


St. Barbara Orthodox Monastery

*15799 Santa Paula-Ojai Rd, Santa Paula, CA 93060
(805) 921-1563*

A photograph of a garden bed. The garden is filled with various plants, including numerous bright yellow flowers, green ferns, and a large basil plant in the foreground. The garden bed is bordered by a wooden plank and contains several large, light-colored rocks. The background shows more greenery and a path.

*There will be no
Friends' Gathering
in May or June 2023.*



Dear Friends of St. Barbara Monastery,

Years ago, a young hieromonk, fresh from a visit to Mt. Athos, stopped by our monastery. Preparing to serve Vespers for us in what was then a poorly lit chapel, we offered him the use of a floor lamp in the altar. “No, no,” he said. “Nothing hinders prayer like electric light!” A few days later, when our Elder, Father Dimitry, was with us, we related the incident to him. He was quiet for a moment, pondering, and then remarked in his halting English: “I think we must pray in any light.”

Indeed, Father Dimitry, one must pray in any light, in any place, at any time...!

Pilgrims and other visitors to any monastery, ours include, often remark on the peacefulness of the place and how they often find it difficult or even impossible to pray in the midst of their own less-than-peaceful usual circumstances. We know what they mean. But, to quote Father Dimitry again, *we must pray in any light*, that is in any and all circumstances. Yes, we know from the Gospels that the Lord Himself withdrew from time to time to pray to His Father in solitude and quiet. But He showed us—by His very example as well—that exactly when we are beset with anxiety or turmoil or any temptation whatsoever, it is also time to pray.

Do the words of prayer not come easily at such times of stress? Then the Church offers us rich gifts during such times: the Books of Psalms and the Jesus Prayer. The Psalms—a treasury of prayers dealing with every imaginable circumstance—is appointed for every church service without exception. And for good reason. It can also become *our* personal prayer book in times of need and distress. Likewise, a continual cry in our hearts to the Lord with the words of the Jesus Prayer—*Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner!* (or some variant thereof)—can become a sure lifeline in times of distress when no other words seem adequate.

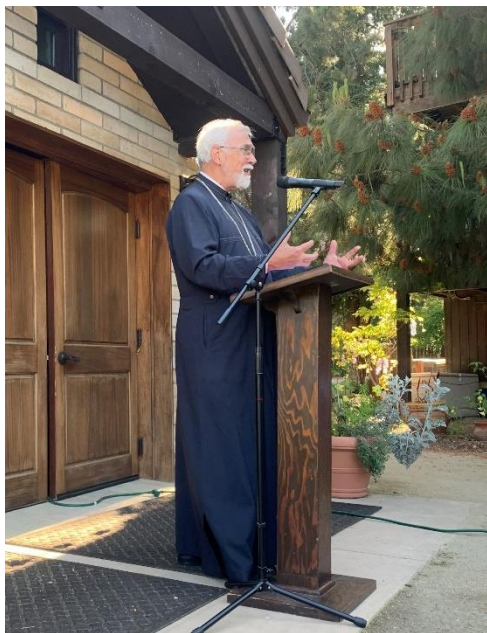
The sisters have a code phrase that pilgrims may hear whispered from time to time around the monastery: *B & P...B&P!* Here at St. Barbara Monastery, “B&P!” means only one thing: *Breathe and pray, breathe and pray!* Prayer is the life-breath of our beings and whether in times of light or darkness, happiness or distress, turning wholly to God in prayer is perhaps—in any condition—always the best and most beneficial action we can take.

The Sisters
of St. Barbara Orthodox Monastery

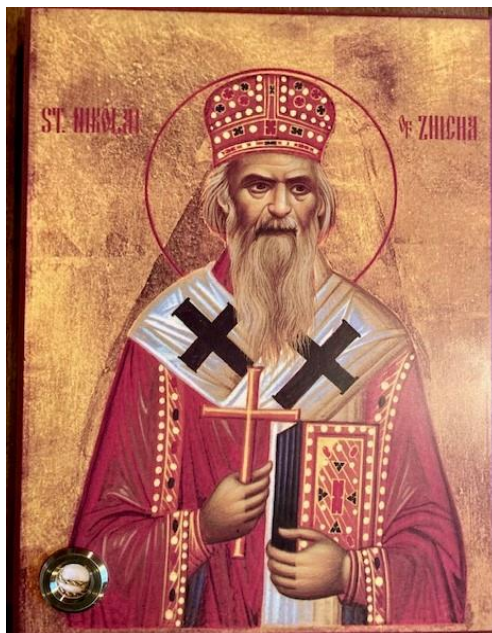
RELIC OF ST. NIKOLAI GIFTED TO MONASTERY

