



# Holy Assumption Monastery Newsletter – July 2019

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Dear Friends of Holy Assumption Monastery,

Recently, we became acquainted with the work of Sharryl Atkinson, an investigative reporter who has done award-winning exposés of wrongdoing on both sides of the political aisle. In the course of her work, over the past several decades, she has also exposed the increasingly cozy relationships between news agencies and politicians. During this same period, the public's trust in the media has - not coincidentally - shown a steady decline. From the 2016 elections onwards, this distrust has increased sharply.

So, in a society that had always prided itself on a free press, we increasingly find ourselves in the painful and bewildering position of asking, "Whom can we believe? Are these accusations against (fill in the blank with your favorite or least favorite politician, rock star, actress, etc.) true?" Or perhaps we don't even ask those questions at all and just blithely assume instead that OUR side of the debate is the guys in the white hats.

Atkinson and other writers with similar concerns give some answers to these questions, which, in general, involve doing one's own research. But there's only so much time to DO our own research. So, we might ask ourselves whether we NEED to know this particular thing. And if we answer YES, then we had better make sure that we are doing something constructive with that information - at the very least (but also, the very most) fervently praying for all those involved in the situation. And we can only do THAT effectively if we offer up our own lives to Christ - rejecting the lies of our own hearts for the love of Him Who IS Truth. Will that change our political system for the better? Almost certainly not in any immediate, tangible way. But one changed heart can help change others. One person following after the Truth can encourage others to walk towards the One Who is the Truth, the Way and the Life. Shall we try it and see?

with love in Christ,

*Mother Melania*

*and the community*

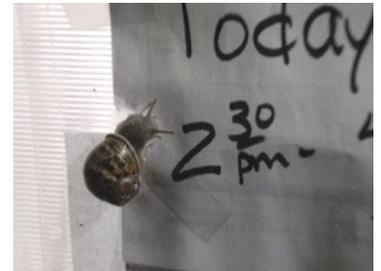
*of Holy Assumption Monastery*

## ZOO UPDATE – Snail Mail?



*The crime scene*

Some of the less-than-welcome denizens of our 'zoo' are the snails. Not content to munch on our garden plants (although, in fairness, WE are not content for them to munch on our garden plants either!), they have expressed quite a liking for the signs that we post on the bookstore door. As they usually only come out at night, we generally only catch their telltale signs. But our intrepid bookstore sister persevered and now at least one snail has been caught red-handed (hmm, well, perhaps red-footed?)



*The culprit!!!*



## HERE & THERE

**St. Nicholas Church Greek Festival, San Jose, May 31-June 2**

**Holy Dormition Church, Celtic Festival, June 22**

**St. Athanasius Youth Group, Work Party, June 11**



*When a giant offers to watch your table, you say yes!*



*When there's no giant, you watch your own table.*



*Oh! That's what we forgot to build. A gate to get out!*



*Polishing vessels from the church - soot is our enemy!*

## *SUMMER RETREAT – June 22*

Fr. Edward Henderson and Veronica Ruby presented a retreat entitled “In His Image and Likeness: Sanctity of Life Teachings of the Holy Orthodox Church and Reflections on an Orthodox Christian Response for Our Times.” Fr. Edward, who presented the theological underpinnings of the topic, repeatedly stressed that we must never reduce our faith to an ideology, which invariably leads to judging and even hating those on the other side of the conflict. Rather, we must obey Christ’s command to love those who hate us. Father started by contrasting the Orthodox Christian view of sexuality (life-nurturing, within the context of marriage, for unity of husband and wife, and for raising children) with the prevailing contemporary view (anything goes between consenting adults). With this change in attitude, the basis of our relationships (not just sexual) devolves from love into function and feeling. When we stop having loving feelings towards somebody, the relationship (or person) no longer functions as we wish and we devalue the other person. From such a jaundiced view of our fellow humans come broken marriages, hook-up culture, abortion, euthanasia ... and the sad list goes on.



