

Monastic Musings

News and Views of the Eastern Rite Monastics
of the
Ohio Orthodox Catholic Church

February 2011

From the Idle keyboard

by: schema-Archimandrite Barb

What a winter this has already been. Snow and flooding have been in the headlines for many weeks. The weather pattern has changed significantly this year! One wonders what the rest of the winter holds for us. However, with all of the rain and snow, there comes not only destruction but reconstruction of the earth. The ground will spring forth with new growth in due time. There will be the needed water to fill the rivers and reservoirs. Winter is always the preparation of new life although it always seems very dark and dreary to us. The animals have learned to hibernate or move to a warmer area. The landscape is often lacking in the beauty of the flowers during winter, especially if you live in cold and snowy areas. But during this time, we too need to take time to “shed” our old selves and put on our new selves so that we can shine the light of Jesus to all.

Starting with this month, Mother Myrella has decided on four (4) major topics that she wants to teach over the next few months. She will break each topic down into “bite size” writings that will help all of us focus more on our faith – living it as the Gospels teach us. And who knows, maybe Mother Myrella will be on the same “wave length” as Bishop Chuck again! The Holy Spirit moves in mysterious ways! We do know that we want to provide not only to the monastics but to our reading friends the necessary spiritual information that they can use within their everyday lives. The teachings will not be strictly western or eastern perspective but a blending of both since that is really who we are within the Ohio Orthodox Catholic Church. If we really look at our faith, originally we were all one faith – community “churches” that gathered together to hear the Good News, share a meal together and then share communion. There were not denominations in the early church but one church – the church/faith that was given to us by Jesus through his teachings!

Meanwhile, I will continue to teach/write about whatever seems to be appropriate for the moment. We will continue to cover the major feasts that occur during the month to help everyone understand in greater depth what that feast is. Hopefully, the writings will help our readers gain a greater understanding of God so that they may learn that God is love and He is always with us no matter what we have elected to do with our lives. The sharing of the Orthodox icons help you to grasp what the writers as saying. I hope that in time you will be able to look at an icon and realize just what the subject is and what is being taught. It takes time and patience

to be able to read icons, but they really teach the Scriptures so simply and with such beauty! Icons are the Windows into Heaven and thus help us to reach and understand God in all of His wondrous creations on this earth!

Journey to Discipleship – The Beatitudes (Part 1)

by: Rev. Mother Myrella LeClair

Introduction:

Sometimes understanding what being a Christian means is very confusing. There are so many conflicting theologies among the various denominations that it appears at times that we can all be labeled as Christians. However, all denominations basically believe that a Christian is one who believes that Jesus Christ is the Messiah – the Son of God. Our other beliefs about Christ, the Trinity, Sacraments, etc. are based on what Christian denomination we are affiliated with. For example, in the Ohio Orthodox Catholic Church, we believe in a God who loves all of His children unconditionally. Our mission is “To Exemplify Jesus' love through us. To be an inclusive Church, welcoming everyone to our Eucharist and to the joyfulness of God's love and peace.” We accomplish our mission by living the Gospel – that is, to live what we believe and to be His disciples:

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34-35 – NKJV)

Discipleship, however, does not come about without effort on our parts. Within the Gospels, Jesus provided not only teachings but also guides for putting these teachings into practice. Over the next several months, we will walk together in Faith through study and prayer. My hope is that this journey to Discipleship will lead us not only to a deeper love for God but also a greater love for His creations -- the one body in Christ.

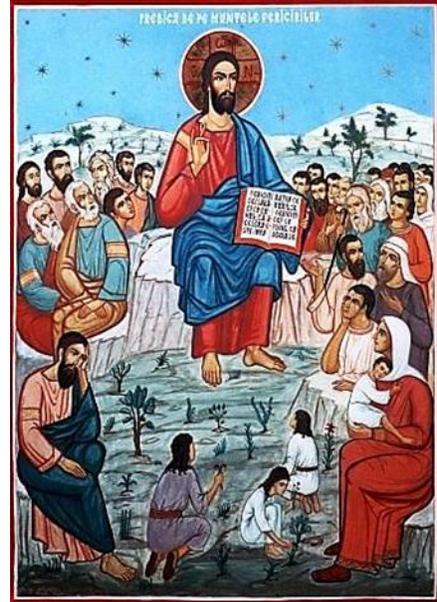
Our journey begins at the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew. The beatitudes, a series of eight blessings, are directives for our spiritual journey. As we grow in understanding of and put into practice each of the Beatitudes, we will progress to a closer union with God and to living a blessed way of life.

