

A Most Edifying Pastoral Visit to Italy and Sweden

(May 16 - 23, 2010, Old Style)

By the Grace of God and the protection of the *Theotokos*, and with the blessing of His Eminence, Metropolitan Cyprian of Oropos and Phyle, His Grace, Bishop Cyprian of Oreoi, Acting President of the Holy Synod in Resistance, made his first pastoral visit, with synodal approval, to Italy and his second to Sweden, where His Eminence, Bishop Silvano of Luni and His Grace, Bishop Johannes of Makarioupolis, respectively, serve as Exarchs, both of them with God-pleasing zeal.

In Pistoia, Italy, on the Occasion of the Feast Day of St. Alexander of Kentoukellai

On May 16 (Old Style), Bishop Cyprian departed from Athens by air with a group of sixteen people, including Father Jiří Ján, Hierodeacon Theochares Hagiokyprianites (who hails from Sweden), Subdeacon Antonios Hagiokyprianites, Mother Justina (from the Convent of St. Paraskeve, Acharnai, Attica), Mother Vasilia (acting as translator) and Sister Justina (both from the Convent of the Holy Angels, Aphidnai, Attica), and lay brothers and sisters in Christ.

Parenthetically, we should note that Sister Justina entered the Convent of the Holy Angels in 2006, at the exhortation of Bishop Silvano, her spiritual Father, with the prospect of later returning to Italy to found a *Hesychasterion*, near Pistoia, dedicated to the *Panagia* of the Burning Bush. Economic difficulties notwithstanding, Bishop Silvano has already bought a building, which he is currently restoring for this purpose, and which is located in a forest near the Reno River.

The group of pilgrims led by Bishop Cyprian landed at the Fiumicino International Airport in Rome at noon. There followed a five-hour bus ride, along the Via Aurelia, to the Monastery of St. Seraphim of Sarov, in San Felice, near Pistoia. Italy greeted us hospitably with its forests and green fields, brilliant under the springtime sun.

Around 6:00 p.m., we climbed with some difficulty up a narrow and winding path, amidst luxuriant vegetation, and arrived at the gates of the



monastery, which serves as the Bishop's residence. Here, we were warmly greeted by Bishop Silvano, clergy, and laypeople.

In the small, compunction-evoking Church, dedicated to St. Alexander and St. Agapetos, we immediately began the vigil service (Vespers and Matins, according to the Russian *Typikon*) in honor of the Holy Martyr Alexander of Kentoukellai. Bishop Silvano has decreed that the Feast Day of the Saint, commemorated by the Church on May 14, be celebrated on the Sunday that falls immediately thereafter, which this year coincided with the Sunday of All Saints.



St. Alexander, who was an officer in the regiment of Count Tiberian under Emperor Maximian, was martyred in the beginning of the fourth century near Rome, in Kentoukellai (present-day Civitavecchia). His Relics remained in the catacombs of Rome until the fifteenth century. In the sixteenth century, they were transferred to Pistoia at the request of one of the city's noblemen, and placed under the altar of the Church of San Domenico, which had been built with his funds. Later, they were transferred to the Monastery of the Venerable Forerunner (St. John the Baptist), which was damaged during World War II. The Relics remained thereafter in oblivion, wrapped in cotton in a box, and placed in a chest for holy vessels. The monastery was later turned into a school, the principal of which was an acquaintance of the then Father Silvano, who had just recently embraced the Orthodox Faith. The director decided to give Father Silvano the Relics, in order that they might be accorded proper honor, to the great displeasure of the local Roman Catholic bishop.

The Relics began to give off a delicate, rose-scented fragrance and to work many miracles. As Bishop Silvano told us, these Relics



delivered the Monastery of St. Seraphim from the powerful effects of black magic. Before he took possession of the building, it had been owned, over time, by *twenty* different people, who had all left it in turn, terrorized by demonic apparitions and signs. From the time, however, that Bishop Silvano made a procession with the Relics of St. Alexander around the monastery, sprinkling it with Holy Water, all of the strange demonic signs disappeared once and for all.



The choir, made up of brothers of the monastery, clergy, and laypeople, chanted the vigil service with compunction in Italian, to Russian melodies, in three-part harmony. Bishop Cyprian read the Six Psalms in Greek. After the Gospel Reading at Matins, Bishop Silvano performed the Small Blessing of the Waters, immersing the Precious Cross and the skull of St. Alexander in the water. During the reading of the Canons, the crowd of worshippers venerated the Relics and the Cross, while Bishop Cyprian anointed them with holy oil from St. Alexander.



Before the Dismissal, Bishop Silvano welcomed the pilgrims from Greece and expressed his great love for our ailing Metropolitan and his joy for Bishop Cyprian, who has been charged with the especially heavy responsibility of serving as Acting President of the Holy Synod. He then explained that it is impossible for us to be Christians, monastics, or Bishops, without being a little “crazy,” according to worldly logic, and that this fact has given him the boldness to start a small *Hesychasterion* for women in the face of great difficulties. For example, the Fathers do not even have the money to pay for heating in winter! Bishop Cyprian then spoke about the four elements of which prayer must be composed, according to the Holy Fathers: doxology, thanksgiving, repentance, and supplication. During the vigil, and again during the Divine Liturgy the next morning, collections were made for the new *Hesychasterion*.

