

Pastoral Visit to Katerine, Greece



ON THE Sunday of Cheesefare, (February 25, 2008 [Old Style]), the eve of the beginning of Holy and Great Lent, His Grace, Bishop Klemes of Gardikion celebrated the Divine Liturgy at our parish Church of All Saints, in Katerine, in order to convey to its pious Flock the love and prayers of His Eminence, Metropolitan Cyprian, who is ailing. This pastoral visit was also a practical expression and demonstration of our Holy Synod's concern for our faithful in Pieria, in heroic Greek Macedonia.

Taking part in the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy were the parish's hospitable pastor, the Reverend Father Bitalios Almanides, and Bishop Klemes' companions on this visit, the Reverend Father Jiri Ján and Subdeacons Apostolos Phykiyas and Christos Giatrakos, who are always ready and willing to assist. A large crowd of pious parishioners was in prayerful attendance.

- In his homily, Bishop Klemes discussed the way in which our fasting may be pleasing to God and the basic presuppositions for the fruitful exercise thereof, namely, **forgiveness** and **reconciliation**. Fasting, which constitutes a token of our sacrifice for the sake of the Lord's commandment and a means whereby our nature may be healed, receives Heavenly recompense and bears fruits of Grace when it is placed on the foundation of **repentance, humility, and love**. This sacred triptych renders our fasting acceptable to the Lord and unites us, without hindrance, with God and



with other people. **Forgiveness** and **reconciliation** constitute clear indications that we allow the Grace of God to come and fill our existence, granting us peace, joy, and repose and bestowing on us a foretaste of Paradise.

But wherever there are divisions and scandals and an absence of forgiveness, forbearance, and reciprocity, even the strictest fasting loses all of its value and is transformed into a means whereby we may fall into delusion or destroy our spiritual, or even bodily, health.

His Grace made special mention of the extremely instructive and well-known example of the Holy Martyr Nikephoros the Forbearing (commemorated on February 9), who begged forgiveness of the unworthy Priest, Saprikios, thereby winning the Crown of Truth in his place. The resentful Saprikios, justly abandoned by God, reached the point of denying his Faith and earning eternal perdition on account of his hard-heartedness and unforgiveness.

- After the conclusion of this festal Divine Liturgy, a small gathering was held inside the Church. Bishop Klemes and the two Priests sat down with as many members of the devout Flock as desired to remain, in order to develop a better and closer spiritual acquaintanceship and a relationship of mutual edification.



His Grace spoke, in a simple and direct manner, on the spiritual topics of **love** and the **Jesus Prayer**, the way in which these are practiced in a spirit of **repentance** and **self-reproach**, the salvific effects they produce on man, as well as the obstacles that arise in this pursuit. He also briefly touched on the subject of the subtle ecclesiastical differentiation

between us and the innovationists of the New Calendar Church, and also between us and certain of our anti-ecumenist brethren, so as to underscore the necessity of combining Orthodoxy (correct belief) and Orthopraxy (correct observance of the Faith), with discretion and steadfastness.

The faithful present were then able to pose questions, and an interesting discussion arose in which they received guidance and clarifications regarding (primarily) practical matters. The Fathers also stressed the need for obedience to one's spiritual Father for consistency in one's spiritual life.

On the whole, this opportunity for spiritual communication was very interesting and strengthening. By the admission of the faithful, it afforded them *wings* and *spiritual provisions* for the arena of the Great Fast, and everyone expressed the hope that this type of ecclesiastical ministry might be continued and augmented, to the glory of God and the edification of the faithful.



The Bishop, Priests, and a small portion of the congregation.