First Beatitude:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:3 – NKJV)

“Poor in spirit” means that we recognize our need for repentance. We are spiritually impoverished – filled with pride and need to rid ourselves of pride by admitting our dependency on God. Emptying ourselves of Pride requires a thorough examination and assessment of our thoughts and actions as well as of the secrets we hide in our hearts. It means that we must be honest and face the truth about what forms of pride we cherish. Are we like the Pharisee: self-righteous, judgmental, and despising of others? If so, then we need to acknowledge our guilt and resolve to change by turning to God and asking for His help. Like the Publican, we need to recognize our brokenness and confess our need to God.

“Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector [Publican]. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’ And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Luke 18:9-14 – NKJV)



To paraphrase the first Beatitude, blessed are those who are humbly aware of their need for God for God will give them the kingdom. Only with God’s help can we transform our hearts and minds from being rich in pride to being “poor in spirit”. We need to bring our goals and desires into line with Christ’s call to humility and obedience. We are blessed when we surrender to God’s Will, knowing ultimately that His Will is ours as well.

Second Beatitude:

“Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted”. (Matthew 5:3 – NKJV)

The mourning referred to in the second beatitude is not sorrow due to the death of a loved one, ill health, loss of a relationship, or loss of a job but to deep sorrow and genuine repentance for one’s sins by admitting one’s failing and seeking forgiveness – the kind of repentance that leads to transformation. God will comfort those who are truly sorrowful by forgiving them for their sins and granting them eternal life.

So, the first step in living the second Beatitude is to humble ourselves before God in a spirit of brokenness and confession, expressing sincere sorrow for our sins and asking for His mercy and forgiveness just as the Publican did. We stop living life on autopilot – making excuses for our failings, continuing to repeat the same patterns of thought and behavior, and stubbornly clinging to our self-righteousness. Instead, we adopt a spirit of watchfulness and prayer, keeping our spiritual eyes open and uplifted, being ever vigilant against our failings. When we become discouraged, we pray to God to empty our hearts of our sins and to fill them with faith, hope, and love:

*“Most High, Glorious God,
enlighten the darkness of our minds.
Give us a right faith, a firm hope and a perfect charity,
so that we may always and in all things act according to Your Holy Will. Amen.”*
(Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi for Enlightenment)

If we ask, God will give us the grace and direction we need. So, as we continue our journey on the path to Discipleship, let us begin each day by praying:

“O Lord, give me the strength to greet the coming day in peace. Help me in all things to rely upon Your holy will. In every hour of the day reveal Your will to me. Bless my dealings with all who surround me. Teach me to treat all that comes to me throughout the day with peace of soul and with the firm conviction that Your will governs all. In all my deeds and words guide my thoughts and feelings. In unexpected events, let me not forget that all are sent by you. Teach me to act firmly and wisely, without embittering and embarrassing others. Give me strength to bear the fatigue of this coming day with all that it will bring. Direct my will, teach me to pray, pray in me. Amen”

(Morning Prayer of Saint Philaret of Moscow)

Blessed hope awaits us.

