

# MONASTERY of ST JOHN

## of San Francisco

December 2018

Diocese of the West—OCA



### Times of Stress

*"...men fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken." (Luke 21:26)*

*"But understand this: that in the last days there will come times of stress." (1 Tim 3:1)*



As I gaze out the window from the monastery's visiting room while a cheery fire dances in the wood stove, I am relieved to see the rain fall. A nice, steady rain marks the turning of the season and the cool of a California winter. We are especially thankful to see an end to the fire season in Northern California. It has been a disastrous year for wildfires, to say the least. While our monastery has been spared, many people in the cities of Redding and Paradise have lost their homes and even their very lives. The recent incident of violence in our monastery (see article that follows) have also made us realize how vulnerable we really are and how near death is to us every moment. These events have left us shaken and wondering at why these calamities befall us.

Yet, we should not let ourselves be easily shaken or lose our faith. Last year, I attended a talk given by Fr. Zacharias of Essex where he touched on this theme. He reassured us that extraordinary events and social upheaval of our times have been prophesied already in Holy Scripture. We should not let ourselves be shaken, but, seeing these events take place, do as it says in the Gospel: "Look up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

Orthodoxy in the United States is still a tiny minority—a mere 0.3% of the total population. Even though we are few, we can offer a certain "leaven" of influence. Most importantly, we can offer the solace of sanity. If one looks at an icon of a saint, one sees no extreme emotion. One sees serenity, peace, and strength. We can gaze at the icon. We can take into ourselves the same spirit of passionlessness in the face of much external turmoil. This is how we ought to live. This is the sanity we can give.

The real danger we face is not wildfires, acts of violence, or even death itself. Our foe is the overwhelming fear and dread that the *thought* of these calamities engenders. In monastic literature, we are encouraged, above all, to keep our peace. We must believe that this is always possible. Perhaps the "peace that passes all understanding" is a serenity that doesn't match the circumstances, but is ours by virtue of our being children of the Prince of Peace.

—Hieromonk Innocent

### **Monk John Recovers from Recent Stabbing Attack**

On the Eve of our monastery's founding day, October 18<sup>th</sup>/31<sup>st</sup>, the feast of the Holy Apostle and Evangelist Luke, our peace was suddenly disrupted by an act of violence. A guest who was staying at our monastery, who struggled with addiction, suffered a relapse. In the early hours of the morning, under the influence of alcohol and hallucination, he managed to attack the Superior and wound Monk John by stabbing him repeatedly. The local Sheriff arrived and arrested our guest, and Monk John was flown by helicopter to a local hospital.

Although exploratory surgery revealed no significant damage to his internal organs, it took nearly four weeks before he was strong enough to return to the monastery. We would like to thank all those who responded to our crisis. Your prayers and genuine concern were a great comfort to us as we faced this life and death situation. Please continue to pray for Monk John as he recovers and for our former guest Mikhail as he awaits trial and seeks help with his addiction.

—Hieromonk Innocent

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### **Spiritual Principle**

by Monk Cosmas

Not long ago a friend of mine told me about a spiritual principle that he had formulated. Since he is not looking for publicity, I will not force fame upon him against his wishes. We can pay tribute to him, though, by a vague reference to the first letter of his first name, and call it “the delta principle.” That has a nice ring to it.

Simply put, it is this. Everything we do, everything we say, everything we think, and everything we feel, has one of two results: either it brings us closer to God, or it places us at a further distance from Him.

Doesn't it sound as if it's something true, something profoundly true? Notice that it doesn't say we deliberately create a distance between ourselves and God. In fact, we probably don't often plan to turn away from God. No, the “delta principle” simply points out that all of our acts, words, thoughts, and emotions have one of those two results.

The reality, as we experience it, is that we sometimes feel that God is far away from us — not recognizing that we are the ones who have made the move without any conscious intent — and we don't understand what happened.

So what do we have to do to counteract this? My friend didn't explain that, so I will offer something that someone else pointed out a few years ago. He said that we do better by looking forward than by looking backward. Of course we should repent of our sins, but we move closer to God most effectively by developing habits that bring us closer to God.

This includes things like prayer, Bible reading, other spiritual reading, confession, going to church, and partaking of the sacraments.

