



Monastery of St John of Shanghai and San Francisco

Orthodox Church in America, Diocese of the West
Manton, CA

November 2020



Pray Big

If we find ourselves overwhelmed by the circumstances of life and not knowing where to begin, as our first move, we should turn our attention to God and pray. God is sovereign and allows everything to happen. He even sends perplexing situations and unsolvable problems our way, just so that we would turn to Him in our desperation. Like a mother who hides from her child, to teach him to run to her as soon as she appears, God hides for a while, to teach us about our dependence on Him.

Our Church instructs us to pray to God for things great and small. The Divine Liturgy begins with broad-sweeping petitions. The deacon calls on all the faithful to pray for the peace of the whole world and the salvation of all souls. We pray for an everlasting peace from above. We are not doing this in vain, but in earnest. We really expect God to bring His peace and to save our souls.



A recent Sunday Gospel lesson gave us the story of a woman with an issue of blood. She had spent all she had on doctors but, for twelve years, had not gotten any better. Many people thronged our Savior that day, but this one woman grabbed the hem of his garment in faith, believing that she would be healed. Of course, she was healed and eventually openly confessed about what had happened. Everyone else may have brushed up against Christ, but she, alone, grabbed him and held on. We can take this as an image of what it means to pray in earnest. We can follow her example and not hesitate to ask for the good things that we need. Things like the safety and health of our loved ones, freedom from our besetting passions, and, ultimately, whatever it takes to gain our salvation and the salvation of all those around us.

In this era of stress, danger, and uncertainty, let us not hesitate to turn to our Heavenly Father and boldly ask him for the good things that He truly wants to give us.

Local Feasts

Every monastic community has its own unique customs. We like to observe our founding day at the end of October (the Holy Apostle Luke, o.s.) as a day of remembrance and thanksgiving. There is a story about the founding monks who came and started the work at St John's, when the monastery was located in Pt Reyes Station. After a hard day getting things cleaned up, the pair went to town for a bite to eat. The waitress said words to the effect, "Hmm, let me guess...you are monks." She paused, and, realizing her mistake, added, "Wait a minute, you're the real thing!" It was, after all, October 31st.

This year, we added Alaska Day to our local tradition. It was on October 18th, 1867 that Russian America was transferred to the United States. Since two of our members hail from the 49th state, we felt it would be good to observe the day. A special cake called "Baked Alaska" was prepared, state flag unfurled, and the Alaska state song was sung with gusto.



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Nuns Take Refuge at St John's



The rains have returned to the Northern California, much to the relief of the people here. The summer saw many wildfires in our area. We had a few close calls, but were spared this scourge. As the showers began to fall last month, we all felt a little safer.

Following a lightning storm and high winds, the sisters at Holy Assumption Monastery were forced to flee on September 28th. In accordance with a prior agreement, they took refuge at our monastery. All nine of them arrived on a Monday—right in the middle of a PG&E power outage. We felt pity for them because, eight years ago, we also had to flee under similar frightening circumstances.

We thank God for this opportunity to offer them aid. We were already set up with a complete dormitory with rooms for everyone and a nice covered back porch for their aviary. They joined us for our cycle of services in the chapel. For safety (in these COVID days) the monks prayed in the altar area while the nuns positioned themselves in

the nave. It was wonderful to hear the beautiful, flute-like singing during the Liturgy and at all the services.

Back in Calistoga, around the feast of the Protection of the Theotokos (October 1st), the winds died down and an inversion developed in the atmosphere above. This reduced the oxygen supply to the wildfire and quelled the flames. The town and the monastery were spared! Upon receiving this news, back in Manton, we celebrated the Divine Liturgy. Prayers were offered in thanksgiving for this deliverance. Apparently, the Theotokos did not want to see her monastery burn. After a week's stay, the sisters returned home to their monastery in peace.

Although circumstances of the exile were dire, the stay at our monastery was quite welcome. The sisters helped so much with our myriad of tasks: cleaning, baking, vestment mending, forest clearing work, and bookkeeping. It was a huge consolation for us! But beyond the practical help, the nuns carried themselves in a meek and quiet spirit—a spiritual beauty worthy of their heavenly patron, the Theotokos. As would be expected, there were moments of humor—the antics of their tropical birds and the monks getting themselves locked out of their truck on a Sunday afternoon outing, to name a few. But, all-in-all, it was very edifying to gain from our sisters in Christ an example of dedication to our common, Heavenly Bridegroom.



Reptiles Rising

When you live in the same place long enough, you sense the changes of the seasons and the appearance (and disappearance) of the flora and fauna. Of late we have seen a marked increase in fauna, including our scaly-skinned, forked-tongued friends.

On a late-night return trip from town, there lay this rattlesnake, just as content as can be, in the middle of the road. We stopped and got out and took pictures (from a distance, of course). Apparently, snakes do that to soak up the heat from the sun-baked road. Another pickup pulled up behind us. Out came our neighbor with a shovel. Without pausing, he proceeded to attack the serpent, eventually severing its head. We were horrified! “That's one of God's creatures,” I protested. Apparently, rattlers will slither into your garage, hole up there, and only be removed with great difficulty. Even on the monastery grounds, rattlers have shown up—one big one and some little ones. Locals explained that they eat the venomous snake—it is apparently tasty and good for one's health. Thank God, I am a vegetarian!



On my daily, short walk to the chapel, there is a landscaping rock. On the top of that rock, I have frequently observed a lizard just sitting there. Even as I moved closer, it didn't move. Occasionally it has another lizard with it. I wonder: is it a mate? This would be unusual because it is not mating season. Is it a friend? Do lizards have companions? In another instance, I have seen a pair of lizards happily munching on a swarm of creeping termites. Is it nicer for them to dine together? Perhaps I will not find all the answers, but it is reassuring to know that there is still cause for wonder—and even mystery—in the world around us.

