



Holy Assumption Monastery Newsletter – July 2020

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Dear Friends of Holy Assumption Monastery,

Have you ever had the experience of saying or hearing a word you've known your whole life, but seeing it from a completely different angle? That happened recently to me with the word "grievance," which my Bing search tells me means 1) a real or imagined wrong or other cause for complaint or protest, especially unfair treatment, 2) an official statement of a complaint over something believed to be wrong or unfair, 3) a feeling of resentment over something believed to be wrong or unfair. What struck me about the word itself, though, is its obvious relationship to grief. To me, grievance has been nearly synonymous with resentment and anger. But what if I looked at the grief instead of the anger? Then, I could ask myself, "Whom have I grieved? What exactly did I do to grieve them? How can I help heal our relationship?" And when I am grieved by another person, what if I asked myself, "Can I get below my resentment to my grief? Is it possible that some of my grief isn't the fault of the person I'm angry at? And can I get even further below my anger to where I can see THEIR grief?" What might that do to my family dynamics, my neighborhood and all the way up to our nation? Not that it will be easy, but with God, all things are possible!

with love in Christ,

Mother Melania

and the community

of Holy Assumption Monastery

ZOO UPDATE – Aquaculture



Guppies, ghost shrimp, and microgreens. Oh my!

For years we've wanted to put together an aquaculture system with our koi. We're not there yet, but one of the sisters HAS started two small aquaculture tanks. The "Vivosun" tank has fancy guppies, ghost shrimp and radish microgreens. The "Back to the Roots" tank has a betta fish, ghost shrimp, and wheatgrass. We like naming our critters, but the guppies are hard to tell apart and the ghost shrimp are hard to see. So, they just have group names – the fancy pants guppies and the ghost collective. We DO name our bettas (not all of which live in aquaculture tanks). So, far we have Prince Gallant and Bubba, but we've got four more male bettas and one female betta, and our creative juices are running dry. So, if you have any brilliant ideas, please let us know!



Bubba's in here somewhere!



HERE & THERE



Can you find the hummingbird?



Do you see a ladybug? Me neither!



Home-grown green beans - okay, we're not quite self-sufficient yet!



Maybe we need a few more slats?



Ah! Much better!

ZOOM 1 – Fr. Spyridon Jajeh on COVID & Bioethics

On Sunday June 7th, Fr. Spyridon Jajeh led a bioethical Zoom conversation about COVID-19 and its practical implications upon our entire life: spiritual, medical, and socio-relational. This viral assault is causing unprecedented impact upon us all. Hence we are called to pause, assess, and ask some very profound questions; not only to understand the impact, but to be able to formulate a plan of action and reaction that correlate with our foundational spiritual history and theological reality – preserving our health, both of body and soul.

We attempted to define bioethics and explore the need for us Orthodox Christians both to have a deep experiential understanding of our own theology and to understand science in general and the health sciences in particular. This dual knowledge will permit us to speak the language of the respective fields and form a bridge of truth between the two. As we confront the havoc of COVID-19, our world is in very great need of our distinctive Orthodox viewpoint (which is founded on the Gospel and spiritual experience of the Holy Fathers). The world needs the Body of Christ, the Church, right now.



Fr. Spyridon Jajeh

We landed on the idea that our initial conversation MUST, by necessity, ask more questions than it gives answers. Although it is said there are no stupid questions, we contemplated what can happen if we ask the wrong questions. The wrong line of questioning can sidetrack us, thus keeping us from capturing the truth we seek.

Time slipped away so fast this day, and we used the last portions of the conversation to stop and ponder some profound situations and scenarios facing us now: (below is a small sample of questions posed)

1. Many COVID patients are dying all alone in the hospital by themselves without family, and perhaps, priests, being able to be at their side. Is it within our collective Christian experience to allow loved ones to die alone?
2. If I am a health care worker, do I have a moral obligation to go to work and take the chance of myself being exposed? Do I have any spiritual duty to put myself at risk? Should I just stay home and not expose myself to harm and take care of my own family? Is that fair to patients or colleagues?
3. If there are limited supplies and resources in the hospital (ventilators, medications etc.), how do we decide who gets treatment and who goes without? This was happening around the world. Do we let older people just die and concentrate on younger? Do we help only healthier patients? Who decides this?
4. How is live-streaming the Divine Liturgy and not being able to physically participate affecting my spiritual life? What am I doing to continue to be active spiritually? Is this a time where “Tele-Orthodoxy” needs to enter the scene and hit the air waves? Is this time of social distancing from the parish life a blessed opportunity, a hazard to our spiritual life, or potentially both?

The conversation ended with some exhortations with the understanding that the world is in turmoil indeed, but lovers of Christ need not be. We Orthodox Christians have an obligation to proclaim Christ by word and deed to the world around us. Perhaps this is the time for us to act and reassure the world, and to begin to change its paradigm, by fully embracing ours. There is a God who cares, who values each living person, regardless of their usefulness or physical health. There is a different mode of living other than the rat race we have been force fed. Perhaps this is the time for a life re-calibration, a resetting of sorts, to reorganize our thoughts, priorities, objectives and ambitions of this life—short as it is. This was a blessed day and, God willing, the first of many in-depth conversations about our precious God-given gift of Life.

JOIN US for another Zoom retreat, Sunday July 5 at 1 pm, as we look further into some of the above questions.



