



# Holy Assumption Monastery Newsletter – July 2015

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Dear Friends of Holy Assumption Monastery,

We often have the privilege of showing visitors around the monastery and taking them into our church building. Recently, when one of the sisters took a young woman into the church, the woman gasped, started weeping, and said “I have never seen anything so beautiful!” This brought to mind the famous story of the ambassadors of St. Vladimir, who reported of their visit to Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, “We no longer knew whether we were in heaven or on earth ... and we know not how to tell of it.”

Of course, our little church cannot compare with Hagia Sophia except in the most important way – God dwells there. And while our church is indeed beautiful, the beauty that shook the young woman to her core was not the physical beauty but the presence of God.



Yet, as we are reminded at the beginning of every service, God “is everywhere present and fills all things.” Sadly, though, we seldom notice Him because we are caught up in the minutiae of our lives. Even in the monastery, it is perilously easy to allow our focus to turn away from God. In the world, only the most focused can remember God in all that they do.

If we wish constantly to remember the One Who is everywhere present and fills all things, let us start with thanking Him for everything around us and for the unfailing love that we hardly ever notice precisely because that Love is always there sustaining and nourishing us. Then, bit by bit, we will find our beautiful Lord everywhere we look and in everyone we meet.

with love in Christ,

*Mother Melania  
and the community  
of Holy Assumption Monastery*

## HERE & THERE

Women from two area churches came by to pick up a few tips about baking prospora



*It's all in the wrist!!*



*Now can we do another batch?*

Fr. John Christiansen and many friends did much needed tree work for us!



*SERIOUS chain saw work!!*



*NOT the kind of wading pool we had in mind!!*

A visit from the youth of Christ the Savior Church, San Francisco



*These aren't man-eating plants, are they?!*



*Can we put monastery clean-up on our resumes?*



*Yes, of course, lavender comes in strings!*

Benefiting from the bounty of our friend Rachelle's garden



*The fire hydrant in Rachelle's yard doing his Paddington Bear imitation*



*Kale harvest – One ton down, five to go!*

## *SUMMER 2015 Retreat*

On Saturday June 27, Mother Melania spoke on “Practical Lessons from the Lives of Ss. Peter and Paul. The talk started with the observation that St. Peter always and fervently desired to be with Christ, but that his sinfulness sometimes got in the way. This led to a discussion of the three powers of the soul (nous, appetitive power, and incensive power), which formed the framework for the talk. The nous is the eye of the soul, given to us so that we may directly commune with God. The appetitive or desiring power was given so that we may desire things that will draw us closer to God. The incensive or angering power was given so that we may repel anything that interferes with our relationship with God. In a properly functioning soul, the nous is like a charioteer driving the horses of the desiring and angering powers on a straight path towards God. Because of sin, though, the nous becomes clouded and its attention fragmented. Then, the horses gain control, and the chariot of the soul is led willy nilly by anger and desire.

Placing the Gospel accounts of St. Peter within this context, we see him directing his gaze and his course to Christ, but wavering due to fear, anger, etc. His healing involves an ever deepening recognition of his sinfulness and the acceptance and embrace of Christ's death and his own as acts of joyful love. St. Peter learns the depth of his sinfulness and weakness when he – the courageous and devoted disciple – denies Christ, and thus falls where he is most sure of himself. He comes to himself when he encounters the gaze of Christ and then does the only sane thing: he weeps. After His Resurrection, Christ heals St. Peter's three-fold denial by the three-fold “Do you love Me?” St. Peter accepts the pain of this healing and also the commission to love and tend Christ's sheep. Then, Christ reveals to St. Peter that he will die a martyr's death and thus, at long last, accomplish what he previously failed to do (to die for his Lord) and gain his great desire, eternal union with Christ.

The discussion of St. Paul revolved around his well-known statement, “Love never fails” (I Cor. 13:8a). In response to the unfailing love of God and His people (including Barnabas, whom tradition says was a fellow student of Saul under Gamaliel and who often tried to persuade Saul to become Christian; Stephen, who died forgiving all those who participated in his death; and Ananias, who obeyed God and overcame his fear to accept Saul as a brother), Saul the persecutor was transformed into St. Paul the apostle whose unfailing love for the Gentiles caused the Pharisee of Pharisees to live as a Gentile and whose love for his own race caused him to be willing to be damned in their place (Rom. 9:1-4). St. Paul's life was one of great hardship, persecution, deprivation, and finally martyrdom. If his goal were physical safety, his life was a disaster. But his goal was to follow Christ, he turned all his desires towards that end, and he directed all his anger towards anything that would keep him and his spiritual children from union with Christ. So, the chariot of his soul was right on track and in martyrdom he completed the course that he so longed to complete – for to St. Paul “To live is Christ and to die is gain” (Phil 1:21).



