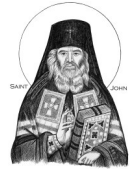


# MONASTERY of ST JOHN

## of San Francisco

March 2019

Diocese of the West—OCA



### The Pharisee and the Publican:

#### *On Being a Debtor*

Many wonderful homilies have been delivered on Christ's parable of the Publican and the Pharisee. Truly, this short teaching is a fruitful source of much wisdom. It is a study in contrasts: the Pharisee is outwardly righteous but inwardly unwell. The Publican, having no virtues to display, stands "afar off" and pleads for mercy. Our Savior declares the Publican justified rather than the other.

This Sunday Gospel lesson is placed at the beginning of the Triodion period for a reason. Our Mother, the Church, desires that we, her children, receive great spiritual benefit from these upcoming days of Lent. We must be prepared and approach the forty days with the right inner disposition. I believe that the attitude we must assume is that of being a debtor. There is something about what was going on inside the Publican that was right, and the parable invites us to explore and discover what it is.

Being a spiritual debtor begins with an awareness of our own sinfulness. It is a deep-seated realization of the enormity of sin that weighs upon us. It includes a vision of how that sinfulness has adversely affected our own lives and those around us. A debtor is unable to compare himself with others because he is so conscious of his extreme need for God's mercy. Thus, he has no opportunity for fault-finding. A debtor relates to God with a correct disposition. He does not consider his salvation guaranteed. He is aware that without real repentance, he is in danger of being eternally lost. He is willing to do whatever it takes to allow God to heal him of his extreme spiritual sickness.

The hymnography of the feast directs us to follow the Pharisee in his virtues and to emulate the Publican in his humility. To those hearing the parable, our Savior uses emphatic words: "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other." The Publican's attitude and disposition won the mercy of God. As he stood afar off, unable to lift his eyes to heaven, the Publican displayed a healthy shame for what he had done. Yet, he did not despair. He still regarded God as capable of hearing him. He had enough hope to at least ask for His mercy. In the brief description of the Publican, we are given a picture of what humility looks like. Thus, with a consciousness of our own sinfulness, an awareness that we are debtors, yet with a sure hope in God's mercy, let us begin these blessed forty days of repentance.

- Hieromonk Innocent

## **THE BIRDS, THE FLOWERS, AND ME**

I don't know about you, but I have a hard time resembling the birds of the air and the lilies of the field.

What I have in mind, of course, is what Jesus tells us:

*Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink: nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?*



*So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? (Matthew 6:25 – 30)*

Obviously Jesus isn't telling us not to take responsibility for things we are supposed to do. His point is that we should trust that our heavenly Father will provide for us. I don't worry much about food and clothing. But I do find all sorts of other things to worry about:

Troubles in the world around me, what other people think, what they are going to do, how things are going back at the monastery, the political situation here in Gagauzia...

Safety, security, well-being, the opinions of other people, mostly things that are out of my control...

What am I going to do? How am I going to handle that? What if this happens? What if that happens?

Do you know what all these worries amount to? Distrust, that's what.

The birds of the air & the lilies of the field trust God. They don't doubt that God will take care of them.

Jesus knows I worry. And He has a simple message for me: Stop worrying and trust your heavenly Father.



-Monk Cosmas

## **YOUNG ADULT WINTER RETREAT HELD IN DECEMBER**

From December 27 to 29 our monastery hosted a Young Adult retreat organized by Fathers Philip Halliwell and Timothy Winegar, and by Kathy Pieracci., which turned out to bring together 17 participants.

This event started with dinner, an ice breaker activity, and a bonfire with marshmallows and carol singing. The evening was quite cold and windy, yet the group braved the elements and roasted their marshmallows, none-the-less.

The next morning talks were given by three priests covering practical things having to do with life in Christ, despite the forces in the world that oppose this. A lively discussion followed, relating to relationships and conflict resolution. That afternoon, obediences were assigned, including forest work, candle making, cleaning and polishing church items, prosphora and Litya loaf baking, and choir practice.

The event concluded Saturday morning with the Divine Liturgy served by Fathers Innocent and Timothy and sung most beautifully by a young adult choir directed by Anna Golitzin.

Everyone agreed that this should be done again next year.

