

MONASTERY OF ST JOHN

of

San Francisco

May 2018 Newsletter

Diocese of the West—OCA

The Coming of the Spirit



As we gaze upon the icon of the Feast of Pentecost, we see a figure in the middle: a crowned king who is holding out a band of cloth to catch the Word--in the form of tiny scrolls. That person represents us. We are the descendants of the Gentile nations who received the Good News and Holy Baptism. The Book of Acts recounts the exponential growth of the Church. Since the Church gathered all the nations under one flock and one Shepherd, it is a reversal of the Tower of Babel. At Babel, it was the will of God to scatter--this was the antidote to their pride, but at Pentecost, when the time was right, the Spirit came and tamed the wild nations and brought them under the light yoke of Christ.

There is a time for everything under the sun, as the Preacher said, and the nations had already been brought to that time, that is, to a state of receptivity before the Apostles arrived with the Good News. In the Gospel lesson for Pentecost Christ makes the offer, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me."

Blessed Augustine comments about this passage with the following words, "If you had not been thirsty, you would not have believed in Christ." What does he mean by this? Just this: if a person is not thirsty, he will not drink. In the same way, if we are not aware of our need, if we are not desirous of the gift of the Spirit, we will not receive it.

Our Savior skillfully led the Samaritan woman to the point where she saw that she was, indeed, thirsty for the real, living water of the Spirit. She had been living in a moral wasteland that could not satisfy her deepest longings: "Give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty." How often have we, like her, suddenly realized that we have been "running" on things that cannot sustain us in our innermost need? Pursuing empty pleasures, constant distractions, or even nobler things like making a living or raising our kids, if these are done outside of a consciousness of God can only mean that we are relying on false sources. "For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns, that can hold no water" (Jeremiah 2:13). As we approach the great feast of Pentecost, let us make ourselves ready by asking God to show us how needy we are. Only when we realize that we are in the desert can we be ready to receive the Spirit--the moment by moment vitality of life that comes from a constant, grateful reliance on God for everything. This is life in the Spirit. This is the only way of living that will satisfy our thirst. —*Hieromonk Innocent*

Opening of Our Spiritual Eyes

As soon as he arrived among us, our second abbot, Fr Meletios, asked the members of the brotherhood to do something which had more meaning than we realized at the time. He suggested that each of us begin the day by making a list of five things for which we are grateful.

His proposition met with some grumbling, and I think some people started to do it and stopped, while others continued, and perhaps some people didn't even get underway.

Let's take another look at the idea of deliberately focusing our attention on gratitude for God's gifts to us and see if there might be more to it than immediately meets the eye.

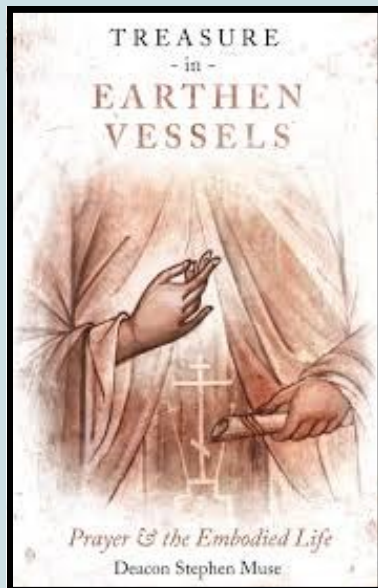
We talk about miracles, but we usually mean events that strike us as out of the ordinary. We tend to take everything else for granted. Similarly, our theologians speak of the uncreated energies of God, but they refer to them most often to explain things such as the experience hesychasts have when they see the uncreated light.

If God's uncreated energies are with us all the time, though, and if we say that the Holy Spirit is "everywhere present and fills all things," perhaps we can also view gratitude as the opening of our spiritual eyes, so that we are able to recognize many things as God's action in our lives that we would otherwise pass over as just "ordinary stuff." Could we say, instead, that gratitude is really the opening of our spiritual eyes so that we see our situation in life as it really is?

