



Holy Assumption Monastery Newsletter – April 2016

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Dear Friends of Holy Assumption Monastery,

One of the striking aspects of Great Lent is the Soul Saturday Matins canon, in which we pray for all the departed according to the manner of their deaths. We love the opportunity to pray for all the departed from all times and places, but frankly, the catalog of often violent ways to die can be rather unnerving. I, for one, never fully appreciated this aspect of this canon until the recent ISIS atrocities. Then, these verses became comforting reminders that NOBODY is forgotten in their last minutes by Christ or by His Church.

Our culture does its best to ignore or sanitize death. Christ and His Church do neither. The road to eternal life leads straight through the Valley of the Shadow of Death. Christ died not so that we would not have to take that road, but that we might traverse it aright - that we might die to ourselves and be resurrected with Him. No matter what difficulties or even horrors we experience in life or in death, Christ walks beside us. In Lent, we are given the privilege of walking beside Him towards HIS death and Resurrection. God grant us all the grace to finish the path!

with love in Christ,

*Mother Melania
and the community
of Holy Assumption Monastery*

ZOO UPDATE – Our Hare-brained Cat

Lately, Philly has given up on teaching Tin Tin Tin new tricks and is currently trying to make friends with the bunnies (at least we HOPE that's what he's trying to do). Ricochet, the bolder of the two bunnies, has been returning the favor. Perhaps, having roughly the same markings, he regards Philly as a long-lost cousin!

Okay, Ricochet. I've honored you with my presence long enough.



A TREE-MENDOUS HELP

Many thanks to Fr. John Christiansen, Fr. Ian MacKinnon, and the other members of *Stylite Tree Trimmers*, who spent most of the first Saturday of Lent ensuring that St. Nicholas House was not clobbered by a huge dead oak branch overhanging the house. Also, thanks to the members of the crew who planted our new little apple tree. May it grow strong and healthy (but nowhere as big as our old oak!!!)



What do you mean we ran out of ladder?

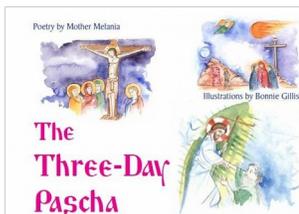


No, I CAN'T move the hole a little to the right!!



NEW BOOKS!!!

Our first self-published book is almost finished! *The Three-Day Pascha* combines all three books of the out-of-print Conciliar Press series of the same name. Many thanks to Bonnie Gillis (our wonderful illustrator) and Subdeacon Mark Harrison (who did a marvelous job of formatting). We will place a notice on our webpage and send out an email when we have more information. So, stay tuned.



Available NOW is *Re-introducing Christianity: An eastern apologia for a western audience*. Edited by Amir Azarvan, the book contains chapters from a diverse group of Orthodox theologians, clergy, monastics, etc. Mother Melania and Sister Margarete both contributed chapters. For more information, see <http://wipfandstock.com/re-introducing-christianity.html>.

SPRING RETREAT 2016

On Saturday March 5, Fr. Irenei Steenberg spoke to us on “Bearing Witness: Martyrdom in everyday life in the 21st century.” He started by reminding us that the Christian life is a mystery at its core. We can talk about it, but can't fully understand it. As a LIFE first and foremost, it is something that must be lived, not just studied.

Every Christian life must be a martyrdom in the original sense of the word – a bearing of witness. THE martyrs are those who witnessed to Christ in the most powerful way – by taking the death that we must all share and made of it a loving sacrifice to God. They were able to offer up their moments of death to God because they offered up their whole lives to Him. Whether we are ever called on to die for Christ, every true Christian must be His martyr/witness. This involves being BOTH 1) contemporary (i.e., being of the same time and place as those with whom we live) and 2) totally unctemporary since we are citizens of the Kingdom of God, which is always radically different from the fallen world. The anonymous epistle to Diognetus (an early Christian writing) expresses this beautifully:



Fr Irenei

For the Christians are distinguished from other men neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe ... following the customs of the natives in respect to clothing, food, and the rest of their ordinary conduct, they display to us their wonderful and confessedly striking method of life ... As citizens, they share in all things with others, and yet endure all things as if foreigners ... They obey the prescribed laws, and at the same time surpass the laws by their lives. They love all men, and are persecuted by all ... yet those who hate them are unable to assign any reason for their hatred (www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.iii.ii.v.html).

Tragically, the vast majority of us are no longer martyrs/witnesses of Christ. Rather, in attempting to “fit in” to our culture, we have become indistinguishable from it. You only have to look at Orthodox discussion sites on the web to see the arrogance, politicizing, scandal-mongering, etc. that you see anywhere else in this fallen, broken world.

