

Monastic Musings

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

July 2012

From the Idle keyboard

by: schema-Archimandrite Barb



Summer has arrived and I have a feeling that it is going to be a great one. So far the weather has been cooperating so that we get the sun along with the necessary rain we need to have the grass and gardens growing. Almost back to normal weather wise, though I hate to say it too loudly. Don't want the hurricane season to think it can come up here and mess with us again this year!

Over my life time, I have come to the realization that we love to use terms to put people down when it comes to religion and beliefs or "pigeon hole them". Think about what comes to mind when I say

the following: Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Mormon, Sunni, Muslim, Fundamentalist, Evangelical, Jewish, etc. Do not these terms cause some sort of reaction – good or bad – in your mind? I have come to a point in my life that I have had to find a new term to use for those of us who follow the teachings of God, no matter what our basic religious faith is or has been. What I have come to realize is that we are all Children of God no matter what our faith/religious teachings have been or are presently. It is just that each of us may call God by a different name.

I am a child of God who follows the teachings given us by Jesus. Some are Children of God who follow the teaching given to them by Buddha or by Abraham, etc. But, we are all Children of God trying to live our lives so that we might please God and teach of God to those we come into contact with. We have to learn to stop using hateful words to "put down" those who may not believe exactly as we do! We all have been created equal in the eyes of God. No faith/religion is better than another. God had always taught us that he loves us all the time. He may not like some of the things we do, but he, like any parent, knows that we make mistakes and at some point will realize the mistakes and try to correct them. Personally I never see a God that is hateful and revengeful. I know in my heart only a God of love! It is man who wants us to think that God will punish us for not obeying the church laws set forth by man. Jesus taught us that we are to be respectful of all people. That their faith is their faith, but through the love of God we

can find common ground to live and work together. Is it not time to stop allowing ourselves to become involved in the divisiveness that occurs because of religion? There is one God but there are many paths/faiths to God. We must learn to find ways to be accepting of those who may not believe as we do, but know they are also on the same path as we are – being the Child of God the best way we know how. So for me to say I am Christian is really a word that creates division. Instead I like to say I am a Child of God! As I have had a chance to learn from others concerning their faith over the past few years only because I lived where there was a mixture of so many different cultures and I was curious as to what they believed, I have come to realize that they truly believe the same as I do. There is a God that has made us and is leading us to eternal life. The pathway we each take is a little different but in reality, we are all reaching for the same goal – Eternal life with our God no matter what name we have been taught to call him. May we take the time to put aside our fears for a moment concerning other faiths and learn about their faiths so that we can come together in a way to make this world a much better place to live. Each of us has a part to play in making things better. Become the Child of God that you were created to be! Love your neighbor as yourself no matter what their faith/religion may be is what Jesus has taught us. Jesus did not say to love only those of your faith/religious. He said love everyone as you would want to be loved. Let this become your challenge today and every day. Do not let faith/religion become the force that divides us but instead what joins us together.

July is such a wonderful spiritual month for me as I get to remember two Russian Orthodox Saints that are special to me – St. John the Wonderworker and St. Maria of Paris. This month, I am going to share with you the life of St. John the Wonderworker (the Archbishop of Shanghai and San Francisco). St. John is a contemporary Saint given that he died in 1966. He also was an Archbishop here in the US; so, he can be claimed as an American saint! I was not blessed to have known this saint personally, but only through many of the Russian Orthodox clergy and congregants I had the pleasure of talking with and studying with when I was studying to be ordained to the diaconate and priesthood in the early 1990's. I cherish the stories they have shared with me of him. I was so happy on the day they raised him up as a Saint! He was a wonderful man who truly cared about those he ministered to as well as the world around him.

Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama
by Rev. Mother Myrella LeClair

"(Compassion is) a strong unifying thread among all the major faiths. And these days we need to highlight what unifies us."

Leave it to a Roman Catholic Franciscan priest (who truly follows in the footsteps of St. Francis of Assisi) to introduce the students in his Christian Spirituality class to a religious leader who is not only not Roman Catholic but also not even Christian! That's exactly what Fr. James (OFM Conventual) did in 1997. All of my classmates (except for me) were conservative Roman Catholics who were not even willing to be open to other Christian traditions never mind being open to another faith. Fr. James, however, persisted in his endeavor to challenge our thinking.