On April 30th at the last Friends' Gathering, Fr. John Finley shared an inspiring talk on the life and times of St. Nikolai Velimirovic. Who better to relate to the faithful the life of this remarkable saint than Fr. John? Rarely a sermon is preached by him that does not reference St. Nikolai in some way. In his talk, Father laid out before us the beautiful life of this modern and multifaceted saint from Serbia who was not only bishop of Zhicha, but a scholar, professor, ambassador, prolific writer, and a former prisoner at the Dachau concentration camp. St. Nikolai was fluent in seven languages and traveled the world, teaching and instructing the faithful and gathering lost sheep into the Church. He leaves behind a rich trove of spiritual writings, including the well-known *Prologue from Ochrid* and *A Treasure of Serbian Spirituality*.

Before beginning his presentation, Fr. John took the sisters by complete surprise when he gifted the monastery with an icon containing a secondary relic of St. Nikolai. This relic—a portion of a tassel from one of St. Nikolai's vestments—is originally from St. Tikhon's Monastery in South Canaan, Pennsylvania, and made its way to Fr. John Finley by way of one Mr. Scott Rasmussen of Utah. (St. Nikolai spent his last years as the dean, professor, and rector at St. Tikhon's Seminary.) Thanks to Fr. John, this relic has now found a permanent home at St. Barbara Monastery where the faithful may venerate and ask for prayers from this remarkable saint not far removed from us in time and space.



Fr. John Finley waxes eloquent on the life and teachings of St. Nikolai.



Icon of St. Nikolai of Zhicha with secondary relic.

ENTERTAINING ANGELS UNAWARES

A knock at the door. Someone praying in the chapel. A couple strolling the grounds. A family attending Sunday liturgy. We don't always know when we will have visitors, but we know in our hearts that God has sent them to us.

Although we live a quiet life in a rural area, our lives are enriched by the variety of people who come to the monastery - on purpose or on the spur of the moment, perhaps when they see our sign from the road. We meet clergy and parishioners from Orthodox countries and ethnicities around the world. We host people from other religions and those who identify as non-religious. Curious neighbors and Orthodox families from our neighboring communities come by. They may stay a few minutes, for a service and a meal, or for a few days of retreat.

Did you know that we professed sisters have taken a vow of stability along with our vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience? Stability means we will live the rest of our lives at this monastery—on this blessed piece of land—unless the Abbess or Bishop specifically transfers us. Someone who doesn't know us well might think this would be boring—but far from it! Though we don't travel the world, the world comes to us. We hear Russian, Ukrainian, Greek, Serbian, French, Spanish, Romanian, Polish - you get the idea - and learn about Orthodoxy and life in other countries. Truly, we are grateful that God has given us this opportunity to practice hospitality and to meet and come to know so many of you!

READERS' CORNER



*Appropriate to yourself the thoughts and spirit of the Holy Fathers
by reading their writings. —St. Ignatius Brianchaninov*

This month the sisters met to discuss *On Ascetical Life*, which comprises the first six homilies of St. Isaac the Syrian. Discussion was challenging because of the great wealth of themes to pick out, and the fact that St. Isaac often presents very deep thoughts in short, seemingly simple proverb-like sentences. We touched on the fear of God, the things of the Age to Come, guarding the senses, humility, and finding peace, and we could have easily lingered much longer on any one of these topics. Our next book discussion, taking place in June, will be *On the Soul and the Resurrection* by St. Gregory of Nyssa. Please feel free to join the sisters as we read through the SVS Press Popular Patristics series.

ODDS & ENDS

** Starting on Sunday, June 4th, the sisters will be traveling to various local churches for Divine Liturgy on Sundays during the summer. We will resume the celebration of the Divine Liturgy on Sundays at the monastery on September 3rd.*

** June 23rd to June 25th: The sisters will be bringing their books and wares to the Ventura County Greek Festival in Freedom Park, Camarillo. This event will be hosted by St. Demetrios Orthodox Church. Stop by and say hello!*