We cannot reclaim our culture for Christ by trying to get a bigger part in it, voting into office the 'right' politicians, etc. The most important thing we can do is to start living like Christians. Fr. Irenei suggested three ways to do this:

1. Be obedient – Christ called us to FOLLOW Him, NOT to THINK about Him! Further, He expects us to obey Him and His Body the Church whether we understand or not.
2. Take seriously Christ's call to Perfection – Christ didn't call us to be a little better than we are now. He called us to be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect. Yes, we will fall over and over again as we strive towards this high calling, but we must keep going. God's forgiveness does not “lower the bar” but instead strips us of the chains that weigh us down so that we may indeed be as our heavenly Father is.
3. Be healed – We would be appalled at a medical doctor who said, “You have cancer, but don't worry about it.” Yet that's what we often EXPECT of our spiritual doctors. So, we must unflinchingly look at the desperately sick state of our souls, for that is the first step in receiving healing.

If we seriously attempt to do these three things, the world will notice that we are very different.

In the second session, Fr. Irenei examined true and false freedom. Our cultural idea of freedom is more or less an unrestrained ability to choose between extensive or unlimited choices. But this external freedom in fact produces deep interior oppression and slavery. We are overwhelmed by this oppressing power of self-determination. If I am the sole arbiter of my fate, how weighty all my decisions become. I therefore become so crippled by fear that my heart becomes incapable of its fundamental action – LOVE. So, ironically, TRUE freedom is perfect enslavement of the will to the will of God so that the man that had been a slave of God becomes His friend.

We are very uncomfortable with the term “slave” because of the horrors of slavery, particularly in our own country. Nevertheless, this is a deeply Christian term and notion, which we can't shy away from just because of the abuses. The fact is that all “freedoms” (except the freedom of those who voluntarily enslave themselves to God) are illusions and really just soul-destroying slaveries. We can only break away from soul-destroying slavery into true freedom if we acknowledge certain truths about ourselves:

1. Our wills are broken away from and in conflict with God.
2. The reform of our wills is linked to obedience.



Yes, Dad, I understood it all!

3. The new will wills as God wills. In Orthodox circles, we constantly hear talk about “deification,” “mystical union with God,” etc., and lose sight of this stark and wonderful truth – if we submit our will to God, His will shall be born inside us and manifest in and through us.
4. As we freely become God's slaves, He makes us His friends, and we develop a relationship with Him that bears freedom, God-likeness, and ever deeper union with Him.

So, how DO we enslave our wills to God? Again, this is not some esoteric thing. God enacts His will in us by dwelling in us. But that can only happen if He is “comfortable” living in us. So, we enslave our wills to God by obediently doing the things that make Him “comfortable” in our hearts. Fr. Irenei listed four instructions from St. Ignatius Brianchininov:

1. Combat impurity. In the end, only God can clean me up. But I can pick up the broom, and when He sees that good intent in me, that attracts Him.
2. Avoid satisfaction in food and other things – exhibit a moderate and constant abstinence in food and drink, sleep, discussions, etc. If I want to have a free will, I have to start living in a way in which my will is no longer dictating everything.
3. Keep Christ's commandments. These are not arbitrary demands, but His self-revelations to us. By keeping them, we become like Him, get to know Him, and make our hearts comfortable dwellings for Him.
4. Read the Gospels as often as possible and don't overlook the smallest thing in them.

Following God is simple (but not easy). It is not a matter of figuring Him and ourselves out. Rather, we simply need to create a heart in which He can dwell. Then He will manifest His will in us and we will be true slaves, which sets us free to be friends and thus truly free. This is the only freedom, and the only way that the world will ever see it is if we live it.

The last session concerned the Theotokos. The irony behind all the complaints that the Orthodox Church must not respect women (because they can't become priests) is that the exemplar for ALL Christians is a woman - the Theotokos. She is our “canon.” This word has come to be interpreted as a law, but the original meaning was a straight stick by which the straightness of other sticks is determined. So, she is our “yardstick.” If we look like her, we're probably doing okay!