Fr. James had given each one of us a copy of Franciscan Fr. Murray Bodo's article about the visit of the Dalai Lama to the Trappist Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky "to attend an East-West gathering of the Monastic Interreligious Dialogue". Fr. Murray wrote of his experience of holiness when the Dalai Lama looked into his eyes with "lovingkindness" as they joined hands and prayed together in silence – their prayer of love reaching out to and embracing the world.

To Fr. Murray, this experience confirmed in his mind “that all the world’s religions have the potential to produce good people, despite their differences of philosophy and doctrine”. It was this “good in other traditions” that Fr. James wanted to open our hearts and minds to. We are all the children of God and contain the essence of His divine nature -- although some religious traditions do not want to recognize that. Perhaps, they fear losing congregants or they believe that those who are not of their particular tradition are “the devil”. Fear not! God created each one of us, and we need not give up our own religious beliefs “in order to pray together, talk together in love and kindness”.



“All major religious traditions, although they differ in theological interpretations, carry basically the same message, that is love, compassion, tolerance, forgiveness.” (Dalai Lama)

Following in Fr. James’ ecumenical spirit, I requested that Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama, be added to our sanctoral calendar. I knew that doing so would at the very least “raise eyebrows” since he is the Chief High Priest of the Tibetan Buddhists. However, what qualifies a person to appear on our sanctoral calendar is that a person somehow exemplifies and promotes the values that Christ taught us: Love, Compassion/Mercy, Forgiveness, and Peace. Those values are not limited merely to Christians. Even those who practice other faiths can still promote the values that our beloved Jesus Christ taught us. Remember, it was Jesus Himself who placed no limits on whom He taught or whom he associated with. He first offered “living water” to a Samaritan – and to a woman, no less! (John 4)

His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, like Jesus, is a man of love and peace whose all-embracing compassion reaches out to all people everywhere. He knows that he is not Jesus, the Son of God, but a “simple Buddhist monk” and an “ordinary man”, who works to promote “lovingkindness”, peace and compassion throughout the world among all people. He has travelled around the world to participate in interreligious dialogues and foster interreligious harmony:

“Harmony among the major faiths has become an essential ingredient of peaceful coexistence in our world. From this perspective, mutual understanding among these traditions is not merely the business of religious believers — it matters for the welfare of humanity as a whole.”

What is so refreshing is that the Dalai Lama actually practices what he teaches. “My religion is kindness”. He could have succumbed to hatred and vengeance since he had the power to fuel the hatred and vengeance of the Tibetan people who have been exiled and denied their basic human rights by the Chinese government, but he has chosen not to do so. Instead, he promotes peace, non-violence, interreligious understanding, and compassion. He prays for the world.

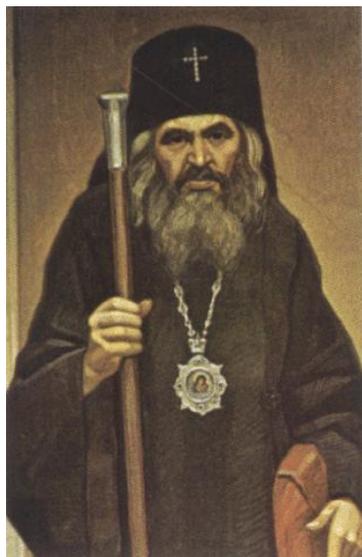
God’s grace shines through this “ordinary man”. Through his words and actions, he reminds me what Jesus taught us about loving one another, about being merciful, about praying for all of God’s creation. Christ commanded us to love one another. We do that by treating all as if they were Christ himself and responding accordingly. So, be not afraid to recognize the “heartbeat of

God” in people of all religious faiths or even those with no faith. You never know who Christ will send to help you in your journey along the Way.....

St. John the Wonderworker (Maximovitch)

by: schema-Archimandrite Barb

John Maximovitch was born June 4, 1896 in southern Russia (in an area now known as the Ukraine). He was a sickly child and ate very little! He received his secondary education in the Poltava Military School. He then entered the Kharkov Imperial University where he graduated with his law degree. While he was at the University, he spent much time reading the Lives of the Saints (of the Orthodox Church). He started to emulate the saints in how he lived his life and dealt with those around him. You might say, he was a monk in the making at this point in his life.



