



# Holy Assumption Monastery Newsletter – December 2011

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Dear Friends of Holy Assumption Monastery,

Advent brings such a dichotomy to us American Orthodox as we strive to keep the fast in the midst of the excesses of the commercial season. Faced with this situation, we can easily fall into one of two traps. One is to give in to all the temptations to eat and to 'shop till we drop.' The other is to be self-satisfied with our self-restraint.

The cure for both is Christ – the One Who chose to be laid in a manger to be heavenly Food for us. If we tasted even the least drop of the sweetness of Christ, we would not be so enamored of what the world has to offer. And if we had the smallest glimpse of the humility of the Heavenly King Who lay in the manger, self-satisfaction would be impossible.

So, as we approach Christmas and the great mystery of the Incarnate God, we do well to remember the words that an abbot used to tell his novices – eat what you wish, but be sure to eat Christ. If we strive to do this, fasting and feasting will come into balance in our lives. We will fast from anything (whether it be food, television, music ...) that keeps us from being filled with Christ, and our feasting will be full of the One Who came to invite us to His eternal heavenly banquet.

with love in Christ,

*Mother Melania*

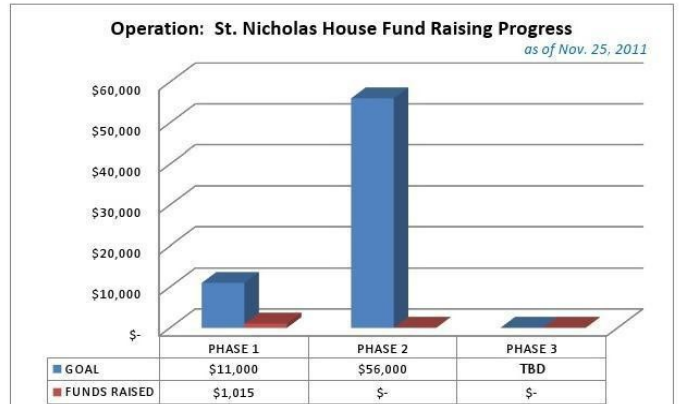
*and the community*

*of Holy Assumption Monastery*

## ST. NICHOLAS HOUSE – Update

Operation St. Nicholas House is progressing slowly but surely. The demolishing of the old aviary has been completed. The new aviary has been built and is awaiting finishing touches before the birds move back in. Oscar has more than once expressed his desire that we get on with it and get him into his new home pronto! So, next month we hope to have pictures for you of content birds in their new abode.

Our heartfelt thanks to those who responded with financial gifts and prayers for renovating St. Nicholas House. The chart to the right shows the amount of money that has come in and the total amount needed. Thank you again for your help and prayers.



Phase 1 – Aviary & Demolition; Phase 2 – Footprint extension, new roof & waterproofing; Phase 3 – Interior Remodel (no estimate yet)



## HAVE BOOKSTORE, WILL TRAVEL – PART 2

On the weekend of November 12 & 13, the sisters were blessed to take our bookstore to Ss. Peter and Paul Church in Santa Rosa. In addition to bringing the bookstore, the sisters also did storytelling, and the famous mynah hat made a reappearance!! Many thanks to Fr. Alexander and his community for their warm welcome.



At left – Sr. Mary with the book display.



At right – it's so much easier to tell a story when you get into character!!

## A MONASTERY IS A BUSY PLACE

There doesn't seem to be enough room in this month's newsletter to say much about the various things that are going on. So, we thought the best approach was just to show some pictures. Enjoy!



*On November 3, the Ministry Colloquium Class from Pacific Union College in Angwin visited us. We enjoyed the discussion, and they enjoyed the koi!*



*The second-grade class from St. John School in San Francisco visited us on November 10. As you can see, the koi are a hit with big kids and little kids alike. And Ashley the cat kindly put in an appearance, too!*



*Our intrepid friends from St. Seraphim Church finished working on the low wall and path in the lower garden.*



### NOVEMBER FRIENDS

On Sunday November 6, Vincent Rossi gave the third part of his three-part series on Contemplative Prayer. He started by recapping where we've been so far. In the first talk, he discussed how prayer is a ladder on which we move simultaneously upwards to God and down into the depths of our own beings. The second talk was about how we get there - moving from passions (things that have come to control us) to dispassion (in which we are no longer enslaved to our desires or controlled by our emotions). The goal of true prayer is to reach this state of dispassion and enter into contemplation, but we don't get there easily because our attention is scattered. Before the fall, according to the Fathers, all our senses were united in a single sense that was focused on God. After the fall, this focus divided and moved into the five senses. In the prayer of the heart, we refocus all our senses in that single sense - directed towards God - that still exists deep within our hearts, but which needs to be enlivened. This is the art and the heart of prayer - to stand before God with our minds in our hearts.