Fr. Irenei stressed three of her characteristics for us to emulate in our own ways:

1. Mother and Birthgiver of God. She did not choose this role, but accepted it joyfully. By nurturing the Holy Child, she brings forth life for the first time in this fallen world, which since the time of the first Eve has brought forth children doomed to die. In nurturing the holy Child, her own holiness is brought forth. She submits to God in obedience and rears Him in grace, changing all creation and providing all of us, but particularly women, with this ability to bear Christ.
2. Exemplar of Christian Life for us all. She is our great example of humility, inner solitude, and unflinching dedication to God. Her humility is revealed in her willingness to obey God even when led into scary situations and even when she didn't understand. This humility made her a wonderful dwelling for the Holy Spirit and then of her Son and our Lord Jesus Christ. Her life of profound inner solitude left her unshaken by the violent winds that roared outside. Thus, she stood at the Cross of her Son when all the apostles but John had fled. Her humility and inner solitude were key in producing her unflinching dedication to her Son, no matter how mystifying and painful the situation.
3. Example of Mission. Her mission work is uniquely motherly. After the death and Resurrection of her Son, she became mother to John and all the apostles. Her role as mother also manifested itself by her being a voice of love and support for the whole church. She was NOT a dogmatic teacher, but that does NOT make her role secondary. She intercedes for and sanctifies us. It is significant that the Bishop wears an icon of her around his neck. The bishop cares for us, and she cares for him.

She is eminently contemporary because she is still with us, but totally uncontemporary because she does not buy into any of the spiritual sicknesses of any time or place. Rather, she points constantly to her son, and it is for that reason that she is our exemplar. She is the true martyr who witnessed and continues to witness to her Son with her entire life that we may, like her, may become comfortable dwellings for Him.



Learning is hungry work

April 2016 Schedule for Holy Assumption Monastery & St. Simeon Church
 Monastery contact info – (707) 942-6244; email – sisters.holyassumptionmonastery@gmail.com;
 website – <http://www.holyassumptionmonastery.com>

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
<p>SAVE THE DATE- June 25 Retreat On Stillness and the Prayer of the Heart Speaker – Hieromonk Innocent <i>Superior of St John of Shanghai and San Francisco Monastery, Manton, CA</i></p>					1 1 pm Pre-Sanctified Liturgy 6 pm Matins (both at Monastery)	2 8:40am Hours/ Divine Liturgy <u>Soul Saturday</u> 5pm Vigil (both at Monastery)
3 9:40am Hours/ Divine Liturgy (at Monastery) <u>Veneration of the Cross</u>	4	5	6 5pm Vigil for OC Annunciation (at St Simeon Parish)	7 10 am Vesperal Liturgy (at St Simeon Parish) <u>OC Annunciation</u>	8 1 pm Pre-Sanctified Liturgy (at St Simeon Parish)	9 5 pm Vigil (at St Simeon Parish)
10 9:40am Hours/ Divine Liturgy (at St Simeon Parish) <u>St. John of the Ladder</u>	11	12	13 5pm Pre-Sanctified Liturgy (at Monastery)	14	15 1 pm Pre-Sanctified Liturgy (at St Simeon Parish) 6 pm Matins (at Monastery)	16 8:40am Hours/ Divine Liturgy (at Monastery) <u>Saturday of the Akakthist</u> 5 pm Vigil (at St Simeon Parish)
17 9:40am Hours/ Divine Liturgy (at St Simeon Parish) <u>St. Mary of Egypt</u>	18	19	20 5pm Pre-Sanctified Liturgy (at Monastery)	21	22 1 pm Pre-Sanctified Liturgy (at St Simeon Parish) 6 pm Matins (at Monastery)	23 8:40am Hours/ Divine Liturgy <u>Lazarus Saturday</u> 5pm Vigil (both at Monastery)
24 9:40am Hours/ Divine Liturgy (at Monastery) <u>PALM SUNDAY</u> 6 pm Bridegroom Matins (at Monastery)	25 9 am Pre-Sanctified Liturgy 6 pm Bridegroom Matins (both at Monastery) <u>Great and Holy Monday</u>	26 9 am Pre-Sanctified Liturgy 6 pm Bridegroom Matins (both at Monastery) <u>Great and Holy Tuesday</u>	27 9 am Bridegroom Vespers 6 pm Matins of Holy Thursday (both at Monastery) <u>Great and Holy Wednesday</u>	28 9 am Vesperal Liturgy 6pm Matins w/ 12 Passion Gospels (both at Monastery) <u>Great and Holy Thursday</u>	29 7am Royal Hours (at Monastery) 1 pm Vespers (at St Simeon Parish) 6 pm Lamentations Matins (at Monastery) <u>Great and Holy Friday</u>	30 11:30pm Midnight Office (at St Simeon Parish) <u>Great and Holy Saturday</u>

NOTE: Paschal Matins/Divine Liturgy will be 12:00am MAY 1 at St. Simeon Parish
Agape Vespers will be at 12:00 pm MAY 1 at Macedonian Park