

# MONASTERY of SAINT JOHN of SAN FRANCISCO

December 2019 Newsletter

Orthodox Church in America, Diocese of the West

## Rhythm of Life

*“Teach us to number our days, so that we may get a heart of wisdom.” (Psalm 91:12)*

It is an incredible privilege to live in a monastery in a remote, natural setting. The mighty forests of pine, cedar, and oak bring a comforting stillness that is so much a part of the atmosphere of this sacred place. During the months of October and November the change of the seasons is stunning. The deeply-variegated yellowed leaves of the black oaks give a flame-like flash in the clearings of the thick forest when touched by the rays of the newly-risen autumn sun. Piles of potatoes and winter squash are harvested from the kitchen garden and fill our pantry shelves to sustain us for the long months of winter. The season is a strange mixture of dying, in-gathering, and resting in anticipation.

We feel this change in our surroundings and realize that we are changing along with them. The feasts of the Church lead us along on this annual journey. On the Feast of the Protection of the Theotokos, the nearness of the holiest of the Saints assures us that we are not alone or without defense on our journey. Even though we glimpse the Divine in the splendor of the visible world, the feast of the Archangels reminds us of the deeper reality—a world filled hosts of angels, always doing the bidding of God. As we enter Advent and celebrate the Feast of the Entrance of the Mother of God, we join her in putting our lives always in the “God-ward” direction.



Not content to busy ourselves with earthly cares, we sit with her in stillness in the very presence of the Lord.

As I gaze out the window to watch the last few leaves of the maple tree blow in the wind and fall gently to the ground, I realize that God has blessed this season to teach us to number our days and hold this life as transient. We are given just what we need in life, not to make ourselves comfortable but to fully utilize our life for repentance. Repentance is the miracle of yielding our will to the Divine

will. It opens the gates for us to change into the image of Christ. Perceiving the world through the eyes of gratitude, we can accept our portion and find our place in the Kingdom. This is the way to peace and wholeness. *--Hieromonk Innocent*



## Fall Work Weekends

In September, our monastery received a group of pilgrims from the Ss Cyril and Methodius Mission in Chico, CA together with St Gabriel's in Ashland, OR. It is a great encouragement when we are blessed to host these work party weekends. Worshipping together and working together in a monastic setting makes for a memorable, bonding experience. Saturday activities were packed. The early morning Divine Liturgy is always especially meaningful because with pilgrims, it makes for a crowd—we are not alone! After coffee and breakfast (with readings from the holy fathers), we divided into teams. The chapel crew polished the candlestands, cleaned the floors, and generally made our temple look nice and clean. The painting crew prepped our candleshop building by scraping, sanding and priming the exterior.



The bee crew fed our multitude of tiny insects and got them ready for winter. There was something for everyone to do.

November brought a team from St Basil's Greek Orthodox Church in Stockton. As before, we followed the pattern of common worship and meals together. The main focus for the guys was forest work and for the ladies: a much-needed deep cleaning of the monastery kitchen. The men exhausted themselves cutting down excess trees, building slash piles for winter burning, and hauling off loads of logs for firewood. The ladies did a marvelous job with the kitchen work. Despite the heavy work load, there was time in the evening for spiritual discussion. Fr Innocent offered a talk on discovering and re-enforcing the inner motivation that draws us to pray and worship God. A meaningful discussion on our individual spiritual journeys followed.

## Remembering You in Our Prayers

*"...[F]ar be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you." (1 Samuel 12:23)*

If you receive this as a mailed newsletter, you will find a slip of lined paper with places to write the names of the living and departed of your loved ones. Of course, we send these in all our mailings. This paper is used to commemorate names at the preparation service before the Divine Liturgy. Particles from the bread are placed on the paten as the names are read aloud.

When Christians pray for each other with regularity and fervency of heart it is an act of love of the highest quality. Orthodox traditions regards commemoration of the living and departed at the Divine Liturgy as "right there at the top" for effective prayer. The Divine Liturgy is usually served four times weekly at the monastery. We keep your lists for forty days, reading the names at Proskedia many times. Our monastic calling includes praying for you and your loved ones. We invite you to send us your lists and let us pray, though we are unworthy.

## St John Monastery: the Monastic Struggle

Every organization has ups and downs and ours is no exception. Monasteries often face great spiritual struggles because the Enemy particularly opposes them. This past year, especially, seemed to bring an extra measure of trials and temptations to our community.

A year ago, we were approached, quite unexpectedly, by a developer who offered to purchase our facility—our 42 acres and buildings. He explained that the place would be ideal for his growing business. He reasoned that although we have this large monastery we were under-utilizing it. Built to house 24 monks, we had only 6 active members. If we agreed to sell to him, he could immediately put the entire facility to use as a health retreat center, and our community could use the proceeds of the sale to re-locate to a smaller place—one more manageable that would better match our size. On a practical level, his proposal was appealing. It made us think and ask ourselves some hard questions.

The offer made good business sense, but we ultimately decided to turn it down. For a monk, stability is important. It is one of our vows, one of the main things that makes it possible to work out our salvation. We decided to stay, but during the weeks of uncertainty four members of the community decided to move on to other places. This has reduced the Brotherhood to just two members. Although another monk has recently joined us, our community remains small.

We face tremendous struggles—there is much work to do to maintain our property and to keep our industries going, but there are few hands to do it. We keep our daily and weekly round of services in the chapel and offer hospitality and retreats. The challenges—both with the work load and keeping our heads above water, financially—often seem overwhelming. Yet, the joy and the privilege of living the monastic life is still there. The trials of the year have taught us that if we focus on the negative, we can easily fall into despondency. If, however, we learn to perceive our situation through the eyes of gratitude, receiving everything as sent from God for our salvation, we find ourselves in a better place. St John Monastery has faced many crises in its 23 years of existence. In that light, we face nothing new. By the intercessions of St John of Shanghai, we will persevere and thereby find our salvation.

Upcoming Event:

Whatever you do, do it in the Name of the Lord :  
Living our faith at work and at school  
Young Adult Winter Retreat

Dates: Friday, Dec 27<sup>th</sup> 4:00 PM – Sunday 29<sup>th</sup>, noon  
Who can come: Orthodox men and women ages 18-35  
Accommodations and meals provided by the monastery  
Cost: \$60 per person  
Register online: [www.monasteryofstjohn.org](http://www.monasteryofstjohn.org)

