



Holy Assumption Monastery Newsletter – December 2014

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Dear Friends of Holy Assumption Monastery,

In an old Calvin and Hobbes comic, Calvin is holding a watering can over a flower and saying, with a maniacal glint in his eye, “You are totally under my power. If I don't water you, you will die ...” The last frame shows a single cloud raining down water just on that flower and a frustrated Calvin looking reproachfully up to the heavens.

To the “Calvins” of this world, this comic is a reminder that our unkind deeds do not go unnoticed by God, and that He has ultimate control – not we (thanks be to God!). To the “flowers,” it is also a reminder that God is the one with ultimate control, not our enemies or external situations. However, when we are the “flower” in this story, we are often tempted to wonder why God didn't bring the rain cloud sooner, or why sometimes He does not bring it at all. Sometimes, the flower dies.

Of course, it is not mere flowers that we are concerned with. Every day, hundreds and thousands of people are dying, most of them innocent. Why does God allow this? Why the Ebola outbreaks? Why the depredations of ISIS? Why the violence in our inner cities and schools? To these “Why's?” there are no easy answers.

But Christmastide reminds us that, even though we seldom get an answer to “Why does God allow this?” we know that He entered this world to endure our sorrows with us. The icon of the Nativity of Christ shows Him wrapped in a winding sheet, not swaddling clothes. He is the Incarnate God Who came to die – Who turned the Cross into the weapon of peace.

As we continue the Nativity Fast, may we hold fast to the Cross of the One Who was born to die for us. Thus, may we weep with those who weep, do our utmost for their good, and together experience the truth of Immanuel, God with us. Then, whether the earthly rains come or not, we shall be filled to overflowing with His spirit.

with love in Christ,

*Mother Melania
and the community
of Holy Assumption Monastery*

ZOO UPDATE – Bunny Business

Our bunnies, Pulgita and Fiver, get a lot of visitors, especially among the children who come to visit. Recently, though, the bunnies got a visitor of their own kind – Wiggles the bunny, who accompanied the Reighard family on a Thanksgiving day visit to the monastery. The bunnies all enjoyed themselves, and so did the humans!



There's a bunny in this picture – honest!!



Bunnies put a smile on everyone's face!

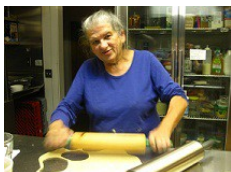


Wiggles & chief caretaker, Maddie



HERE & THERE

Rosalie Cooke teaching us to make piroshki –



It's all in the wrist action!

Visit by the Protection of the Theotokos Church Group, Palo Alto



Everyone worked hard – even the kids!!



One gutter cleaned – twenty to go!



They even prepared our lunch!

Thanksgiving Day



We thank Thee, O Christ our God ...



For Thy many bounties ...

FALL RETREAT 2014

On Saturday, November 15, Fr. Stephan Meholick gave a retreat entitled “*The Divine Liturgy: Communing both vertically and horizontally. When we partake of the Holy Eucharist worthily and in faith, we are united to Christ and through Him to one another.*” The talk was built around the fact that sometime in the 10th or 11th century, the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom replaced the Liturgy of St. Basil the Great as the major Sunday Liturgy in the Byzantine Commonwealth. Nobody really knows why this happened, but there are several theories. The most common explanation has been that, over time, preference goes to shorter services to prevent people from being overwhelmed with long services. There are problems with this theory, though. The Sunday Liturgy was a welcome distraction from the daily realities of the time. So, if anything, the slightly longer length of St. Basil's Liturgy might have been an attraction, not a deterrent. Also, the theory does not address the internal differences between the two Liturgies. So, at least two other possibilities have been proposed. One theory is that the change was a response to the iconoclast controversy. The iconoclasts held that Holy Communion was the only true and allowable image or icon of Christ, whereas the iconophiles insisted that Holy Communion is not an image but truly Christ's Body and Blood. So, this theory holds that since St. John Chrysostom's Liturgy makes this explicit (whereas St. Basil's Liturgy only implies it), Chrysostom's Liturgy became the prominent one.