Not only do those things work by their own spiritual and sacramental power, but they also function “behind the scenes” to guide us toward the acts, words, thoughts, and emotions that keep us in better contact with God.

## A WEEKEND OF INTENSIVE WORK

From time to time we get blessed by work parties from various parishes who come to perform much needed tasks at the monastery. The latest such work party came from SS. Cyril and Methodius Church in Chico on the weekend starting on Nov. 9 and was going to be largest such party with around 30 people staying overnight one or both nights. Unfortunately, it was just on the previous day the disastrous Camp Fire broke out in Paradise, causing many of those who had planned to come to remain in Chico.



But we still ended up with a fairly sizable group which enthusiastically launched into a number of projects. These included cleaning the chapel, removing cobwebs, vacuuming the floors and cleaning the rugs in the main building, baling a large batch of prosofira, felling trees that needed thinning, cutting firewood, and trimming branches from the trunks of existing trees.

And at the Divine Liturgy on Saturday morning we were greatly assisted by Deacon David Greenfield serving in the altar and by Matushka Ruth and their daughter Lucy singing in perfect harmony at the kliros. All in all, we were exceedingly grateful for the group's presence and for the mild weather that lasted all weekend.

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## Farewell, Little Friend



Pets have an important place in many monasteries. A warm furry cat that likes to curl up on your lap and purr is a consolation to many visitors (and monks, too). Yet, it is a sorrow when their short lives come to an end. A few weeks ago, we had to say "goodbye" to our cat Mija (Spanish for "my daughter"). She was suddenly half paralyzed by a blood clot and had to be put down. There is no funeral service for animals, but the Brothers and our guests gathered at the grave site on Saturday to read some psalms and say a few words of remembrance. A good mouser, always friendly (even with the most difficult toddler visitors), she will be missed.



St. Peter Youth Camp, June, Harrison, Montana



Blessing of the vineyards, August, Manton



Pilgrimage to Romania, October

Every day we feed our body and breathe the air so that it might live. But the soul needs the Lord and the grace of the Holy Spirit, without which the soul is dead. As the sun warms and enlivens wildflowers, and as they are drawn to it, so is the soul which loves God drawn to Him and maintains a state of bliss in Him, and wishes, out of much joy, that all people be likewise in a blissful state. Our Lord created us specifically so that we would dwell with Him in love eternally in the heavens.

Glory be to God and to His mercifulness. He has come to love us so much that He gave us the Holy Spirit, which teaches us all that is good and gives us strength to conquer sin. In accordance with His mercifulness our Lord gives us grace, and we must guard it firmly in order not to lose it, for without grace a person is spiritually blind. Whoever gathers riches in this world is blind, for this means that his soul does not know the Holy Spirit and does not know how sweet He is and thus becomes captivated by the world. But whoever has come to know the sweetness of the Holy Spirit knows that it is not comparable to anything and cannot be captivated by anything on earth any longer. He is captivated only by God's love, he rests in God, he rejoices, and weeps over people since not everyone has come to know him, and feels compassion for them.

When the soul is in the Holy Spirit it is satisfied and does not yearn for the heavenly, for the Kingdom of God is within us – God has come and dwelt in us. But when the soul loses grace it yearns for the heavenly and tearfully seeks the Lord.

—Saint Silouan of Mt. Athos, translated by Hieromonk Alexis

#### **Upcoming Events at the monastery**

- **Young Adult Retreat** (Thurs– Sat) December 27-29, 2018 *“How Can I Live My Life in Christ Today?”*, with Fr. Innocent, Fr Phillip Halliwell, and Fr Timothy Winegar, open to men and women, ages 18-30, \$50, to sign up email Kathy at: [klpieracci@yahoo.com](mailto:klpieracci@yahoo.com)
- **Nativity of Christ (old calendar) Sunday, January 6th: Vigil 6:30 PM; Monday: Jesus Prayer, Hours, Divine Liturgy of St. Basil 8:30 AM**

#### **Read more about it at:**

[https://www.dowoca.org/news\\_181129\\_1.html](https://www.dowoca.org/news_181129_1.html)

[www.monasteryofstjohn.org/retreats/](http://www.monasteryofstjohn.org/retreats/)

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