

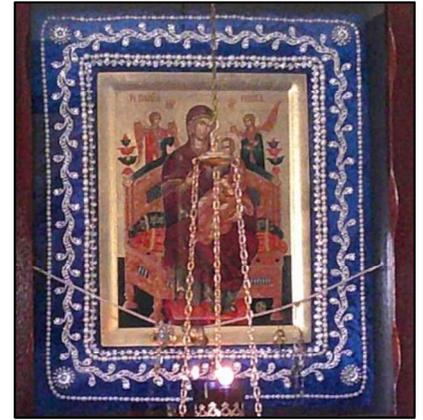


Volunteer workday, Nov. 2nd



Skete of the Most Holy Theotokos  
and Ever-Virgin Mary,  
Queen of All  
The Healer of Cancer

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Queen of All icon in the Skete's Chapel

Winter 2024/25

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Christ is in our midst!

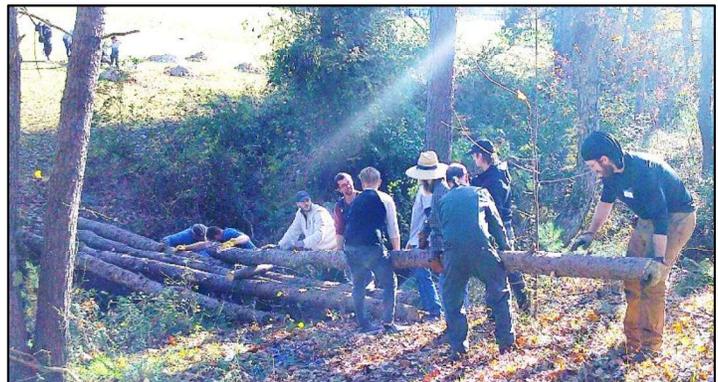
“How do I know that I am doing God’s will?” This is a frequent question from pilgrims to the Skete. To some, it seems natural to know God’s will, something that cannot be explained, they just inherently know. But to others it can be more of a struggle, especially people who face all of the unavoidable stimuli of living *in the world* – something which is unavoidable.

As we approach the Nativity of Christ, it is a nice time to reflect on this question that puzzles so many. We know that we can discern God’s will because the Apostle John tells us that *if we do God’s will*, then we will know whether something is of God or if it is from our imagination (7:17). The Bible is filled with references to understanding God’s will, we need only to read it every day to find the answer to this and many other perplexing issues. For me, this reading is best done in the wee hours of the morning when the world is quiet, before leaving my kellia to start the day.

When people seek to know God’s will it is generally for a response to a specific need. Yet these individuals have not addressed both the internal and external factors that may affect *why* they lack discernment to know if they are hearing God. They are calling upon God and seeking immediate gratification at a specific point in time, believing that somehow God is outside of creation and enters it only when He is needed. In other words, we expect God to become *our* servant. And then, because they do not receive the response they have already decided upon, they do not fully hear God.

Understanding God’s will becomes more difficult in light of the spiritual warfare launched against us in seemingly normal distractions: advertisements, cars, laughter and chattering, phones ringing, loud music (even as you fill your gas tank), colors, smells, and more. In a monastic environment, life is a little calmer and simpler: there is no media, fragrance is the heavenly aroma of incense, color is seen in the flowers and greenery of God’s nature and in the holy icons, and noise is the rhythmic ringing of the censer bells or the bleats of nearby sheep.

But while all the externals are important – and I urge people to stand quietly in front of their icon corner with just the low glow of a vigil lamp, no noise, no other light source, and to empty oneself to silence – more significant is the internal. We must acquire discernment through prayer, good works, trying to calm the passions, acquiring virtue. Now is a good time to make a fresh start in our quest for discernment. We are calming down our bodies by fasting and engaging in the Church’s services that are preparing and leading us to the birth of Christ.



Work day: foreground is men making a log bridge with cut bull pines; background is RJ supervising planting of green giants for a wind break from the north winds.



Above Workday (l-r): Reader Paisios Newton (St. Tikhon); Hieromonk Aidan (St. Demetrios Monastery); Mother Andrea; Pannikhida/ Vespers Celebrant Father John Cook (St. Tikhon); Deacon Joseph Sirko (Church of the Assumption); Reader Noah Wyatt (St. Tikhon).

Right (l-r): Kelly Mine and Kathy Miroy – interesting how in a monastic setting, work is enjoyable!



In Skete news, the November Grounds Beautification workday was delightful, with participants driving from as far as Georgia and Florida! Thanks to all volunteers, and especially to:

- LiL' Guss' 3rd-generation restaurant in Grottoes, Virginia, for catering a magnificent lunch;
- The benefactors who provided \$10,000 to purchase equipment, trees, vineyard posts/wire, cedar raised beds, concrete, crusher run gravel, and other items;
- Eleni Raccanello for assisting at vespers with her beautiful Byzantine chant;
- Dimitrios (Liam) Chassé of Renaissance Man Company for the time spent before the workday preparing the ground to plant trees; and
- The mothers who worked with the children to teach them about St. Hilarion, make paper crafts, fly kites, and other activities. Friendships were formed that will last a lifetime.

Two subsequent groups came on later dates: one to split and stack firewood, and another to level the raised beds in the vegetable garden.

In other happenings, the iconography in the chapel is progressing; and the reliquary built into the wall is almost completed, needing only trim and glass. The online gift shop is more complex than I understood and is therefore an ongoing work in progress.

Thank you for all that you have done to bring the Queen of All Skete to this stage, may you be blessed! Please keep the Skete in your holy prayers, and know that you are remembered in prayer as well. Have a blessed Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord!

*Mother Andrea*

Right: Paraskeve Kalvesmaki working on the Platytera icon; Below: the reliquary containing 38 relics of female saints (inset is St. Ludmila).

