

Pascha 2013 Newsletter

The Monastery of St. John of San Francisco

PASCHA HAS come, a time of new life. Of course we celebrate Christ's conquest of death in rising from the tomb. Several items in our Paschal newsletter will concentrate on that overwhelming event in the life of the world with personal reflections from members of the brotherhood of the Monastery of St. John and from the Fathers of the Church.

But we also have reason to celebrate here at our monastery, because events have occurred among us which provide us with welcome encouragement. One is that a new man has joined our community, Theophan, who is currently a postulant. This is the very first stage in the "ladder" of commitment in the monastic life, and we ask your prayers for him and for us as he makes his way.

The second event is that the brotherhood has asked one member, Fr. Innocent, to accept the duties of Superior of the Monastery and he, with humility, has accepted. Fr. Innocent brings to the task a great deal of experience as a monk, having joined the brotherhood in the old Point Reyes days and having been a monk under the previous two abbots. We petitioned our hierarchy, His Eminence Archbishop Benjamin, who agreed to our request. These two events are important steps in the life of our community. Please pray for us and for our new Superior, Fr. Innocent.

On April 25th, at the Brotherhood's request, Archbishop Benjamin appointed Monk Innocent as Superior of the Monastery of St. John.

IT IS WITH FEAR and a certain sense of wonder that I accept this appointment. Fully aware of the heavy responsibility of leading others and of my own incapability to do this on my own strength, I am committed to call continually upon God for His help. I want to do everything I can to serve the brothers, but I know that God loves each member of our

community far more than I could ever conceive. The mystery of the way of God is that He chooses to channel His grace and love to his beloved sheep by means of sinful people like me. My daily cry to the Lord is, "You love these men. You want to give them what they need. Let my words be those that You want to be said, and not my own thoughts, opinions, and falleness."

Announcement:

Feast of St. John of San Francisco

Our Monastery's Patronal Feast Day

Monday, July 1 st	7:00 PM	Great Vigil
Tuesday, July 2 nd	8:00 AM	Hours Divine Liturgy with Archbishop Benjamin
	10:30 AM	Breakfast

All are invited to attend. Overnight accommodations are limited. Please email or call to let us know that you are coming, and to reserve a room if needed.

Mid-Pentecost 2013

Monk Innocent, Superior

SOMETHING unexpected happened to me on Pascha. Of course, Pascha itself brought an unexpected joy to my heart as we sang “Christ is risen” into the early hours of the morning. And I am always amazed at how the quiet peace and grace of this Feast of Feasts never fails to touch my soul. But it was after all the boisterous festivities that the unusual occurred. After the traditional Paschal nap, I went for a walk. Dark clouds filled the skies, and the air was cool and brisk. Suddenly, I heard what sounded like the crackling of a massive short-circuit. I glanced up the hill to the source of the sound and saw an intensely white light between the ground and a parked truck, only 150 yards from where I stood. A full second later, the sound of thunder exploded then rumbled while the ground beneath my feet seemed to hop, then tremble. As I quickly ran for cover, I was left with the impression of having witnessed an incredible demonstration of the power of God.



In Matthew’s account of the resurrection, when the two Marys went to see the tomb early in the morning there was a great earthquake and an angel rolled away the stone of the tomb. “His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became as dead men” (28:3). The women who found the empty tomb also



witnessed the supernatural power of God and spoke with an angel, at whose sight the Roman guards were knocked flat on their backs. The Resurrection of Christ is coupled with a demonstration of the divine power. Perhaps, this is for our assurance—that this is real. Pascha, as the culmination of the saving work of Christ, the redemption of our souls and the defeat of mankind’s greatest foe, death itself, is truly the good news that humanity has awaited. For us to say, “Christ is risen” is to announce the triumph of Christ, the succinct, joyous summary of the gospel. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith...” (Romans 1:16).

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On that quiet Sunday afternoon stroll, unbeknownst to me, a tremendous charge had built up in the clouds above me. Seeking neutralization, it found release in a patch of ground just a short distance from where I watched in amazement. When we feel utterly helpless, victims of our outward circumstances, the all-powerful God is always there, immanently present. Though unseen, that same power which raised Christ from the dead fills us and quickens us at all times. There can never be any real cause for despair. The ultimate victory of Christ transforms every situation in our lives. Even before we reach the end of the book of our lives we have the happy ending. To see with the eyes of faith, beyond what is apparent, is to live in the spirit of that succinct gospel message: “Christ is risen!”

From the Fathers

Extract of a Paschal Homily by St. Gregory of Nyssa:

THE TRUE SABBATH rest, that which has received God's blessing, in which the Lord has rested from His works on behalf of the world's salvation, spending the Sabbath in the inactivity of death, is now at an end. It has manifested its grace to our eyes, our ears and our heart through all these things which the feast has accomplished in us—in our eyes, our ears, and our joyful heart. What have we seen? A light like a cloud of fire of the candles burning during the night. All night our ears have resounded with psalms, hymns and spiritual chants; it was like a river of joy running through our ears to our soul and filling us with blessed hopes. And our heart, delighted by what we heard and saw, was marked with ineffable joy, conducting us by means of the visible spectacle to the invisible. Those blessings which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man, are shown to us in replica by the blessings of this day of rest; they are a guarantee for us of the ineffable blessing we hope for.



