



# Monastery of St John of Shanghai and San Francisco

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

November 2021



## Now and ever...

The meaning of life is found within the cycle of services of the Church. As we are faithful to participate and join Her in the daily prayers, we are taught thereby to understand what is important in life. Our priorities are re-aligned to a heavenly orientation. How refreshing it is to get God's perspective on life!

In our worship, one phrase is often repeated: "Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit." This is followed up with: "Both now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen." Have often have we heard this refrain? Have we ever considered why we hear it so frequently? It is fruitful for us to consider and learn what these words actually mean and what the Church is teaching us.

God is beyond anything that our minds can comprehend. He is good, merciful, powerful, and everywhere present, yet he is beyond our conception of what goodness is and of what mercy means and of what we think of power and omnipresence. When God is revealed to us, in the small part of what we are able to grasp, He is seen as self-evidently glorious. That is, He is being *who He is* in all the majesty of His Being. Of course He is beyond all being, but we, in our feebleness, rightly respond by exclaiming, "Glory to Thee!" These words mean that we affirm God to be who He is, we affirm His holiness, majesty, and wonderfulness and we send up words of praise and the affirmation of our faith in Him and, by so doing, give glory to God.

What an incredible privilege to be able to sing the praise of God! Though we are unworthy, yet we function in our finest capacity by being instruments of worship to the Holy Trinity who is worthy of all glory!

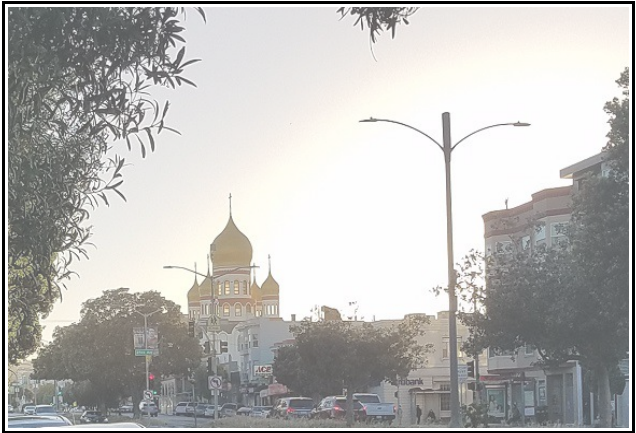
But what of the phrase, "both now and ever and unto ages of ages?" Having given glory to the Holy Trinity, we now enter the eternal reality of God. He is the only God. He is now and has always been God and will continue being God for all ages. There is no other God beside God. This is a bold statement, but one that is absolutely essential to our faith. Not only are we proclaiming our monotheism, we are also willingly committing ourselves to be with such a God forever. Another version of this phrase ends with "world without end". This adds a certain nuance. Having given glory to God, who is so worthy, we willingly submit ourselves to be a part of His Reign—and even to co-reign with Him—in a world that has no end.

"Now and ever" completes the glory couplet, but does something more. If we are destined to live our lives in eternity, the duration of our earthly existence, by comparison, is infinitesimally small. Yet our earthly life is enough time for us to repent and learn to do God's will and learn to love as our Father loves. Whether that portion of our life is pleasant or difficult, whether it is full of years or is cut short, actually doesn't matter. What matters is whether we learn to love God and our neighbor and whether we lovingly submit to the will of God in surrender during this earthly existence. If we do this, we are giving glory to God with our life, and we are prepared to enter that world that is coming and is without end.

--Hieromonk Innocent

## New Yard Equipment Purchased

We wish to thank our many supporters who responded to our last newsletter and our request for help. Your financial contributions made it possible for us to purchase much-needed for our ongoing yard and forest work. These 'right tools for the job' have been a big help for summer and autumn chores and projects.



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## Blessing All Creation

Human beings are made in the image of God and are put on earth to bless God's creation on behalf of the Creator. It is wonderful to work with our hands and pray and know that God's grace also touches the things that we work with.

We are often asked to bless candles and sometimes other items that we sell through our online bookstore. Some customers always ask for this, and we are happy to comply. One customer attests that the blessed candles are somehow different. She is able



to stay attentive for her prayers when one is lit in her icon corner.



We bless other things, as well. This April, we purchased more bees. They come as a big swarm with a queen in the middle. They are safely packaged in wire mesh and wooden cages. The Orthodox Church has a special blessing for bees. We read these prayers as we “installed” our bee packages in their new homes of individual hives. Our day with the bees was exciting and did involve a few bee stings! We welcome our new laborers and hope they will serve us well.

At the start of the Dormition fast, in August, we bless the new honeycomb. It is the feast of the Maccabean martyrs and also the feast of the Procession of the Holy Cross. It is considered the last day that bees make honey before the long winter ahead. Combs of honey are cut from the beehive and placed on a platter. They are brought to the chapel and blessed at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy.

## Monastery Happenings

With the easing of Covid restrictions this summer, we had our first small group of pilgrims as overnight guests for our patronal feast day on July 2<sup>nd</sup>, with His Eminence presiding at the Vigil and the Divine Liturgy the following day. There was a tangible sense of joy to finally see guests come and join us for worship and fellowship. Soon after our feast,

we were able to attend the tonsure to the small schema of Archpriest Nicholas Letten at Annunciation Orthodox Church. Hieromonk Andrew (as he is now called) is now our newest member. We were blessed to have him visit us for several days after the tonsure.



Wildfires once again blazed throughout California this summer. We continued our wildfire mitigation work on the monastery property. We found that a truck and a chain work well to quickly pull excess manzanita bushes! We continue to work on thinning trees and creating more protective space around our buildings. It will be a long process, but we work at it with help from faithful pilgrims who join in the effort.

The brothers from St Herman Monastery in Platina, CA were required to evacuate because of threat of wildfire in late August. We were privileged to provide them with a place of refuge at our monastery. We have many rooms available, so we found a place for all 11 brothers. This unexpected gathering of monastics was a huge blessing. The fathers helped with many tasks during their ten-day stay. We enjoyed a much fuller monastic choir for our services. The Divine Liturgy was especially glorious. Each night, we gathered to sing the Akathist to the Theotokos “The Unburnt Bush” to seek her protection against the threat of wildfire.



*Monk Salathiel and Hieromonk Paisiy of St Herman Monastery visit a nearby spring.*

The sojourn was not without hardships. Together, we endured a three-day power outage and all the problems that come with it. There were moments of uncertainty when fresh reports of the McFarland fire indicated it was spreading toward Platina. In the end, through the intercessions of the Theotokos, the monastery was spared any damage and when the authorities opened the roads, the fathers returned to their place of repentance in peace.