In 1921, because of the Russian Civil War, the Maximovitch family evacuated to Belgrade. There he entered the University of Belgrade and graduated with a degree in Theology. In 1924 he was ordained a Reader of the Russian Church in Belgrade. In 1926 he was tonsured a monk and ordained a deacon. Later that year, he was ordained a priest. He was a teacher and tutor while he ministered to the Greeks and Macedonian communities. He learned to celebrate Liturgy (Mass) in Greek for the locals.

While he was teaching at the Serbian Seminary of St. John the Theologian, it became evident that Father John (affectionately known as Vladika John to everyone throughout his entire life) was an extraordinary man. It was the students that discovered the great feats of asceticism (self-discipline) that he practiced daily. He barely slept at night but instead would walk through the dorms praying for the students and making sure their covers were on them and blessed them in their sleep with the sign of the cross. He never slept in a bed and would only allow himself an hour or two each night sitting in a chair or bent over on the floor praying before the icons for a little sleep. Years later, Father John admitted that since taking monastic vows, he had not slept laying in a bed!

In 1934 it was decided that Father John was to be elevated to the rank of bishop. Now that was not something Father John was looking for or even wanted! When he protested that this was out of the question since he had a speech defect and could not enunciate words clearly, he was told that the Prophet Moses had had the same difficulty! After his consecration as a bishop, he was assigned to the diocese of Shanghai China.

In China he brought unity back to the Russian Orthodox Church and found a way to help all who needed help in his refugee flock. He founded an orphanage that at the closing had 3500 children. It was this orphanage (along with the children) that he brought to America via the Philippines. The people of Shanghai soon learned of Bishop John's great asceticism. His asceticism was built on prayer and fasting. He only ate once a day at 11pm except during Lenten season and Advent season when he would fast - only having the communion bread daily. He would spend the nights in prayer, and when he finally became exhausted, he would put his

head on the floor and grab a couple of hours of sleep. His constant attention to self-denial had its root in the love of God, which he possessed in the tradition of the ancient church.

Bishop John wore clothing that was of the cheapest fabric, sandals (never any socks), or soft slippers. He often went barefoot as he would give away the sandals to the needy. He even celebrated Liturgy in his bare feet. I can just imagine the thoughts going through the congregation when they saw his bare feet! But Bishop John was a very simple man although he knew when he was required to put on the “official vestments” of his rank.



At this point, it became very apparent that Bishop John was not only a righteous man and an ascetic, but was so close to God that he was endowed with the gift of clairvoyance and healing.

In 1946 he was raised to the rank of Archbishop over all the Russian faithful in China. But in 1949, with the coming of Communism in China, it was time for the Russians to flee Shanghai and move to the Philippines. They remained there for 27 months while Archbishop John worked with the US government to allow them all to immigrate into the US and then settling in the San Francisco area.

In 1951, Archbishop John was reassigned to Western Europe, first to Paris and later to Brussels. As a leading hierarch of the Russian Church, he frequently traveled to the Synod meetings in New York City. It was during this time that the Western European Saints dating before the schism of the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church were added to the Church calendar for the Orthodox thanks to the work of Archbishop John and his desire to include saints who influenced the church as a whole. His reputation for holiness spread even among the non-Orthodox. In one of the Paris Catholic churches, a priest was trying to inspire his students. He told them this: “You demand proofs, you say that now there are neither miracles nor saints. Why should I give you theoretical proofs, when today there walks in the streets of Paris a saint – Saint Jean Nus Pieds (Saint John the Barefoot).” Yes, Archbishop John left an indelible mark on those who came in contact with just by how he lived!