-Hieromonk Alexis

## Sermon on the Feast of the Meeting of the Lord in the Temple

Today we celebrate the feast of The Meeting of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Temple, a time when, forty days after His birth, His parents brought Him to the temple, in accordance with the Law for first-born sons, and submitted to the prescribed rites of the redemptive offerings and purification.

Thematically, the feast concludes the Nativity-Theophany cycle which began with a forty-day fasting period, during which the young Virgin Theotokos, as a little girl, was brought into the Temple, into the Holy of Holies, in order to become herself the temple of God, to reveal the Church for what it is: a corporate body of faithful believers, who through constant prayer and purity of heart—prayer both of petition for the fulfillment of the promises made to man by God, and prayer of thanksgiving for the blessings and sanctification of life received—manifests the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit residing with man, enlightening him to the reality of his potential salvation.

The hymnography of the feast we are now celebrating not only recalls that the Virgin comes again to the temple, this time as the Theotokos, who has given birth to the Son of Righteousness in the flesh, but stresses throughout by its paradoxical language and imagery the *kenosis*, the self-emptying, of God, Who in the Person of the Son of God came down to earth, hiding His divine glory, in order to save mankind from the darkness of sin through His wondrous incarnation, His nativity in the flesh.

The hymns continually stress the idea of affirmation, of fulfillment of promise, by contrasting Moses, who once beheld God in darkness granting him the Law on Mt. Sinai, with Simeon, one of the last representatives of the Old Testament church, who—at least according to the festal hymns—as a priest after the order of the Levites receives our Lord, Who created and spoke through the Law, as a babe now subject to the Law in order to fulfill it and redeem man, and honors His mystical and high priesthood after the order of Melchizedek.

The feast, then, stresses our Lord's meeting with His people, in the persons of the righteous Simeon and the aged prophetess Anna, and affirms the glory and light of the revelation that has been granted to us through His incarnation. We ourselves, on this present occasion, come to the Church of God as children of God. And yet, each one of us being of the royal priesthood of believers, must take up the Lord Who dwells within us, Who through His all-holy Spirit grants us purity of heart, peace of understanding and love, and vision of our salvation if we strive as men to be perfect as God, our Father in heaven, is perfect, and say to the Father: "My eyes have seen Thy salvation."





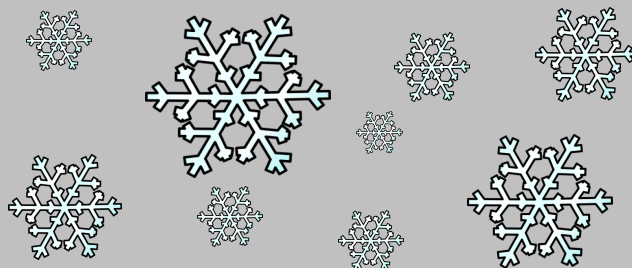
## Winter Activities Around the Monastery

The long, cold winter months at the monastery keep the monks indoors and close to the heat of our wood-burning stoves. There are, however, many outdoor activities that we attend to in this season.

One such activity is an important one for fire safety. We thin out the forest of dead trees and trees that are growing too close together. Some wood we harvest for our supply of firewood for the next year and other smaller branches we burn up to reduce the “fuel load” from the forest floor and keep our monastery property “wildfire safe” during the hot dry months of summer and autumn.



The dark days of winter are somewhat alleviated by dreams of planting our annual vegetable garden. In January, we plan what we will grow and order seeds. For cold-season vegetables, like broccoli, cabbage, lettuce, onions, and cauliflower, in January, we turn on our heated seedling mats and grow lights. We use home-made flats of custom potting soil and sow our seed in little rows. We keep them watered and rejoice as the little seedlings emerge!



In most years, our orchard keeps us supplied with fresh fruit in late summer and autumn. To keep the trees healthy and fruitful, we prune for fruit. Dead branches are removed and excess limbs cleared away to make room for the next year's crop. Though we snip away at the trees, they are dormant in the winter months and won't feel it! May we learn to abide in Christ and accept God's pruning in our lives, so that we can “bear much fruit” (John 15).



### Upcoming Events at the monastery

- **Orthodox Life School** (Sun– Sat) June 16-22, 2019 For young adults 18-35 yrs. old ; Many Orthodox guest speakers, manual work, outreach

### 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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