BOOK REVIEW

Treasure in Earthen Vessels: Prayer & the Embodied Life

By Deacon Stephen Muse



Waymart PA: St. Tikhon Monastery Press, 2017, 161 pp. This book is an excellent presentation of a life of prayer as a means of entering into embodied life, which means that the soul and the body, and by implication, the spiritual and material, are brought together and are both saved and deified. There are continuous references to what has been written on this subject by a whole array of Orthodox writers, from early fathers such as St. Mark the Ascetic and St. Macarios of Egypt, to those of later centuries such as St. Maximus the Confessor, St. Isaac the Syrian, St. Simeon the New Theologian, and St. Gregory Palamas, as well as Metropolitan Anthony Bloom, Elder Sophronios, and Fr. Alexander Schmemmann of the twentieth century. This is a very timely presentation of the relational aspect of prayer in an age of what Deacon Stephen calls "disembodied imaginations and personalities" brought about by our fascination with "ubiquitous digital media", making us "more and more disincarnate."

THE MYRRHBEARING WOMEN



The Holy Church regards with great honor the Holy Myrrhbearers for their ineffable love for Christ, since they fully committed their hearts to the Lord Jesus. She honors them for serving Him with everything they had – their possessions, their womanly cares, satisfying all of His everyday needs. And they set an example to all women of how one should love the Lord Jesus with one's heart and serve Him.

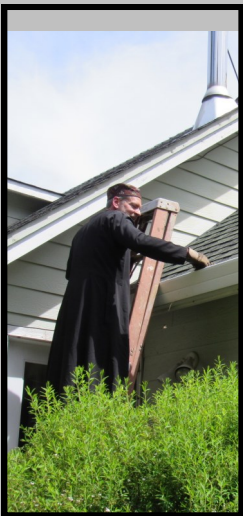
Christ has raised the Myrrhbearing Women before you Christians as a great example for you to imitate. They devoted all their zeal, all their strength to be of service to Him, the Lord Jesus Christ, in His bodily needs. They fulfilled all of the womanly tasks of which He was in need. But the merit of these women lies not only in this, but first of all in the fact that their hearts were pure, holy, and complete before God.

Our Lord Jesus Christ chose precisely the Myrrhbearing Women for His appearance because He knew how pure, how holy and how complete women's hearts are if they follow the path of goodness rather than the path of evil. He knew that women, and especially the Myrrhbearing Women, would perceive His appearance after the Resurrection differently from men, from His holy apostles. He knew how hard it would be for certain of His apostles to believe that the Risen Christ was standing before them, while it was much easier for the Myrrhbearing Women.

They understood everything that had taken place in a simple way, since their womanly perception was totally different from that of men. Women perceive the truth, goodness, and grace directly, with their entire being, and, first of all, they perceive the truth with their hearts. But men are different, for they perceive the truth only upon having ascertained it with their minds. They need cerebral proofs, not ones from the heart, as in the case of women, but ones from the mind. This is exactly why it was so hard for the apostles and why it was so easy and simple for the Myrrhbearing Women to believe that the Risen Lord Jesus Christ Himself had appeared to them.

This is why the Myrrhbearing Women were granted this great honor, this great happiness, of being the first to see the Risen Lord. Their hearts were pure, they easily perceived the truth, and thus they were the first to whom the Lord Jesus Christ appeared.

There are many jobs to do around the monastery. Last month, Fr Stephen Soot of St. Anne's in Corvallis, OR came and helped us out!



Scenes from Pascha 2018



Upcoming Events

- **Orthodox Life School** (Sun– Sat) June 17-23, 2018 For young adults 18-35 yrs. old ; Many Orthodox guest speakers, manual work, outreach
- **St Peter Youth Camp** (Sun– Fri) June 23-29, 2018
For young people ages 14-22; Harrison, Montana
- **Dormition Retreat** (Fri– Sun) August 10-12, 2018
“Life of the Virgin Mary”, with Fr. Innocent

Read more about these at:

<http://www.monasteryofstjohn.org/retreats/>

<http://stpetersmonastery.com/jekyll/update/2016/12/17/summer-youth-camp.html>

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