But most of us don't reach this state because deep down we really DON'T want to see God - our passions keep getting in the way. As long as that is the inner state of our hearts, all our external prayer will never amount to anything. This is why it is so dangerous to try to reach spiritual heights when we are still immersed in our passions. Prayer is communion with God. If we don't truly want to see God, we are opening ourselves up for great delusion.



*Vincent Rossi speaks to a roomful of attentive listeners*

On the other hand, if we are willing to humble ourselves and confront why we don't want to see God, it will be liberating. Then, when we try to pray and get distracted (by the latest movie we saw, an argument with somebody ...), we can start dealing with whatever has gotten between us and God. As we go through our days, we will learn to make decisions based on how what we do will affect our prayer. Then when we pray, we will be able to confront the results of our bad decisions with honesty and faith. This process is just the first part in a progression that leads from practice of the virtues to dispassion, then natural contemplation (this is not "Oh, isn't this a lovely view" - which is largely about me and my feelings; rather, it is seeing traces of God in all created things, which requires great purity of heart), then a higher contemplation of the noetic or angelic realm, and finally contemplation of the Holy Trinity.

It's important to know all these levels exist, but it's equally important to know what to do on the level we're on. So, when asked what "homework" we should take away, Vincent said that we should pray, keep praying, observe ourselves in prayer, pray some more, and have faith in Christ that He can change us!

As there was much that he did not have time to say and many questions that there was no time to answer, Vincent has agreed to come back in January for at least one more talk. So, stay tuned!

**December 2011 Schedule for Holy Assumption Monastery (Blue) & St. Simeon Parish (Red)**

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Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1	2	3 5:00pm Vigil (St Simeon Parish)
4 9:40am Hours/Divine Liturgy (St Simeon Parish)  Entry of the Theotokos into the Temple (Old Style)	5	6 St Nicholas  No Liturgy. Service is moved to St Nicholas Parish, San Anselmo, CA	7	8	9	10 5:00pm Readers' Vigil (Monastery)
11 9:40am Hours/Divine Liturgy (Monastery)	12	13	14	15	16	17 5:00pm Vigil (St Simeon Parish)
18 9:40am Hours/Divine Liturgy (St Simeon Parish)	19 9:40am Hours/Divine Liturgy (St Simeon Parish)  Slavonic Liturgy  St Nicholas (Old Style)  5:00pm Vigil (Monastery)	20 8:40am Hours/Divine Liturgy (Monastery)  St. Ignatius	21	22	23 7:00am Matins, 1 <sup>st</sup> & 3 <sup>rd</sup> Royal Hours  12:00pm 6 <sup>th</sup> & 9 <sup>th</sup> Royal Hours, typica  5:00pm Vigil (Monastery)	24 9:00am Christmas Eve Divine Liturgy  1:00pm Vespers  9:30pm Vigil (Monastery)  5pm Vespers (St Simeon Parish)
25 12:00am Christmas Liturgy (Monastery)  9:40am Hours/Divine Liturgy (Slavonic) (St Simeon Parish)  St Herman of Alaska (Old Style)	26	27	28	29	30 5:00pm Vigil (Monastery)	31 8:40am Hours/Divine Liturgy (Monastery)  St. Melania the Younger



Announcing  
**THE DECEMBER 2011 MEETING**  
of the  
**FRIENDS OF HOLY ASSUMPTION MONASTERY**

*Sunday December 4, 2011*

*Pilgrimage to Constantinople:  
Experiences & Reflections*

Presented by

*Fr. Lawrence & Mat. Ann Margitich*

*St. Seraphim Church, Santa Rosa*



4:00 PM – Presentation

5:00 PM – Vespers

6:00 PM – Potluck

**UPCOMING MEETINGS**

**January 8** – Vincent Rossi will continue his series on contemplative prayer.

**February 12** – Archimandrite Irenei (Stenberg) will speak on an as yet undetermined topic

**FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CALL (707) 942-6244  
or EMAIL [sisters.holyassumptionmonastery@gmail.com](mailto:sisters.holyassumptionmonastery@gmail.com)**

**STARTING IN JANUARY, FRIENDS MEETINGS WILL MOVE  
TO THE 2<sup>nd</sup> SUNDAY OF THE MONTH**