Since then this night is aglow with lights and mingles the brightness of its lights with the first rays of the dawn, making one day with no interval of darkness, let us reflect, brethren, on the prophecy that says: "This is the day which the Lord has made" (Ps. 118:24). This proposes to us nothing difficult or hard, but joy, happiness, rejoicing, as it goes on to say, "Let us rejoice and be glad in it." O wonderful instructions! O sweet order! Who can be slow to carry out such instructions? Who does not feel guilty even at a slight postponement of carrying out these orders? Joy is our task and rejoicing is our instruction. By this the judgment pronounced on sin is effaced and grief is turned into joy.



It is a saying in Wisdom that evils are forgotten on the day of joy. This day makes us forget the first sentence brought against us; or rather, it eliminates its very existence and not just its memory. For it has completely erased the memory of our condemnation. At that time birth took place in travail; now our new birth is painless. At that time we were flesh born of flesh; now it is a spirit born of spirit. At that time we were sons of men; now we are born children of God. At that time we were relegated from heaven to earth; now the One in heaven has made us sharers of heaven with Him. At that time death reigned because of sin; now, thanks to Life, it is justice that has taken over the power. At that time one man opened the gate of death; now through one man the gate of life is opened in its place. At that time we fell from life through death; now death is abolished by life. At that time we were hidden under the fig tree by shame; now by glory we approach the Tree of Life. At that time through disobedience we were expelled from paradise; now through faith we are admitted into paradise. Once again the fruit of life is offered to us to be enjoyed by us freely. Once again the fount of paradise with

its four rivers of the Gospels irrigates the whole face of the Church, so that the furrows of our souls are inebriated, which the sower of the word has ploughed with doctrine, and the seeds of virtue increase and multiply. What else then should we do because of this except to imitate the mountains and the hills of prophecy? “The mountains,” we are told, “skipped like rams, and the hills like lambs” (Ps. 113:4). Come, then, let us exult before the Lord Who has broken the enemy’s strength and power, and has raised up the great trophy of the Cross for us to destroy our adversary. Let us exult. For exultation or jubilation is the cry of victory raised by the victors over the vanquished. Since then the battle line of the enemy has collapsed, and the one who once held sway over the force of the devils has been vanquished and disappeared, annihilated, let us say that God is a great Lord and a great King over the entire earth. He has crowned the year with His kindness and has assembled us in the spiritual choir, in Jesus Christ our Lord, to Whom is glory rendered for ever and ever. Amen.

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ON THE BURNED HILL to the east, the dust of the earth drifts, wraith-like, across the stumps and brittle remnants of what was once live forest, before the sudden fire last August. The engines of the logging machines usually sound relentlessly, and it is a necessary thing, perhaps, or an inevitable one, for the cleansing to occur—to be nearly finished, really. Yet today there is a silence from that wounded land, a deep stillness. And on this Great and Holy Friday, it is impossible not to think of Golgotha. In the forest on the monastic property, the warm wind breathes through the trees, the branches sway and the new green leaves dance together with a hushing sound, and white sunlight encompasses all. Among the shoots of grass along the woodland paths (and in the clearcut), small yellow flowers rise from their roots in the dark earth toward the far and endless sky. Birds call out in the afternoon, butterflies and bees fly about, Creation is very much alive. Pascha is nearly upon us; once more we celebrate the defeat of death through Christ’s resurrection, once more we are invited to break away from the cycle of sin and death through the quelling of the passions, and to begin today to enter into eternity.



In our earthbound lives, we may experience much that Our Savior did, in ways that are shadows thereof—we may experience being misunderstood, betrayed, forsaken, abandoned, maligned, and abused—and we sinners may ourselves misunderstand, betray, forsake, abandon, malign, and abuse. We may be burned and broken, we may burn and break. We acknowledge this in the commemoration of the Passion, and we daily forgive the debts of love others owe us, and ask forgiveness for our own debts of love, never paid in full. Of course, every year we also liken our spiritual renewal to that of Creation, blossoming forth from the grave of winter. We yearn for Paradise, and the spring always reminds us of that. The liturgical year is a year for a reason, after all. Intentionally or not, it is structured around the changes of season, around the work of the gardener. And so, here we are. The winter has passed over us, again, and left us still here, still fallen, another year older, and anxious to approach the chalice with a renewed commitment to our baptismal vows. We’re a bit like the little yellow flowers poking through the scorched earth: we’re beautiful, tough in a relative way, and as always, trying to get to Heaven. May God have mercy on us all.