

St. Mary Magdalene Orthodox Church

January 28, 2024

34th Sunday after Pentecost

NEW MARTYR AND CONFESSORS OF RUSSIA

Ven. Ephraim the Syrian (373-379)

Activities and Events this Week

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| • Wednesday January 31 | Choir Rehearsal
<i>Mere Christianity</i> | 4:30pm
6:00pm |
| • Thursday February 1 | St. John Brotherhood Meeting | 6:00pm |
| • Saturday February 3 | St. John Brotherhood Meeting
Catechism
Great Vespers | 9:00am
3:30pm
5:00pm |

38th Annual Assembly

I invite everyone (Orthodox and Non-Orthodox) EVERYONE in the community to participate in the 38th annual assembly. This is the once per year opportunity for all of us to come together to hear more about the community and for direct participation in the stewardship of our parish. We do have an orderly agenda as you can see and there is time for questions and comments but at appropriate times during the meeting we will be happy to answer your questions and we can all engage together for the preferred future for our mission. I am so happy that so many of our parishioners chose to go up to St. Catherine's Monastery in Sonora to participate in a work day to help the nuns of the newly founded woman's monastery. I am very interested in hearing how things went and would even be happy to hear a small report at the assembly.

Also during the assembly I would like to share with you some of our plans for the community and propose a project - both of which I would invite your feedback. I also plan to thank...well everyone in some capacity for everything we have been able to accomplish in such a short time together. I am also going to reiterate that I am never too busy for all of you! Yes, my schedule is very hectic - but here at St. Mary's is where my heart overflows with joy for all of you and in our common and appreciable struggle to find our salvation. *Fr. Lawrence*

Monasteries

In honor of our monastery pilgrimage thanks to both the Myrrhbearers and St. John's Brotherhood I would like to say a few words about monasteries. It may be interesting to note that almost all Orthodox Christians know about our beautiful monastic tradition but maybe have never spent time at one. I personally have always enjoyed staying at monasteries – sometimes not wanting to return to the world. At the monastery one can experience intense prayer, healing and restoration that makes returning to the world feel less than edifying.

Monasticism and living an ascetical life is not new to Christianity. For example Buddhism has been practicing monasticism for over 600 years before Christ. There were also ascetical sects within Judaism such as the Essenes, a sect that John the Baptist may have belonged to and which gave us the famous “dead sea scrolls.” In Western Christianity it was monasticism which saved western civilization during the so call dark ages thought the protection of books and knowledge.

It is in the monasteries where I have witnessed true giants of the faith – true athletes and practitioners of deep and intense prayer. I for one will never forget some of the experiences and images I have from my visits to various monasteries throughout the world. Most of our church services are influenced by monastic practices. Anytime one sees a priest in his black Riassa during a church service is seeing how the monastic practices have influenced the Church. The monastics have also influenced the church in it spiritual life.

Anthony the Great is consider the “first monk” as he went into the Egyptian dessert in the about the year 270. We know from Anthony, by his own writings, that there were other ascetics in the desserts seeking a solidary life with Christ. Anthony made the monastic practice perhaps more popular as he gained many disciples and through his life through Latin translators, monasticism came to the western world with Benedict of Nursia taking the lead by forming the famous Benedictine Order.

The monastic practices also brought us the prayer rope which is very popular pious practice by non-monastic Orthodox. I am happy people pray the Jesus prayer and use the prayer rope. I encourage practitioners to be guided by someone who may have more experience. I would go on to say that the prayer rope is not to adorn our bodies as if it were jewelry. For the monastics, the prayer rope is their sword – a literal weapon against the wiles of the evil one.

I would recommend that everyone at some point make at least one pilgrimage to a monastery to spend a week or even two if the monastery permits it. Many monasteries, such as those on the Holy Mountain only permit a three day stay. Do not bring your preconceptions or desires to a monastery. Go and participate and do what they do, eat what they eat, pray what they pray to get a full and wonderful exposure to this beautiful aspect to our Church. The monastics are a part of us as we are a part of them – together those of us in the world and those who live the angelic life are intimately linked together in the same beautiful Church.