*M Melania*

The conversation then turned to characteristics of good leaders. If Christ's shepherds are to love the sheep entrusted to them, they must be humble, long-suffering, fearless, etc. The crown of such leadership is martyrdom, as beautifully expressed by St. Ephraim the Syrian. “When [the Lord] saw that [St. Peter's] mouth was confessing and that his tears were a seal, he gave him the reward reserved for pastors, namely, death, since this is the crown of victory of the pastors.”



*Singing the Akathist for  
Ss. Peter & Paul*

In the end it all comes down to martyrdom. If we desire to be with Christ, we must go to the Cross. If we want unfailing love, we must lay down our lives. If we want to be good leaders, we must crown our leadership with martyrdom. We are not all called to be Martyrs with a capital M. But we ARE all called to be martyrs (i.e. witnesses to Christ) in our day-to-day lives by joyfully laying down our wills, desires, fears, etc. to serve each other.

Last, we looked at two “short cuts” to help us do this – never do our own will and always take the blame. Only saints do this fully, and it is a long process. However, to the extent that we curb our own wills, we heal our desiring power until eventually we simply want what God wants. Likewise, the more that we can honestly take the blame, the healthier our angering power becomes. If we truly accept the blame for our own actions and attitudes, how can we be angry at anybody else? Assumed in this process is that our nous is also being cured by love of God and neighbor. Otherwise, our soul becomes like a charioteer trying to beat rebellious horses into submission rather than a seamless team moving in harmony towards the goal. If, however, we direct the eye (nous) of our soul to love of God and neighbor and tame our disordered desire and anger, then we too will be forever with Christ and live a life of unfailing love.



### ***ZOO UPDATE – Yet another new kitty!***

We seem to be turning into a kitty rest home these days! Our friends from Wine Country Animal Lovers, having brought us Rocky the 19-year-old cat, told us of an older Siamese cat named Bella, in need of a new home. Bella has quickly established herself, not so much as a belle, but as the reigning empress. She's sweet and beautiful, though. So, the other denizens of her side of the monastery are adapting with a good will to the change in sovereign authority!



*No, I do NOT pose  
for pictures*

**July 2015 Schedule for Holy Assumption Monastery & St. Simeon Church**  
 Monastery contact info – (707) 942-6244; email – [sisters.holyassumptionmonastery@gmail.com](mailto:sisters.holyassumptionmonastery@gmail.com);  
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Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1	2	3	4 5 pm Vigil (at Monastery)
5 9:40am Hours/ Divine Liturgy (at Monastery)	6	7 5 pm Vigil (at Monastery)	8 8:40am Hours/ Divine Liturgy (at Monastery)  <u>Great Martyr Procopius</u>  (Visiting Clergy)	9	10	11 5 pm Vigil (at St Simeon Parish)
12 9:40am Hours/ Divine Liturgy (at St Simeon Parish)  <u>Ss. Peter &amp; Paul</u> (Old Calendar)  4pm <b>FRIENDS MEETING</b> (at Monastery)	13	14	15	16 5 pm Vigil (at Monastery)	17 9:40am Hours/ Divine Liturgy (at Monastery)  <u>Royal Passionbearers &amp; Great Martyr Marina</u>  (Visiting Clergy)	18 5 pm Vigil (at Monastery)
19 9:40am Hours/ Divine Liturgy (at Monastery)  (Visiting Clergy)	20	21 5 pm Vigil – (at Monastery)	22 8:40am Hours/ Divine Liturgy (at Monastery)  <u>Mary Magdalene</u>  (Visiting Clergy)	23	24	25 5 pm Vigil (at St Simeon Parish)
26 9:40am Hours/ Divine Liturgy (at St Simeon Parish)	27	28	29 5 pm Vigil – (at Monastery)	30 8:40am Hours/ Divine Liturgy (at Monastery)  <u>Apostles Silas &amp; Silvanus</u>  (Visiting Clergy)	31	