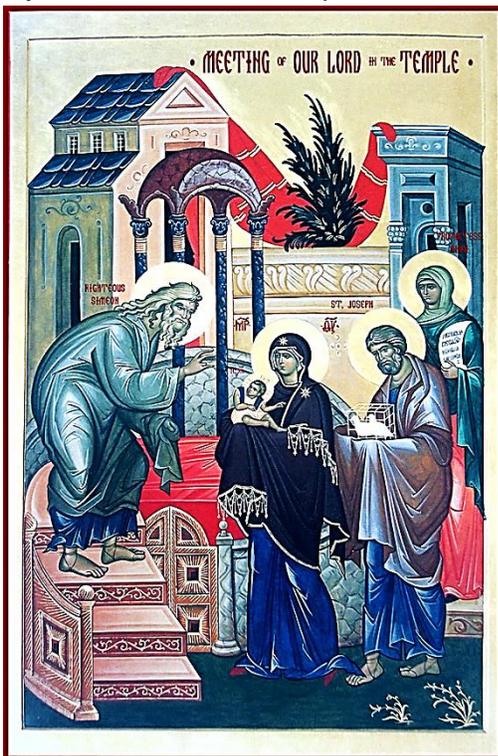
Feast of the Presentation of Jesus

by: schema-Archimandrite Barb

February starts out with the Feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple (The Meeting of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in the Temple). This feast is also known as “Candlemas”, particularly in Western nations, due to the custom of blessing candles on this day. This feast thus concludes the observances concerning the nativity of Christ. In this article, I will be looking at the Feast of the Presentation.

Jewish law forbids the woman from entering the Temple until after 40 days from the birth of a child. Once the 40 days have been observed, it is the time that the child is brought to the Temple and presented to the High Priest who is in charge of the Temple at the time.

If you remember the Scriptures, St. Simeon (Elder of the Temple) was told that he would not die



until he had seen the Messiah. St. Simeon went to the Temple just as Joseph, Mary and Jesus were coming to the Temple. St. Simeon took Jesus into his arms, and giving thanks to God, he spoke the words repeated by the Orthodox Church each evening at Vespers: *"Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people, a light to enlighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel"* (Luke 2:29-32). St. Simeon said to Mary: *"Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be spoken against. Yea, a sword shall pierce through your own soul also, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed"* (Luke 2:34-35).

Also at the Temple was Anna the Prophetess, the 84-year-old widow, *"who did not leave the temple, but served God with fasting and prayers night and day. She arrived just when St Simeon met Jesus. She also gave thanks to the Lord and spoke of Him to all those who were looking for redemption in Jerusalem"* (Luke 2:37-38). If you look closely at the icon of the Feast,

you will see Anna holding a scroll which reads: "This Child has established Heaven and earth."

In the Icon, you see Joseph is holding a cage with two doves to give to the High Priest as the offering for sacrifice. Since Joseph was poor, he could not give money to the Temple; so, the doves were the accepted alternative. This is done per Jewish law that a sacrifice is given or paid for when a child is presented to the Temple.

For Jesus, this becomes his formal entrance into his Jewish faith. He will be taught by Mary, Joseph and the Temple Elders so that he will know his faith completely. It is this Jewish faith that the Christian Church later is built upon. And yes, Jesus does question many things concerning his Jewish faith given that man had taken and written many laws that did not fit to what God meant for the faith. Jesus learns at a very early age that what God teaches and what man teaches are often two different things. Jesus has to learn the faith so that he will know what he must "re-teach" to help others come to God as the innocent children they were born as into this world.

*Rejoice, O Virgin Theotokos, full of grace!
From you shone the Sun of Righteousness, Christ our God.
Enlightening those who sat in darkness!
Rejoice, and be glad, O righteous elder;
You accepted in your arms the Redeemer of our souls,
Who grants us the Resurrection.
(Orthodox Hymn of the Feast)*

Desert Wisdom

A hermit said, We suffer temptation because we are careless. If we always remember that God dwells in us, we shall never bring into ourselves anything that is not his. The Lord Christ is in us and with us, and watches our life. Because we have Him within us and contemplate Him, we ought not to be idle; we should make ourselves holy as He is holy. If we stand upon a rock, the power of the wicked one will be broken. Do not be afraid of him, and he can do nothing against you. Pray with courage this psalm, "*They that trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion; they that dwell in Jerusalem shall stand fast for ever*" (Psalm 125:1).

Prayer Requests

Mom LeClair
Br. Yosi and Jim
Bill and Trish
Linda and Wayne
Liz and Courtney
Carol and Leonard
Lynette
Fr. David and family
Br. Damien and family
Fr. Rick Hobbs
Our Archbishop -- +Charles Smith, OSF

Eastern Rite Monastics within Ohio Orthodox Catholic Church

Br. Damien Simmons (Riasaphor monastic)
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Mother Barbara Martzall (schema-Archimandrite/Bishop of the monastics)

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Presentation of Jesus in the Temple

