



# Holy Assumption Monastery Newsletter - August 2011

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Dear Friends of Holy Assumption Monastery,

There is great excitement here at the monastery in anticipation of our altar feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos on August 15. We are sprucing up the grounds, figuring out what we will cook, etc.

One of the beauties of altar feasts is that, in paying special attention to our patron saints, we remember that they are with us all year as our protectors and intercessors before God. When we lived at St. Barbara Monastery and were going through a rather challenging time, Mother Victoria reminded us that St. Barbara had always been a good abbess to us.

Now, we are here, and while St. Barbara will always be dear to us, the Theotokos herself is our abbess. Further, of the many feasts associated with the Theotokos, our altar feast is that of her falling asleep. For monastics, the remembrance of death is a much-repeated theme. So, it is a blessing to walk into our chapel and constantly be able to venerate the icon of the Dormition of this greatest of saints - who died as she had lived, humbly loving and trusting her God and Son.

As we venerate the icon of the Dormition, we often think of a talk that Bishop BASIL (Essey) gave at the Triumph of Orthodoxy Vespers one year. He said that every time Lent comes around, he thanks God that He has granted him one more Lent in which to repent and to prepare for that day when he would meet Christ the Bridegroom. Speaking of why we fast, he said that every bride fasts before her wedding - to make sure she'll fit into her dress! We, too, fast in order to meet our Bridegroom without the excesses of self and pride that will not allow us to wear our wedding robes.

So, as we prepare to enter the Dormition Fast, let us also fast from everything that will keep us from appearing chaste and beautiful before our Bridegroom. And let us ask the help of the Most Holy Theotokos, who has gone on before and remains forever our intercessor and protector.

with love in Christ,

*Mother Melania  
and the community  
of Holy Assumption Monastery*

## August Schedule

On Sundays Aug 7 and 28 (**Old-style Dormition**), Hours/Divine Liturgy will be at **St. Simeon Church** at 9:40 AM/10:00 AM.

On Sundays Aug 14 and 21, Hours/Divine Liturgy will be at the **Monastery** at 9:10 AM/9:30 AM

Saturday evening vigils will be at 5:00 PM at **St. Simeon** on Aug 6 and 27 and at the **Monastery** on Aug 13 and 20.

Other services at the **Monastery** include

Aug 5/6 (**Transfiguration**): Aug 5 - 5:00 PM Vigil; Aug 6 - 8:40 AM Hours/Divine Liturgy

Aug 14/15 (**DORMITION**): Aug 14 - 5:00 PM Vigil (Bishop BENJAMIN presiding), followed by light meal; Aug 15 - 8:30 AM Hours/9:00 AM Greeting the Bishop/Divine Liturgy, followed by buffet luncheon

Aug 16/17: Aug 16 - 5:00 PM Vigil (**Lamentations for Theotokos**); Aug 17 - 8:40 AM Hours/Divine Liturgy

Aug 22/23 (**Leavetaking of Dormition**): Aug 22 - 5:00 PM Vigil; Aug 23 - 8:40 AM Hours/Divine Liturgy

Other services at **St. Simeon** include

Aug 19 (**Transfiguration, Old Style**) - 9:40 AM Hours/Divine Liturgy

For updates and the rest of our schedule, please call the monastery at 707-942-6244 or go to <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Calistoga-CA/Holy-Assumption-Monastery/106974442681502> or our website <http://www.holyassumptionmonastery.com/>

## The July Friends Gathering

On Sunday July 3, Vincent Rossi gave the first of a 3-part talk on contemplative prayer. He spoke of a hidden ladder within the ladder of divine ascent – the ladder of prayer. This ladder can be spoken of as having six steps - oral prayer (just words), prayer of the mind in the head (when we are really trying to pray, but not with much success and still trying to control everything), prayer of the mind in the heart by our efforts (when we are sometimes in the heart, but still mostly by our own effort), prayer of the mind in the heart as a gift from God; unceasing prayer (when the mind stays in the heart continuously), and contemplation (which is a state above prayer). To the Fathers, only the last stage or two can properly be called prayer. All the steps before that are really just preparation for prayer, but still very important. If we don't do them the best we can, we will never progress to the other stages.



*Mother Anna gives Vincent Rossi some pointers for posing for the camera.*

Last he spoke of attentiveness – the state of mind necessary for progress in prayer. Attentiveness allows us to know what is going on in our hearts and what thoughts are trying to enter. A few helpers in attentiveness are 1) remember WHO we're praying to; 2) pay attention to the words; 3) realize that, as beginners, our attention will constantly wander; so, we just need patiently to keep bringing it back. Or to put it another way, the spiritual life is a bunch of zigzags. The zigs are going to happen - the important thing is to make sure you zag! We are looking forward to Vincent's further comments on the zigs and zags of prayer on Sept 4 and Nov 6. Please join us!!



### Harvest Time!



*We knew you wanted us to de-stem the rosemary. But you said nothing about parsley, sage, and thyme!!*

One of Fr. Sergious' lasting legacies here is the many herbs, fruit trees, etc. that he planted and tended. We will have a variety of things to harvest in the coming months. One thing that is never in short supply is the rosemary. So, with the help of several good friends, it was cut back, hung up to dry, removed from its stems, and made into little sachets. In the process, we discovered that rosemary is associated with the Theotokos. One legend has it that while the Holy Family were on their flight to Egypt, the Theotokos draped her blue cloak across the rosemary bush. From that time, its flowers became fragrant and blue.

### A Visit from the Parish Council of Holy Trinity Church, Brotherhood Way, San Francisco

We were very pleased to welcome Fr. Aris Metrakos and several members of the parish council of Holy Trinity Church to the Monastery on Saturday, July 23. After the obligatory introduction to the koi, they listened to a talk by Mother Melania entitled *Be Who You Are in the Body of Christ*. Due to a tight schedule, they did not get a full introduction to the rest of the 'zoo,' but they did help give the koi their afternoon meal. We already consider Fr. Aris an old friend and were very pleased to meet so many members of the parish council. We hope to see them soon and often.



*Say cheese! No, make that "Feta!"*

### REMINDER: Future Friends' Meetings

At our **September 4 and November 6** Meetings, Vincent Rossi (St. Seraphim Church, Santa Rosa) will give the second and third parts of his three-part series of talks on contemplative prayer. Vincent is a theologian, educator, and independent scholar, who wrote his doctoral thesis on St. Maximos the Confessor at Oxford University under the supervision of (then) Bishop Kallistos Ware.

On **October 2** Father Deacon Gregory Roeber (Professor of Early Modern History and Religious Studies, Penn State University) will speak to us on "Prayer, Fasting, and . . . : Reflections on Charity and Righteousness in the Orthodox Tradition."

The Friends' Meeting schedule is presentation at 4 PM, vespers at 5 PM, and potluck at 6 PM.