimages also began to be made to Rome and other sites associated with the Apostles, various saints, and Christian martyrs.”

— From <http://orthodoxwiki.org/Pilgrimage>

Just as there were scatterings and fragments of truth in both the Old Testament and the Pagan religions that foreshadowed the fullness of revelation in Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, coming down to earth and becoming incarnate for the sake of mankind, in a similar way one could view the practice of spiritual pilgrimage as receiving its fullest expression in Orthodox Christianity. Over the centuries many places have become famous sites of pilgrimage, including:

- ❖ Jerusalem. The site of the crucifixion and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- ❖ Constantinople (today Istanbul, Turkey). The former capital of the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire and the see of one of the five ancient Patriarchates and spiritual see of the Orthodox Church.

- ❖ Hagia Sophia, former cathedral and burial place of many Ecumenical Patriarchs.
- ❖ Bethlehem, in Palestine. The birthplace of both our Lord Jesus Christ and the King and Prophet David.
- ❖ Mount Athos, Greece. A monastic republic.
- ❖ Mount Sinai.

Making pilgrimages to both holy sites and/or monasteries has grown as the centuries have gone by, yet from earliest times the actual journey from one’s daily life in the world and preparing and praying in preparation for the goal of one’s journeying on this “miniature” level was seen as a symbol or reference point for strengthening our primary journey—the most important one, of our life in this passing world through death to the next world, where we shall either be resurrected to a state of eternal life—either of consciously chosen submission, humility and love of God in the fulfillment of His holy will as expressed in His Gospel commandments (i.e. spiritual joy—Heaven), or of consciously chosen insistence on one’s own ways, self-centered self-assertion and independent separation from God’s will as expressed, again, in His Gospel commandments (i.e. spiritual torment—Hell).

As C.S. Lewis posited, at the Last Judgement either we will say “Thy will be done!” to God with our entire heart and being, or He will sadly say to us “Thy will be done...” and permit us to have what we attuned and built our lives around—separation from and resistance to Him.

The “miniature pilgrimages,” then, were occasions where the Faithful would renew the primary focus of one’s life, renew the connection to that which truly gives life, and meaning and happiness on the deepest levels. It was not simply a “running away” from the burdens of that

daily toil that we are all subject to, a “vacation,” where one goes to “relax” or the like. In a true spiritual pilgrimage one turns away from the evil of the world that weighs down the heart and strives to re-strengthen the “spiritual muscles” of the soul to strive to be with God, to re-orient and remind the

## LADIES RETREAT

“The Virtues, the Passions, and the Healing of the Soul”  
Nun Melania of Holy Assumption Monastery, Calistoga, CA  
December 12-14, 2014

Have you ever wondered why you keep falling into the same sins over and over again? The passions are like that. When they are rooted in the soul, we seem to have no choice but to “do the things we know we shouldn’t do.” The prophet Jeremiah once wrote: “The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse—who can understand it?” In this series of talks, Mother Melania explores the nature of the passions and how they work to disrupt our souls. She also gives the Church’s teaching on how to receive real healing from our passions and freedom to be restored to fellowship with God and each other.

Mother Melania is the Superior of the Holy Assumption Monastery in Calistoga, CA. Read more about Holy Assumption Monastery online at:  
<http://www.holyassumptionmonastery.com/>



heart and mind of the things which are most important, most dear and most meaningful to one, and which bring the most happiness in the complete and full sense of the word.

This turning away from evil and doing good, however, involves struggle—particularly against those parts of ourselves we have either knowingly or unknowingly neglected to cultivate to act in harmony with God’s goodness and grace and which parts of us do not want to cultivate. This is a struggle already well explained by the Apostle Paul in his famous passage in his epistle to the Romans where it says: “For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.”

Yet it is important to view this struggle in a particular way. The life-long spiritual struggle with this part of ourselves is not simply a life of endless toil, misery and unhappiness. It is not merely acquiring a list of some kind of achievement and self-assertion in our way of life. Orthodox Christianity, the life of God’s grace in our soul consists only of the victory of God’s love in us, that is, in God’s victory over us, and our willing, loving, eager, grateful and humble acceptance of it—a disposition of soul that is both the most wonderful, inspiring, meaningful, uplifting and beautiful thing in this life. In other words, we must remember that we are not just strangers on this earth, we are pilgrims; we have a definite place where we are going, a definite alternate way of life and being that is different from anything else this life has to offer.

Again, throughout the centuries it was through cultivating the habit of the spiritual labor of pilgrimage that many people would develop this different way of being in their soul—whether going on pilgrimage to those physical locations of the earth where our Lord walked during His lifetime, or the shrines of His Holy Saints, or His Holy Churches and Monasteries. With this in mind not only are the doors for pilgrims

to the monastery of St John always open, but we have even begun to arrange for specific times when speakers or lecturers would come and visit us and speak to the pilgrims. ✦

## MONASTERY OUTREACH TO LOCAL PARISH

The Monastery of St. John has been involved closely with the mission parish of St. Nicholas of Japan, located at 880 Commerce Street in Redding, California, since the mission’s founding ten years ago in 2004. Metropolitan Jonah, then Hieromonk Jonah, helped to organize the parish during its infancy. Since then, several priests have been assigned to the mission. After the relocation of its last priest, Fr. Ian Burgess, Fr. Andreas Blom of St. Gabriel Church in Ashland, Oregon has acted as Priest-in-Charge for its parishioners.

Together with Fr. Andreas, the monastery has ministered to the flock at the mission. Once a month, the parish visits the monastery for a Sunday morning service, and on another Sunday, a priestmonk and another monk from the monastery travel to Redding to serve a liturgy and meet the needs of the flock. In both cases, fellowship is fostered in the liturgy and at the ensuing meal. On the remaining weekends of the month, a priestmonk from another monastery serves the Sunday liturgy, and Fr. Andreas ministers on one Saturday. On one occasion, all the monks visited the mission and helped to support the parish’s morale.

Missionary outreach by the monastery helps to promote an understanding of monastic life and witness for the church-at-large. We invite groups from other parishes to come visit the monastery for a spiritually profitable experience. ✦