*Fr. Edward Henderson*

In the Orthodox view, humans are the crown of creation, made by God according to His Image and Likeness. Free will and rationality are major aspects of the Image, which is marred, but not destroyed by the Fall. The Likeness, however, must be attained by a life of virtue. Virtue is not just a matter of following the rules, but of communing with God (Who is present in His energies when we embrace the virtues). Sin breaks that relationship. So, the injunction “Don’t sin” is not an arbitrary rule, but is given so that we can commune with Life. This is possible only in Christ. All that was lost and distorted by the Fall is restored by the Incarnation of Christ, Who is the measure of all things, and restores all through his Incarnation, Crucifixion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension.



*Good point, Father!*

As participants of new life in Christ, we value everyone’s life. We mourn death. We do not cause it. To kill another human being is a terrible act with lasting effects on our soul. When Cain killed Abel, he was afflicted with groaning (inner torment) and trembling (physical effects). Soldiers who have killed in wartime, even under the most justified circumstances, are often afflicted with PTSD. In the Harry Potter books, Voldemort attains a sort of temporary immortality by tearing his soul in pieces through acts of murder. Simply put, murder tears our souls apart. So, when we oppose abortion and euthanasia, we do so out of love and concern for the whole person – body and soul. This love is not just for the obvious victims, but for all. The way to show people the sanctity of life starts with how we treat them.

Father then spoke specifically about abortion, first refuting the idea that it is a modern innovation. Abortion is an ancient practice – the earliest known reference is in a papyrus from roughly 1500 BC. Early Christian documents such as *the Didache* (1<sup>st</sup> century) and *the Epistle to Diognetus* (2<sup>nd</sup> century) clearly denounce abortion and infanticide, and this condemnation was essentially universal among Christians till very recently. Abortion is the destruction of a human being (the term in *the Didache* for abortion is “murder by destruction”), not merely of a potential human being. The Church teaches that the soul is given at the time of conception. From that very moment, a fully human person with body and soul exists, and aborting that child is murder. After giving a short timeline of the modern situation, Fr. Edward spoke of the deep crisis in our own Church, where abortion rates are high (due in large part to the fear of being shamed) and over half of Orthodox Christians think abortion should always or almost always be legal. Those who support abortion are much more likely not to be regular churchgoers, Bible readers, participants in Church activities, etc. This is both an indictment and a hopeful thing – an indictment because of our weakness in reaching our own people (let alone engaging the wider culture) and a hopeful thing in that there is a clear path forward. By teaching and living the Truth and by loving God above all things, we can love and serve each other and help our culture move towards a true view of sanctity of life.

Like Father, Veronica, in her morning session, stressed the humanity of the child in the womb and the importance of loving everybody and being concerned for the whole person – body and soul. She structured the first part of her talk around three questions based on a political platform of the 1990’s and 2000’s, “Abortion should be safe, legal, and rare.”



Veronica Ruby  
and captivated audience

*Is abortion safe?* Women who have had abortions often express immediate relief, but show increased risks of anxiety, depression, and drug use in the long run. Surgical abortions involve the risks of a surgical procedure. The further along the pregnancy is, the greater the risks. Chemical abortion (induced miscarriage) is very painful and often involves excessive bleeding. Furthermore, the woman is often at home when the fetus (clearly human in form by this time, although the mother most likely was not informed of this) is delivered. So, health risks to the mother are physical, spiritual and psychological, and there may also be long-term health consequences such as increased risk of certain types of breast cancer. Finally, an abortion is always lethal to the child.

