



# Holy Assumption Monastery Newsletter – November 2015

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Dear Friends of Holy Assumption Monastery,

Among the Norwegian saints mentioned at our fall retreat was St. Hallvard, a young nobleman who sacrificed his life in an attempt to save a slave girl from the three men pursuing her (see p. 2 for more details). To some, St. Hallvard's noble self-sacrifice might seem futile – he died and yet the girl was still killed. But love and compassion are never futile, whether there is any discernible immediate effect or not. Christ never said that if we follow Him, we will all live happily ever after. But He DID say that those who lose their lives for His sake will gain them.

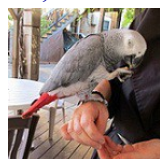
St. Hallvard gained eternal life by his voluntary death. And though the slave girl lost THIS life, she may well have gained eternal life too, in response to St. Hallvard's sacrifice. And a thousand years later and half a world away, St. Hallvard's sacrifice is still affecting hearts and minds. Not a bad legacy! Through the prayers of St. Hallvard, may we also know the joy of laying down our lives for each other – whether through small daily acts or the ultimate sacrifice – and may we share with him in the unwaning day of Christ's Kingdom!

with love in Christ,

*Mother Melania  
and the community  
of Holy Assumption Monastery*

## ZOO UPDATE – BIRDS OF A FEATHER

We are pleased to report that Sunrise and Petie are now sharing the same aviary. A few weeks ago, we were all set to introduce Sunrise to Petie's aviary when our bird expert friends, John Graziano and Chloe Redon, explained that the parrots needed to be eating the same food first. However, Sunrise showed little interest in greens and was FIRMLY convinced that pellets are NOT food. Fortunately, John and Chloe had great ideas about how to change Sunrise's mind for him (including soaking the pellets in apple juice, then in water, then in less water ...). Amazingly (to us, anyway, but, no doubt, not to John and Chloe!), within a week, Sunrise and Petie were eating the same diet.



*Sunrise – Look, Ma! One claw!*

Soon thereafter, Petie and Sunrise started supervised “play time” (which was more like “ignoring-each-other time”) and then progressed to sharing Petie's aviary. PETIE'S AVIARY is the operative phrase as far as Petie is concerned, and he is affording Sunrise grudging acceptance at best. Still, it's a good beginning of what we hope will be a beautiful friendship!



*Petie - Sunrise is such a show off!*

## OCTOBER FRIENDS' MEETING

Our October 18 meeting started with a verse from the Sunday Tone 3 matins canon, “Through the envy of the Jews, Thou wast given over to an unjust judge, O Beholder of all, and Thou who judgest the whole earth with justice hath delivered ancient Adam from condemnation.”



*I thought YOU were taking notes!*

This verse sets on their heads our earthly ideas about justice. The Just Judge willingly suffers at the hands of the unjust judges and instead of meting out judgment on Adam, He saves him from condemnation. So, unlike OUR idea of justice (just=fair=equal), God's justice is inseparable from self-sacrificing love. This is a good litmus test for us when we feel that we are justly upbraiding or criticizing another. If we are unwilling to sacrifice ourselves for (and even at the hands of) the unjust, our justice is still a long way from God's.

Behind most obstacles to godly justice are self-will and self-pity (why do I always have to be the one who ...!!!) and fear (if I don't stand up for myself, just IMAGINE all the horrible things that could happen ...!!!). Some aids conducive to developing godly justice are reflection on Scripture, good examples (Christ Himself, the saints, godly companions), meditation on the Cross, thankfulness, humility, an ever-deepening prayer life, etc. And last but not least, “fake it till we make it.” No matter how we feel, we can choose to forgive little offenses and respond instead with acts of kindness. If, as we do this, we take an honest look at our hearts, we will recognize how much we need the Just Judge to save US from condemnation. And as we humbly and gratefully accept His forgiveness, we will become ever more like Him.

## FALL 2015 RETREAT



*Fr. Theodor Svane  
waxing eloquent*

On Saturday October 10, Fr. Theodor Svane spoke on “The Orthodox Church in Norway – Her saints, history and current situation.” First, he showed slides to give us an idea of the geography of Norway with its stunningly beautiful mountains and fjords (For a map, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norway%E2%80%93Russia\\_border#/media/File:Norway\\_Borders.png](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norway%E2%80%93Russia_border#/media/File:Norway_Borders.png)). The geography lesson helped explain why Christianity came to Norway mostly through the west and south, but also through the east because of its short Russian border. The relationship of the Scandinavians (mostly Swedes and Norwegians) with Russia in Medieval times was a strong one, with the ruling class of Kievan Rus originally being Scandinavians (Viking did not originally refer to a people, but to those engaged in pillaging, raiding, etc.), but Norway’s relationship to Russia declined in the later Middle Ages.

