

St. Barbara Orthodox Monastery

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St. Barbara Monastery

January 2024

Friends' Gathering

Sunday, January 28th

4 pm Presentation:

***The Gift of Our Bodies:
Man and Woman in Christ***

Speaker: Rev. Symeon Halsell

St. Athanasius Orthodox Church

Santa Barbara, CA



Dear Friends of St Barbara Monastery,

Have you ever stopped to consider what it would have been like to be one of the thieves crucified on either side of Christ on the Cross? We know that the one to His left saw Him merely as a man, but the one to His right, Dimas, though reviling Him like the other at first—astonishingly and in an instant—came to recognize Him for Who He is. As we sing in our Holy Week hymnody, this is the wise thief who “in a single moment stole Paradise”!

In a striking homily about the good thief which the Sisters read at table—and which we encourage all to read— St. John of San Francisco points out the attentiveness of Dimas to the Lord and his subsequent enlightenment and faith: “Gazing upon Him, the thief awoke as it were from a deep sleep. He saw clearly the difference between Him and himself...Christ’s lack of malice, His all-embracing forgiveness, His prayer, astonished the thief. He understood in his heart that beside him was no ordinary man. He was the Son of God, Who was able and powerful to forgive men their sins!”

Consider that while the faith of all of His apostles utterly failed them as they fled from Him in His hour of need, Dimas, on the contrary, gazed at the bloody and suffering Man crucified beside him and discerned wisely that this was indeed the King of Kings whose Kingdom not of this world. What eyes of faith were granted to Him at a time when all the world failed to see!

Referring to this astonishing faith and its consequences, St. John tells us that “There, amidst the clamor, blasphemy and derision, he began exhorting his companion hanging to the left of Christ to stop slandering Him...Then from his lips came a humble voice: ‘Remember me, O Lord, when Thou comest into Thy kingdom’ (Luke 23: 40-42). This was the cry of a former thief—now Christ’s new disciple. The thief understood that the Kingdom of Jesus of Nazareth was not of this world...He was the first to comprehend the nature of Christ’s Kingdom, and therefore he was the first to enter it.”

The thief’s accomplishments are summarized by St. John in these words: “His thorough repentance of his sins and transgressions, his profound humility, his firm faith in the Crucified Lord Jesus Christ Who gave Himself over to suffering, and his confession made at a time when the whole world was against Christ—these are the strands which wove the crown that adorned the head of the former thief, this is the substance of which the key was forged that opened to him the gates of Paradise!” St. John goes on to quote from a verse from the Church’s hymnody: *Do Thou, Who alone lovest mankind, grant us the repentance of the thief...who cry to Thee: Remember us also in Thy kingdom.* Pray for us, Saint Dimas!

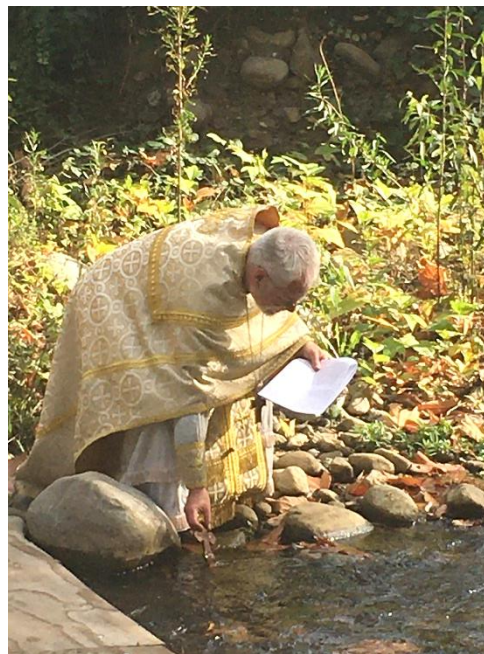
—The Sisters of St. Barbara Monastery

OUTDOOR BLESSING OF WATER

The celebration of the Great Feast of the Theophany of our Lord has often coincided in previous years with the coming of rains at the monastery. However, this year, we were blessed on the actual feast day with a clear and pleasant winter's day.

After the celebration of the festal liturgy in church, the sisters and pilgrims, led by Fr. Jude Lepine, processed through the woods and down to Sisar Creek for the Great Blessing of Water, singing the troparion of Theophany all the while. As we stood by the creek listening to the prayers and petitions of the service of blessing, the various elements of God's surrounding creation seemed to join us in worship: the creek waters flowed musically over rocks and boulders, the roosters sang nearby, sycamore leaves danced in the light. Incidentally, for a few days after the blessing of water, a lone dove was seen to be hanging around that same area of the creek.

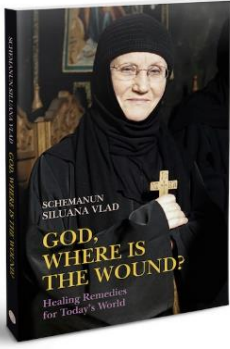
We were reminded of the words of the Akathist of Thanksgiving: *Why is it that on a Feast Day the whole of nature mysteriously smiles? Why is it then that a heavenly gladness fills our hearts...* Glory to God for the blessing of waters and of all His creation!



Top right: Singing in procession through the woods. ***Bottom left:*** Praying by Sisar Creek. ***Bottom right:*** Fr. Jude blesses the creek while dipping the Cross into its waters thrice.

BOOK REVIEW:

God, Where is the Wound?: Healing Remedies for Today's World **By Schemanun Siluana Vlad**



This little book published by St. Sebastian Orthodox Press can help people who are suffering from psychological pain, or who are trying to help people they know. Mother Siluana (of blessed memory) explains the root causes of mental illnesses and illustrates how many people have found relief and healing through going to church, confessing, praying about everything, and obeying God's commandments. She starts with her life story, moving from an unanswerable existential quest for meaning to mental illness requiring hospitalization, to finally giving up her reluctance to try out Christianity, to becoming a counselor who has helped thousands of young people find God's path to healing.

RECENT PHOTOS



*Christmas cookie plates:
an annual tradition.*



*Big Bertha, our largest young
hen, is also one of our gentlest.*



*Saying hello to our friendly
neighborhood llama.*

TAX LETTERS

If you donated to St. Barbara Monastery during 2023 and received acknowledgement cards from us, these are sufficient supporting documentation for deducting these donations on your tax return. However, if for any reason you did not receive an acknowledgement and need a tax letter from us ("no goods or services"), simply email us to request one at sbmonastery@gmail.com. (We are adopting this new policy to streamline the monastery's office work.)