*Is abortion legal?* Yes, but how knowledgeable are we about the key rulings that made abortion legal in the US? *Roe vs. Wade* and its companion *Doe vs. Bolton* were decided by the US Supreme Court on January 22, 1973. *Roe vs. Wade* legalized abortion based on “the right to privacy” supposedly assumed (but not actually stated) in the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment. However, the Court also recognized the government’s interest in protecting the life and health of the woman and the life of the unborn child, especially after viability (which, at that point, was around the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> trimester). So, *Roe vs. Wade* ruled that states could not restrict abortion at all in the 1<sup>st</sup> trimester, could implement reasonable health regulations in the 2<sup>nd</sup> trimester, and could prohibit abortion entirely in the 3<sup>rd</sup> trimester, except when the life or health of the mother was at stake. However, *Doe vs. Bolton* defined the health of the mother so broadly (including physical, emotional, and psychological health) that for all intents and purposes, abortion became legal in all 9 months of pregnancy. Both Norma McCorvey (Jane Roe) and Sandra Cano (Mary Doe) later became pro-life advocates and alleged that their lawyers in these landmark cases had misled them. Veronica went on to address some of the key decisions empowering and dis-empowering states to regulate abortion.

*Is abortion rare?* Tragically, no. The numbers are not totally accurate since states are not required to report all their numbers. However, based on information from the CDC and the Guttmacher Institute (which has close ties to Planned Parenthood), abortions increased after *Roe vs. Wade* to a high mark of over a million per year, but have been slowly declining for some time. Estimates for 2014 were 652,639 (CDC) and 926,190 (Guttmacher).

Despite the decline in abortions, the conflict has heated up considerably, with the pro-abortion rhetoric moving from *Safe, legal, and rare* to *Shout your abortion* and *Abortion is normal, responsible and health care* (although pregnancy is not a disease, illness or disability). And, we have recently seen state-sanctioned infanticide. The language remains veiled (tissue or fetus instead of baby; pro-choice instead of pro-abortion; etc.) to make abortion acceptable. As George Orwell said, “Political language is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind.” The more heated the debate gets, though, the more necessity for loving everyone involved. Our churches must become places where a single woman with an unplanned pregnancy will feel nurtured, not condemned. We must love and help the mother and the child, not just to the point of birth, but must stay involved to provide emotional and practical support for however long it is needed. For those who have aborted their children, we must offer the hope of repentance. Not least, we must have the humility to recognize our own deep sins, so that together we can move from a culture of death to a culture of Life.

Having set forth a summary of the current abortion landscape in the morning, Veronica delved more deeply in the afternoon session into the range of abortion experiences and impacts; systems that push women toward abortion; and, our potential responses as Orthodox Christians. The afternoon *Power Point* focused on an abortion-themed icon depicting the Way of Life and the Way of Death, ultimately stressing the forgiveness of Christ for women who have confessed and repented of having an abortion. Veronica also gifted the retreat attendees with a sanctity of life icon prayer card and small treat box with a “baby step” pro-life action. Veronica concluded her talk with the hopeful message that the aborted souls are in the loving embrace of Christ, and the prayer, “Holy Innocents, pray to God for us!”



*Can we do this every week?!*

We are very grateful to Fr. Edward and Veronica for speaking on this very crucial topic. If your church would like to have a similar talk, please contact Father Edward ([revedwardhenderson@gmail.com](mailto:revedwardhenderson@gmail.com) or 510-845-2944) or Veronica ([veronica.ruby@comcast.net](mailto:veronica.ruby@comcast.net) or 510-882-7779)

## July 2019 Schedule for Holy Assumption Monastery

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website – <http://www.holyassumptionmonastery.com>

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1	2	3	4	5	6 5:00pm Vigil
7 9:40am Hours/ Divine Liturgy	8	9 6:00pm Vigil	10 8:40am Hours/ Divine Liturgy  <u>Venerable Anthony of the Kiev Caves</u>	11	12	13 5:00pm Vigil
14 9:40am Hours/ Divine Liturgy	15	16	17	18	19 6:00pm Vigil	20 8:40am Hours/ Divine Liturgy  <u>Prophet Elijah</u> 5:00pm Vigil
21 9:40am Hours/ Divine Liturgy	22	23 6:00pm Vigil	24 8:40am Hours/ Divine Liturgy  <u>Passion-bearers Boris and Gleb &amp; Martyr Christina</u>	25	26	27 5:00pm Vigil
28 9:40am Hours/ Divine Liturgy	29	30	31 6:00pm Vigil  (for Procession of the Cross, , August 1)			