Robin Wellman

ZOOM 2 – Robin Wellman & Peter Navarro on St. Peter the Aleut

One great Zoom meeting for the month wasn't enough. So, we had another! On Saturday June 27th, Robin Wellman and Peter Navarro gave a wonderful presentation about St. Peter the Aleut. Robin started with a brief history of the Russian-American Company, for which St. Peter worked. The Russian-American Company had posts in Alaska, California, and Hawaii, but Alaska was its main location. Some of the Russians in the Company were brutal towards the Native Americans, but the Orthodox Church consistently tried to protect them, and many embraced the Orthodox Faith, among them St. Peter (given name Cungagnaq), who was baptized by St. Herman of Alaska himself.

The Russian-American Company's purpose in California was to hunt sea otters for their pelts, trade with the Spanish missions, and provide food for Alaska through farming and ranching (which wasn't very successful). Most of the Russian-American Company's workers in California were native Alaskan teenagers who leaped at the chance to prove themselves and earn money away from their families. Fort Ross, the southernmost of Russia's California outposts, was founded in 1812. Most likely St Peter got there around 1814. Born around 1800 in Kodiak, St. Peter would already have been a skilled, experienced hunter, despite his young age.



ZOOM 2 – St. Peter the Aleut, continued

So St. Peter was one of a group of about 15 hunters who traveled from Fort Ross to the Channel Islands in southern California. The head of the hunting expedition, disappointed with their catch of sea otters, decided to go to the California mainland near Los Angeles, despite warnings that hostile Spaniards were there. The hunters were captured by the Spaniards, and St. Peter received a severe head wound. Given the option of converting to Catholicism or being tortured to death, all but St. Peter and one companion chose to convert. The local Chumash Indians were forced to torture St. Peter, cutting off his fingers and toes one joint at a time. During his tortures, St. Peter exclaimed, “I am a Christian. I will not deny my faith!” Finally, they disemboweled him. At the very moment of the saint’s death, the priest received a letter, which he read and buried with St. Peter. So, St. Peter at the moment of his martyrdom protected his friend from death. Until recently, this story has mostly not been well substantiated. In recent years, though, documents found in the Russian-American Company have confirmed the story.

Now the story jumps to modern times, with Robin relating how she found the icon of St. Peter that now lives at the monastery. Robin had worked at Fort Ross for 30 years but her job was in jeopardy, and she was very devastated because the Fort had largely been her life. So, one morning she was taking her daily walk along the beach. On her way back, she saw something glinting on the shore and discovered that it was St. Peter’s icon. Robin was very touched because St Peter, having come back to his last earthly home, reached out to comfort her when she had to leave that same beloved place. After much prayer, Robin decided that the best home for the icon would be our monastery, whose chapel is modeled on the Fort Ross Chapel. We were very touched and, with Archbishop Benjamin’s blessing, gratefully agreed.

Peter then explained his relationship with Saint Peter. Peter, whose given name is James, is a native American of the Chumash and Gabriellino-Tongva tribes. He grew up following the ancient religion and tradition of his people, and one of their foundational principles is to cleave to the Truth. Later, when he realized that most of the elders had truly internalized Christianity into their culture, he decided that he also needed to become a Christian. So he pursued baptism in the Catholic Church. Looking for a Native American patron saint, he discovered a Mohawk saint named Catherine but he couldn’t figure out how to masculinize her name. Then he noticed an article on St. Peter the Aleut. He went to St. Raphael Church in Goleta, CA, and asked to be named after St. Peter, but of course they had never heard of him. So he decided on Raphael as his patron saint. When the priest mistakenly named him Frederick instead, he took that as a sign that something was not quite right. He continued in his Christian Life, but realized that something was missing. Over time he became aware of the Orthodox Church. When he first went to the Elevation of the Holy Cross in Sacramento (where he is now a member), he saw an icon of All Saints of North America, and there on that icon was St. Peter, once again reaching out to him.

At that time, the St. Peter icon that Robin had discovered was temporarily at Holy Ascension Church in Sacramento, and one of James’s friends kept encouraging him to go venerate the icon. Finally on the very last day before the icon was to be returned to the monastery, he decided to go. The priest there, Fr. Paul, was saying that St. Peter was associated with San Francisco, but James told his friend, “No, I don’t think that’s right. I think he has something to do with my people from southern California.” When Robin got up and explained the connection to the Channel Islands and Los Angeles, James knew he had to talk to Robin. That’s how James and Robin came to know each other. The story continues with Saint Peter showing himself very much involved in James life so that it became clear to him that St. Peter was his patron saint. Eventually, he was baptized and took St. Peter’s name.

Then, Robin sent Peter the newly discovered document about St Peter’s martyrdom. Among the names of those involved in St. Peter’s martyrdom was Guillermo Cota. Peter was astounded, because he had recently discovered from his genealogy that he was related to Cota, who had done much harm to the Chumash. So Peter realized that he was related to both the Spaniards and the Chumash who had tortured St. Peter. Given this revelation, Peter wept and thanked the saint for shedding his blood to bring the Truth to the people of his homeland.

Robin and Peter’s talks were very touching on many levels, but it is no accident that this story of blood-guilt, forgiveness and repentance comes at a time of great division and distress in our land. In the midst of heartbreak, St. Peter shows us the way forward – faithful loving self sacrifice for Christ.

That is a very imperfect rendering of a beautiful tale. The good news is that Peter and Robin are planning a book! We will keep you informed.



JULY CALENDAR



Peter James Navarro

- Sunday Hours/Divine Liturgy – 9:40 AM/10:00 AM *All Divine Liturgies are open to the parish, but with continued social distancing, masks, etc. Sadly, parishioners cannot yet join us for meals.*
- Sunday July 5 – 1:00 PM Continuation of Zoom talk on bioethics & COVID-19 by Fr. Spyridon Jajeh