



Monastery of St John of Shanghai and San Francisco

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

March 2021



The Kingdom of God and the Falsehood of the World

Thirty years ago, I was sent as a missionary to Siberia. It was a unique moment in history for Russia. The seventy years of Communist domination had come to an end. When our Aeroflot jet touched down on the frozen Siberian soil, I immediately felt that we were in totally unfamiliar territory. My first impressions were of contrasts and extremes. There were rows and rows of nearly-identical, multi-story, concrete block, pre-fabricated apartments; stores that were nearly empty; ration cards; public places that were trashed and dirty contrasted with the fur-clad, extremely well-dressed citizens that frequented those areas. When invited into the homes of these people, we passed through dirty, dreary, poorly-lit common hallways and staircases to be warmly welcomed into immaculate, well-decorated apartments. We were served lavish, multi-course meals—home-cooked and mostly from the produce of their own gardens.

As the mighty Soviet Union crumbled before their eyes, all were in shock at the onset of extreme inflation. Wages and pensions were slow to catch up with the rising cost of goods. A common interaction would go like this: “This loaf of bread costs 50 rubles! I remember when it cost just a few kopeks. Can you believe it?” Perhaps more unsettling than anything was that the truth about the Soviet Union was coming out. Accurate images and reports from the outside world were coming in for the first time. State-enforced isolation, education and propaganda had taught that Soviet Russia was the most wonderful place and that everywhere else was moral decay, disorder, and poverty. How could one not feel betrayed when the very opposite was closer to the truth?

If we think that in our own country we are secure from this level of misinformation and universal falsehood because we have “free press” then we are sorely mistaken. The “world” in the sense of the system of fallen humanity outside of God is deceitful and false. We must not read the news with any expectation that we are getting a clear picture of current events or of what is really going on in the world.



Monastic life has the services of the Church at the center. We live in a constant flow of liturgical riches: Hymns of the Resurrection, the Theotokos, the Feasts, and the Saints of the day are the steady diet that we feed on. As weak human beings, we may grow weary of so many services, but we can be sure that our ears are hearing no falsehood but the genuine truth about reality. Before you tune into worldly news with the temptations that come with it—carnal passions, despondency, and fear (to name a few)—tune into the spiritual reality that is already happening through God and His Holy Church.

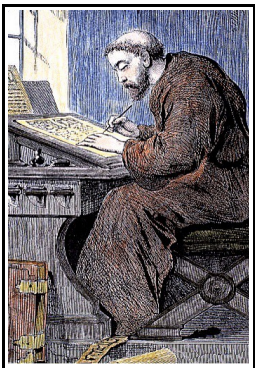
--Hieromonk Innocent

From the Desk of a Student

Last month was a particular milestone in my formation as a hieromonk. I finished the last class from the list of theological courses I was assigned to complete when I was ordained. I thank the professors and staff of St Tikhon’s Orthodox Theological Seminary for helping me as I took courses remotely over the last six years.

The usual path for men called to the priesthood is to attend seminary for a number of years to get a solid foundation and a theological degree. Ordination follows, and the new priest and his family are assigned to a parish. A monastery is different. When the need arises, a tonsured monk, such as myself, can remain at the monastery and get his education through distance learning. Like those who have gone to school while working a full-time job surely know, it requires a lot of energy and focus. But the feeling of accomplishment when all is done makes it worth it!

--Hieromonk Innocent



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Monastery Candleshop Production in Full Swing



Beeswax candles are our work, our industry, our task. Our life at the monastery is centered on prayer, silence, and the services of the Church, the celebration of the Divine Liturgy, and in striving to live a sacramental life where holiness is the goal in all things. Monks have always had handicrafts or some kind of work or industry in addition to the life of prayer and Church services. Some monasteries have a dairy farm, others a fleet of fishing boats; I heard of one monastery that had a sweater-knitting factory! Here at our monastery *we make candles*. We make them with pure beeswax for use in many of the parishes in our area and beyond and, also, in people's homes where they pray.

Seeing our candles take shape, and working with beeswax, is really an amazing and beautiful experience. The beeswax has a very lovely smell, it radiates a gentle warmth and it responds to our work in a pleasantly satisfying way. On warm days, our workshop plays host to dozens of bees who are attracted by the nice smell of the wax! When this happens our work is helped along by their loud buzzing.

It is also inspiring to know that the lights (ie candles) we produce for parishes and for folk's prayers at home are sacred or "venerable" according to St John Chrysostom. It is a joy for me to make candles that are used for worship and prayer because I know and love the beauty of a lampada and candle-lit chapel after sunset when we sing "O Gladsome Light"—one the earliest-known hymns of our Church. It is when we sing this hymn that we thank our generous God for his blessings of the day that is now past. Looking back on a busy year of candle production we are thankful for the bees, the wax and honey, and our faithful customers who keep our "in-box" full of orders.



--Novice Jason

Monastery Happenings



The cool months of Fall and Winter gave us opportunity to work on outdoor projects. Leaves were raked up and transported to the garden for the compost pile. The many piles of brush and forest debris were burned up, to clean up our forest of excess fuel. One day, we had so many bonfires going that we thought of the Three Holy Children in the Fiery Furnace! Little-by-little, our forest is starting to look more park-like—a pleasant place to stroll through and look for mushrooms. More importantly, however, we are in a far-better position to defend ourselves from wildfire.



Can You Help Us?

From time to time, we are asked if there is anything we need at the monastery. We appreciate the tremendous financial support that our many friends have offered us. If God moves you to help in other ways, we are in need of some working, used tools: a medium-sized chainsaw (preferably Stihl); a leaf blower; and a lawn mower. We are also looking for one or two volunteers who have web-design experience to help maintain our monastery website and our online store. Of course, you can work from home. Please contact us, if you are interested.

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