The theory that Fr. Stephan addressed most, however, was that this change was a response to an individual piety that had begun to permeate ecclesial life due to a resurgence of monasticism and to the fact that lay people had stopped receiving Holy Communion frequently. In light of this change in piety, Holy Communion started being viewed less as the sacrament of sacraments and center of the Church's Life, and more so as an ascetical act with which to fight the sinful passions. The prayers in Chrysostom's Liturgy stress this ascetic component more than the prayers in St. Basil's Liturgy (which lay greater stress on the communal component). So, the switch to Chrysostom's Liturgy may have been caused by this greater emphasis on individual piety.

In the end, nobody really knows why this change happened, but we can take some important lessons from the different emphases of the two Liturgies. The individual focus emphasizes the vertical relationship – the need for the individual believer's relationship with God to be as strong and pure as possible. The communal focus emphasizes the horizontal relationships with other believers and indeed the whole creation. Of course, each component is implied in the other. One cannot be in right relationship with God and not love His creation and creatures. Nor can one truly love created things and beings outside of loving their Creator.



*Fr. Stephan Meholick –
story teller extraordinaire!*

Fr. Stephan also addressed the ramifications of the tendency towards infrequent reception of Holy Communion. It's not clear why this started happening, but probably had to do with a concern that people were approaching the Cup unworthily. So, people were encouraged to commune less frequently, but to do extensive preparation through prayer and fasting each time that they did commune. The problem with this is that it sends a subtle incorrect message – I may be unworthy to commune regularly, but if I prepare well, I'm worthy to commune four times a year or once a year. Of course, all that preparation should have the opposite effect – we should become profoundly aware that we can never deserve the Body and Blood of Christ. So, the only way to be “worthy” of receiving Christ is to realize we aren't and never will be!

In our day, most Orthodox usually receive Holy Communion frequently, but unfortunately, this has also brought with it a tendency to be casual about receiving Holy Communion. The proper attitude should be something like this: “Holy Communion should be frequent, but never casual. There are times where we should not approach the Cup, but we should never see that as the norm.”



Hanging on every word!

To sum up, Father said that communion is of the essence of everything. This is true of God Himself – the Trinity of Persons Who live in eternal communion of love. As creatures made according to the image of God, we are called to be in communion with the Creator, His Creatures, and all His Creation. Holy Communion is the visible, tangible expression of that communion with creation (through the Bread and Wine), God's creatures (our fellow members of the Church), and our Creator.

December 2014 Schedule for **Holy Assumption Monastery & St. Simeon Church**

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Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1	2	3 5:00pm Vigil (at St Simeon Parish)	4 9:40am Hours/ Divine Liturgy (at St Simeon Parish) Entry of the Theotokos into the Temple (Old Calendar)	5 5:00pm Vigil (at Monastery)	6 9:40am Hours/ Divine Liturgy <u>St. Nicholas</u> 5:00pm Vigil (both at Monastery)
7 9:40am Hours/ Divine Liturgy (at Monastery)	8 5:00pm Vigil (at Monastery)	9 5:40am Hours/ Divine Liturgy (at Monastery) <u>Conception of the All-Holy Theotokos by St. Anna</u>	10	11	12	13 5:00pm Reader's Vigil (at Monastery)
14 9:40am Hours/ Divine Liturgy (at St Simeon Parish) (Visiting Clergy) 4:00pm Vespers, followed by FRIENDS POTLUCK (at Monastery)	15	16	17	18	19	20 5:00pm Vigil (at Monastery)
21 9:40am Hours/ Divine Liturgy (at Monastery)	22	23	24 1:00pm Vesperal Liturgy 5:00pm Christmas Eve meal 8:00pm Vigil (all at Holy Assumption Monastery) (Visiting Clergy)	25 8:40am Hours/Divine Liturgy (at Holy Assumption Monastery) Nativity of our Lord (Visiting Clergy)	26	27 5:00pm Vigil (at St Simeon Parish)
28 9:40am Hours/ Divine Liturgy (at St Simeon Parish)	29 5:00pm Vigil (at Monastery)	30 5:40am Hours/Divine Liturgy (at Monastery) <u>Ss. Melania and Anysia</u>	31 5:00pm Vigil (at Monastery)	1 9:40am Hours/Divine Liturgy (at Monastery) <u>St. Basil & the Circumcision of the Lord</u>		