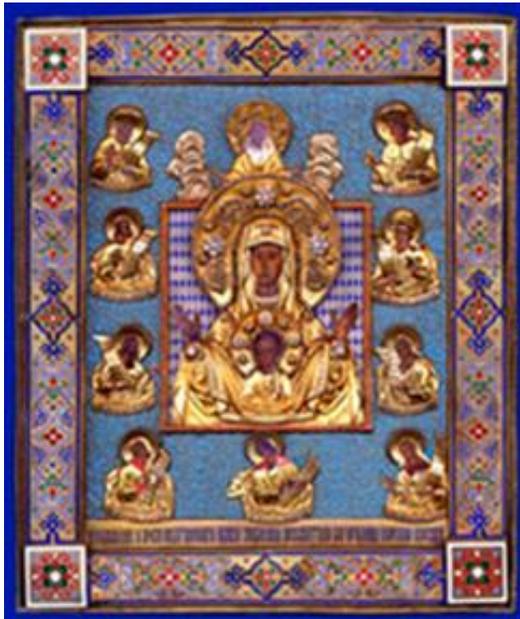
In 1962 Archbishop John was again given a new assignment. But this time it was in San Francisco and back with those who knew him from Shanghai. He rebuilt the community even though there were many attacks on his person – physically and mentally. His last years were filled with bitterness of slander and persecution, though he would not ever complain. Archbishop John’s life was governed by the standards of the spiritual life. And if this upset the routine order of things, it was in order to jolt the people out of their spiritual inertia and remind them that there is a higher judgment than the world’s judgment! Archbishop John was known to take daily long walks about the Russian Hill area of San Francisco, CA and spending the nights (raining or not) on the roof of the orphanage where he lived praying for the world. He became a part of the everyday life of the area with his walks. Archbishop John was easily recognized with his short bent over stature in his monastics and his walking stick.

In 1964 the Russian Church needed to select a new Metropolitan since the present one was retiring. On the second ballot, Archbishop John was tied with another younger Archbishop for the position. Archbishop John really did not want the position so he went to the other bishop and

asked him to accept the position. The next day, Archbishop John withdrew his name and the younger Archbishop was elected unanimously. Archbishop John rose to a high reputation among the hierarchs of the Russian Church before the end of his life. It was a reputation based not on any external qualities, for Archbishop John was frail, bent, without ambition or deceitfulness, unable even to speak clearly. It was based solely on those inner spiritual qualities which made him unquestionably one of the great Orthodox hierarchs of this century, and a holy man. In him righteousness shone brightly. Archbishop John was a very unique pastor and leader within the Russian Church.

Archbishop John died July 2, 1966 while visiting in Seattle. He had completed the celebration of Liturgy and remained in the church for 3 hours praying. He then returned to his room in the parish building. He was heard to fall. Several people ran up to his room and lifted him into a

chair. There he drew his last breath in the presence of the Kurski Icon of the Sign, one of the most ancient icons and one which holds great honor within the Russian Orthodox Church. He was buried (his body never was embalmed) in the basement under the altar area of the Holy Virgin Cathedral.



On July 2, 1994 Archbishop John was canonized as a saint within the Russian Orthodox Church. When the tomb was opened, they found that Archbishop John's body to be incorrupt. His body now lies in a special area on the main floor of the Holy Virgin Cathedral.

May Saint John the Wonderworker be our guide in how to live a spiritual life no matter where we are or what is happening in our lives! That we may be who we truly are, Children of God even when we don't really "fit in" as far as the world is concerned!

Call to Action

*"The world is my cloister, my body is my cell, and my soul is the hermit within."
-- St. Francis of Assisi*

St. Francis really could not said anything more true today. That is how the monastics of the Ohio Orthodox Catholic Church feel each and every day. Whether it be the Franciscan Order or the Eastern Rite Order, all have been called to serve God in the place they are living at the moment and in a way that will help the community they live in. Our monastic orders do not have physical monasteries and they have to provide everything for themselves, but they live their lives as monastic hermit!

Have you felt the call to be a monastic or hermit? If so, why not explore with Archbishop Charles (chancery@ohioocc.org) this feeling and see just where it might lead you.

Prayer Requests

Mom LeClair
Br. Yossi and Jim
Linda and Wayne
Fr. David and family
Fr. Rick Hobbs
Our Archbishop -- +Charles Smith, OSF

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for the
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All writings are the views of the author(s) on a particular subject and are meant to challenge your thinking so as to help you grow in your spiritual walk with God.

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