

MONASTERY of SAINT JOHN of SAN FRANCISCO

May 2020 Newsletter

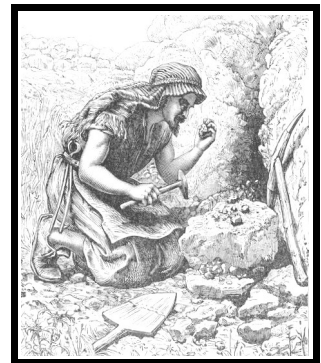
Orthodox Church in America, Diocese of the West

Treasure Hidden in a Field

“For the time being I live in a cave. I have wonderful stillness. I am the luckiest of men, for I live without cares and enjoy the honey of stillness unceasingly.” St Joseph the Hesychast

It is the season of Pascha at the monastery. Spring has been long, cool, and wet. Everything is still green and vibrant. All creation radiates with the joy of the Resurrection. Creation pulsates with life and points to the eternity which is now breaking through. It is in seasons like these that I praise God from my heart that He has given us the monastic way of life. The griefs and sorrows seem small. I am caught up in the glory and meaningfulness of this hidden life.

We read Christ’s parables many times in our lives, and they are planted in our hearts. Their meaning seems to spring up when we need it. The simple parable of the treasure hidden in the field has recently become very meaningful to me. What excitement must that man have felt when he discovered the treasure! He knew its great value. He would buy that field, even if he had to sell everything he had. Many would have considered him a fool. But the man was a good merchant. He knew what he had found.



To become a monastic, it costs everything you have: your wealth, the comfort of a spouse and family life, and even your own freedom. To an outsider, this seems a shameful waste. Stories of ascetics who stand all night repeating a fervent prayer fill me with wonder and admiration, but to an outsider, it is a picture of mental illness, a waste. But the true monk is unconcerned about the opinions of others. There are times I am tempted to look back, to enter the realm of “what ifs”. Earthly consolations often look very attractive. But God has transformed my desires. Yes, monastic life has many deprivations. Perhaps even more so, it has many cares and griefs to endure. But the nearness of the Kingdom which this time of the year brings, and the quiet joy of the presence of Christ make it all worth it. I caught a glimpse of the treasure twenty years ago when I was called to the monastic life. Only now do I sense its great value. Was it worth it? Absolutely. --Hieromonk Innocent

Thank you!

In our last newsletter, we shared a little about our life and the struggles we face at the monastery. The response was tremendous! We received piles of letters of encouragement and financial support. We are deeply grateful. Your kind support actually turned our situation around. In December, we were asking ourselves, “Can we make it?” but by February it became clear that we can. Although many challenges lie ahead, we feel very encouraged and supported by you all. Glory to God! Christ is risen!



Monastery Online Store is Open For Business

Are you stuck at home and missing Church services? Set up your prayer corner to make your home a Church. The monastery has added small packets of candles so the faithful can buy online and use them for worship. Go to our store at: <https://stjohnbookstore.com>

Happenings at the Monastery

People often ask us, “How are things at the monastery?” It is nice that we are a part of people’s consciousness and that you all are concerned about us. Of course, behind that question now is concern over the hardship that everyone faces with the COVID-19 pandemic that is happening. In brief, our monastic life goes on, as before, but things have gotten very quiet. We are blessed to have the full round of daily services, but just for the monks. We realize all the more how precious our Divine Liturgy is. Visitors are, for the moment, not allowed, and we miss you, but the isolation has given us the opportunity to focus on the inner life and to deepen our monastic vocation.

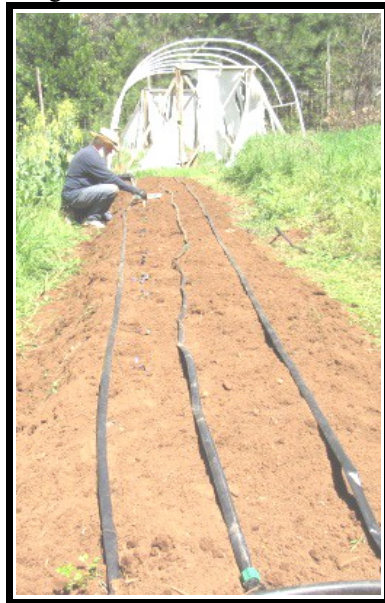
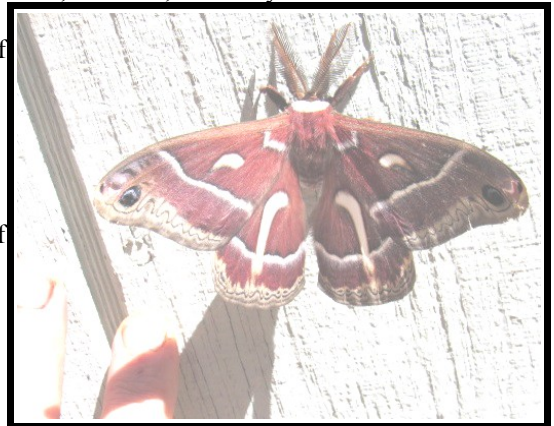
In what would be the last retreat for the foreseeable future, a men’s group led by Fr Nicholas Carr of St Seraphim’s in Santa Rosa stayed at the monastery on a weekend in early March. There was time for teaching and volunteer work. Teams worked to haul thinned trees from the forest and stack them for firewood. Others did a deep cleaning of the monastery chapel. Even a batch of prosphora was baked. The evenings were set aside for teaching and discussion on the book of Proverbs. An important book for Lent, it gives the foundation for the life of a young man, inspiring him in the lifelong quest for wisdom. The heartfelt discussion that followed was encouraging.



Later in March, we were obliged to close the chapel to visitors.

A lock was affixed to the front doors—a sad reminder of our times. Although several work weekends and young adult retreats had been scheduled, all were canceled. We experienced, as many others, feelings of sadness and shock. One thinks of the words of Isaiah: “Come, my people, enter your chambers, and shut your doors behind you; hide yourselves for a little while until the wrath is past.” Candle sales to parishes—normally brisk this time of year—slumped. Sales of our candles and other merchandise online, however, markedly increased.

Although we lack two-legged visitors, we are daily surrounded by a host of animal visitors. A small herd of deer including a young fawn make a nearly daily appearance on the lawn just outside our trapeza window. Coveys of California quail regularly browse the yard in the morning hours. Squirrels, lizards, toads, turkeys, robins, and hummingbirds all make their appearance as if they own the place. This is God’s world, and we all live in it together. Even the majestic lunar moth has graced our hallowed ground, stopping at the guest house outdoor light for a few days of rest on its annual migration.



Garden work is in full swing. Cabbage starts have been planted, followed by potatoes, onions, and other roots. Many weeds had to be pulled to make room for the vegetables. Even the weeds can help—we made a giant heap that is already heating up and composting nicely.

Jason Kratzer from faraway Maryland joined us in January. Novice Peter of Sitka, Alaska has recently transferred to join our community this month. The monastic path is both glorious and arduous. There are hardships, but the reward that awaits those who are faithful is beyond anything we can imagine. Please keep them in your prayers as they try their vocation.