The Christianization of Norway was a long process, starting in the 700s and perhaps not being fully completed till the 1200s. Norway was Catholic until 1537, when King Christian III of Denmark and Norway founded a state church and forced conversion to Lutheranism. 75% of Norwegians are still members of the state church, but the emphasis has been on inclusiveness, not on doctrine. So, the state church is rapidly losing any ability to stand against social changes contrary to traditional Christian belief. This state of affairs is partly responsible for a tiny but growing number of native Norwegians who are becoming Orthodox. The Orthodox Church in Norway has grown in the last hundred years from around 400 people to around 15,000. The bulk of this growth is from Orthodox immigrants, but some of the growth is from native Norwegians attracted to Orthodoxy's stable and ancient Christian witness. There are currently about 30 parishes/missions and 4 monasteries, but only 12 priests. So, there is a great need for more priests. Fr Theodor and family plan to go back after they complete their time of internship here.

The second part of the talk focused on four saints – St. Sunniva, St. Olav, St. Hallvard, and St. Tryphon of Pechenga. St. Sunniva (c. 900) was an Irish princess who fled from a forced marriage to a Viking King. She and her followers got into boats, threw away sails and oars and trusted God to send them safe ashore. Ironically, they ended up on Selja, a remote Norwegian island! There they lived holy lives until Vikings came to kill them. They fled into a cave, prayed that God would save them from the Vikings and the cave fell in on them and killed them. Their incorrupt bodies were later revealed by a light shining from the cave. She and her companions are excellent examples of the willingness to trust God rather than compromise with the pagan world.

St. Olav (995-1030) was King of Norway, but had to flee when one of his retainers took it upon himself to kill a rebellious northern chieftain whom St. Olav wished to spare. He fled to Kievan Rus, where he struggled with whether to become a monk or go back to his kingdom. A dream convinced him to go back and convert his nation. This brought him peace, even though he realized that he might be killed. His army was greatly outnumbered, and at the last he threw away his sword, prayed for God's help, and died by a spear thrust to the side (the similarity to Christ's death is important here). Such a death was the very opposite of what a Viking King would be expected to do, but a great example of Christian meekness and willingness to sacrifice himself surrendering to the will of God. His body was found to be incorrupt, and soon even his enemies recognized his holiness, and he became much loved well beyond the borders of Norway.

St. Hallvard (1020-1043) was a young nobleman who tried to save a slave girl pursued by three men. He put her in his boat and tried to row her to safety, but the three men overtook them, killed the slave girl, and threw St Hallvard overboard with a millstone around his neck. His body miraculously floated to the surface with the millstone still around his neck. He is a great example of selfless love and care for the despised and powerless.

St. Tryphon of Pechenga (1495-1583) was a monk who worked among the Eastern Lapps living in the border area of Russia and Norway. His was a life of humility and loving service to these simple, nomadic people. They returned that love and became the only Orthodox community of Norway, although the Orthodox community almost died out. St. Tryphon forsook his own culture and home to minister to and love others. He and the other saints mentioned above courageously lived out their Christian lives in the face of paganism. As our own culture is increasingly reverting to pagan ways, these saints are important role models for us.

## HERE & THERE

As promised, here are pictures of the sisters' three bookstore events on the weekend of October 3.



*Story time at Holy Cross Church,  
Sacramento - do you think she knows  
there's a mynah bird on her head?*



*St Nicholas Church, San  
Anselmo - we get by with a  
little help from our friends!*



*Holy Dormition Church, Santa Rosa  
- don't tell anybody, but we forgot to  
take our camera. So, this is last  
year's picture!*



*Praying Mantis - I was just  
minding my own business  
when they whisked me and my  
piece of bark onto this table.*

## November 2015 Schedule for **Holy Assumption Monastery & St. Simeon Church**

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Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
<b>1</b> 9:40am Hours/ Divine Liturgy (at Monastery)	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>  5:00pm Vigil (at St Simeon Parish)
<b>8</b> 9:40am Hours/ Divine Liturgy (at St Simeon Parish)  4:00pm Vespers followed by <b>FRIENDS POTLUCK</b>  6:30pm Matins (at Monastery)	<b>9</b> 8:40am Hours/ Divine Liturgy (at Monastery)  <u>St. Nectarios of Aegina</u>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>14</b>  5:00pm Vigil (at Monastery)
<b>15</b>  9:40am Hours/ Divine Liturgy (at Monastery)  <u>Nativity Fast begins</u>	<b>16</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>20</b>  5:00pm Vigil (at Monastery)	<b>21</b> 9:40am Hours/ Divine Liturgy (at Monastery)  <u>Entrance of Theotokos into the Temple</u>  5:00pm Vigil (at St Simeon Parish)
<b>22</b> 9:40am Hours/ Divine Liturgy (at St Simeon Parish)	<b>23</b> 5:00pm Vigil (at Monastery)	<b>24</b> 8:40am Hours/ Divine Liturgy (at Monastery)  <u>Great Martyrs Katherine &amp; Mercurius</u>	<b>25</b>	<b>26</b>  10:00am Thanksgiving Moleben (at Monastery)	<b>27</b>	<b>28</b>  5:00pm Vigil (at Monastery)  <u>Old Calendar Nativity Fast begins</u>
<b>29</b> 9:40am Hours/ Divine Liturgy (at Monastery)	<b>30</b>	<b>Notes:</b>				