

Monasticism – Historical and Present Day

A Day in a Monastery.

Most of Orthodox monasteries follow the cenobitic rule of monastic life: a community of monastics holding all things in common, following a daily schedule of prayer and work in obedience to their spiritual father/mother. The monastic's daily program begins early in the morning with personal prayer time followed by the cycle of worship services and the Divine Liturgy. After breakfast the monastics begin their work day, attending to prayer and their tasks till evening. Tasks may include among others: grounds-keeping; gardening; iconography; charitable work with children, seniors and the sick; teaching; sewing; embroidery; woodworking; publishing; food preparation; and offering hospitality. The day continues with evening Vespers followed by supper, Compline. At the end of the day every monk has his own personal prayer rule. That is the time when in silence a person can be alone with God, and enjoy the sweet fruits of peace and sweetness of union with God

through the Jesus Prayer. The exact hours when the daily schedule begins and ends vary. A typical daily routine is as follows:

*5:30 AM - Midnight Service, Matins,
First, Third, Sixth Hours and Divine
Liturgy*

9:00 AM – Breakfast and Tasks

Noon - Lunch

*6:00 PM - Ninth Hour, Vespers and
Supper*

*8:30 PM - Small Compline, personal
Prayer time*

In the monasteries with the “cenobitic” (which means “common way”) of monastic life, everyone follows the same daily schedule, under the direction of the Abbot/Abbess. Meals are eaten together; work, rest periods, and services are conducted together according to the monastery's schedule. Every monastery is a holy monastery of Our Lord, Jesus Christ; that is, a place of prayer and redemption for those people leading a monastic life, and for pious pilgrims.

Historical background of monasticism.

Christianity was persecuted during the first centuries, and often Chris-

tians fled from these persecutions and were able to find shelter in large deserts, where they could live undetected, and worship God in peace. An example for this is the life of St. Paul of Thebes. In time, such a mode of living seemed fit for those who desired to strive to live perfectly the biblical commandments and counsels. This inspired St. Anthony the Great in the 3rd century to found the hermitic style of monasticism in the Egyptian deserts. According to this style, monks lived mostly in individual isolation. And around 318, Saint Pachomius in Egypt began to organize his many followers in what was to become the first Christian monastery, in which monks lived together. This is another style of monasticism, called cenobitic. The Egyptian monks of the first centuries were abundantly graced with spiritual gifts: hope, faith, prayer, prophecy, healing, languages, and theology. These gifts of Holy Spirit are a normative state of any Christian (1 Cor. 12). The monastics cultivated them to a higher degree.

When Christianity became legal, another monastic center appeared in Constantinople. One of its greatest

achievements was the cenobitic Rule written by St. Theodore the Studite for his monastery the Studion. This Rule remains as an unsurpassed example of monastic organization and is in use by all Orthodox monastic communities today.

In 1062 in Constantinople, this rule was carefully copied by St. Ephraim, a monk of the Lavra Monastery of the Caves in Kyiv and brought back to Ukraine. From the Lavra of the Caves these rules spread to other monastic communities in Ukraine and in other Slavic lands.

In 10th century due to historical events, particularly the barbaric conquests, another great center of monastic civilization arose and flourished on the Athos peninsula in Greece. Today, Mt. Athos or the Holy Mountain continues to be an active and strong centre of Orthodox monasticism. There one can find those who strive to live the same type of Christianity with all its characteristics as Apostle Paul describes in his Epistles.

Monastery have always played a great role in the Orthodox Church. Almost all the Fathers of the Church,

theologians who compiled the Holy Doctrines of the Church, were monks. Most of the Saints of the Orthodox Church Calendar are monastics. Nowadays, as it had always been, the Church elects her Bishops only from monastic Clergy.

Today there is no Orthodox Church without monastics. Our homeland Ukraine is covered with monasteries where the children of our people devotedly serve God. There is a multitude of monasteries across Europe. Here, in North America once can also find monastics and monasteries.

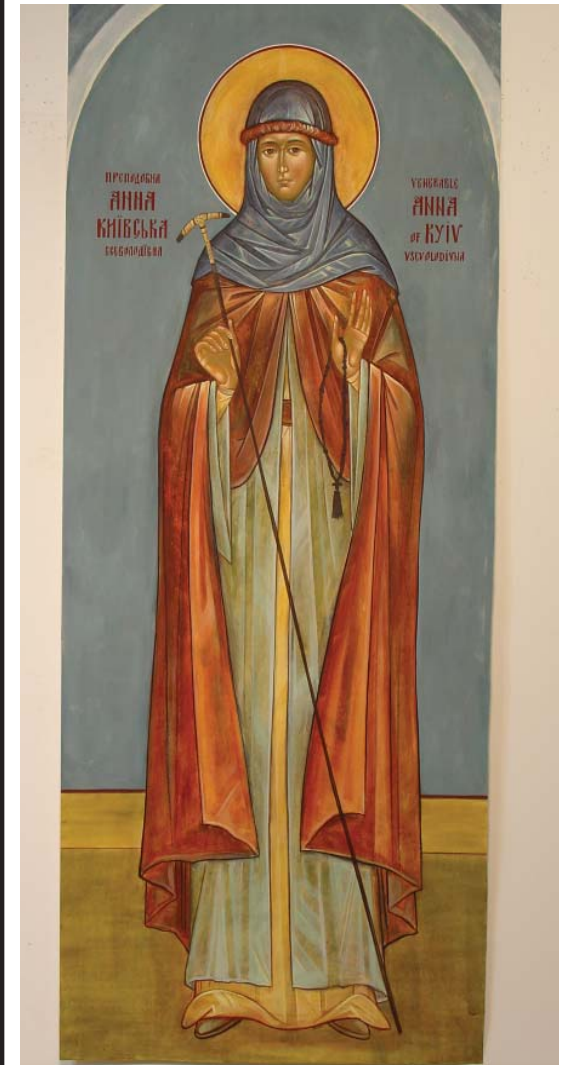
-Sr. Bohdanna (Bakay)

Venerable Ann of Kyiv, Princess of Kyiv, daughter of Vsevolod (1093), Abbess of St Andrew Monastery, founder of the first Ukrainian School for girls, whose memory is celebrated on 3/16 November. (Iconographer- Mrs. Vera Lazarowich-Senchuk)

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*Venerable Ann of Kyiv,
Princess of Kyiv*