At the end of the vigil, around 11:30 p.m., the reliquary with the Holy Relics was transferred by car to the parish Church in Pistoia, in preparation for the Divine Liturgy the next morning.

The pilgrims were then shown to their rooms, after which the clergy and monastics dined in the monastery’s refectory, which is decorated with frescos. The laypeople were served in the adjoining spacious hall. The monastery’s obliging brothers, assisted by pious laypeople, labored with great

self-denial, love, and spiritual joy.

Bishop Silvano, the monastery's Abbot, currently has two monastics under obedience, who speak Italian fluently: Novice Evgenios, who is Russian, and Hierodeacon Paul, who hails from Togo, in West Africa. Hierodeacon Paul is studying at the St. Gregory the Great Free Orthodox Seminary, which is housed in the Monastery of St. Seraphim of Sarov.

During the meal, Bishop Silvano told us, with charm and wisdom, that there are three things he does not count: 1. his sins, so as not to fall into despair; 2. money, because he has difficulty managing finances, which is why he has entrusted another person with this rôle; 3. time, when he is delivering a sermon—he looks the faithful in the eyes, and when he sees that their attention is wavering, he wraps it up!



On Sunday morning, the pilgrims went to the parish Church of the Holy Martyrs and Confessors of Orthodoxy of the Twentieth Century, located in the center of Pistoia. After the reading of the Hours, the festal Divine Liturgy began. Bishop Cyprian was the principal celebrant, assisted by Bishop Silvano, Protopresbyter Vitale Stelyan, Father Daniele Marletta, Father Jiří Ján, Hierodeacons Paul and Theochares, and five Subdeacons. Also taking part was a large, multi-ethnic crowd of faithful (Russians, Romanians, and Ethiopians, among others) from Pistoia and other regions of Italy.



After the reading of the Holy Gospel, Bishop Cyprian, at Bishop Silvano's request, delivered a homily in which he stressed the need for exactitude in our confession of the Orthodox Faith, as an indispensable foundation for our salvation, sanctifi-

cation, and union with God. He likewise stressed the necessity of fidelity to the Tradition of the Holy Apostles, the Holy Fathers, and the Holy Œcumenical Synods. In this context, he stressed that our guide in this process is the Most Blessed *Theotokos* herself, as she has revealed to us in various ways throughout the ages.

By way of example, he told the story of a certain Kosmiane, the wife of an eminent dignitary in Jerusalem. This Kosmiane was a follower of the heresy of Monophysitism. Wishing to venerate the All-Holy Tomb of our Lord, she entered the Church of the Resurrection. The *Panagia*, however, appeared to her together with other Saints and did not allow her to proceed, saying that “you are not with us.” Only when Kosmiane accepted the Orthodox Confession and communed of the Immaculate Mysteries from the Archdeacon of the Church of the Resurrection did the *Theotokos* allow her to worship at the Source of Life, the Life-Giving Tomb.

He also related the example of *Staretz* Boris from the renowned Monastery of Valaam on Lake Ladoga. In 1925, the Brotherhood had split into two factions: those who continued to follow the Old Calendar, and those who accepted the New. The ecclesiastical authorities decided to expel from the monastery all those who did not accept the New Calendar and who, consequently, did not attend services in the monastery’s main Church. The *Panagia* revealed to *Staretz* Boris that “if you want to be saved, you must remain faithful to the Tradition of the Holy Apostles and Holy Fathers; do not listen to the ‘wise’ men of this age.”

Finally, Bishop Cyprian exhorted the faithful to be patient in afflictions, to be distinguished by a spirit of compassionate nobility, and to be in a constant state of watchfulness: “watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.”

Bishop Silvano then read the first exorcism prayer for the making of a Catechumen over Serge from the Togo, who entered into the rank of Catechumen. After his Baptism, he plans to remain at the Monastery of St. Seraphim to study in the seminary and to prepare for the Priesthood, with



the prospect of organizing an Orthodox community in his homeland. This is one more example of the Bishop’s insistence that Catechumens undergo serious and profound preparation for their Baptism.

It was moving that the “Our Father” was read in six languages: Italian, Romanian, Slavonic, Ukrainian, Georgian, and Greek. Before the Dismissal, a procession took place with the Holy Relics of St. Alexander through the center of the city.

Finally, Bishop Cyprian gave Bishop Silvano an

Icon of the *Panagia Paramythia* (January 21), which was painted at one of our monasteries in Greece. The prototype is preserved at the Monastery of Vatopedi on the Holy Mountain. Bishop Cyprian exhorted the faithful always to have respect and love for, as well as trust in, their Shepherd and spiritual Father, seeing in him an unerring guide to salvation. In an atmosphere of resurrectional joy, he distributed to the faithful reproductions of the wonderworking Icon of the *Theotokos* “The Guarantor of Sinners,” before which the aforementioned Monk Boris prayed, as well as small Icons of All Saints and a quotation translated into Italian regarding compassionate nobility.



At the end of the Divine Liturgy, around 2 p.m., the pilgrims were taken



back to the monastery, where they were all served a generous meal. Following a brief siesta, a *Synaxis* was held in the monastery’s new library hall, dedicated to His Eminence, Metropolitan Cyprian, which was attended by clergy and faithful from Italy, Romania, and Greece. Also present was our beloved old friend, Father Marco Davitti, together with his disciple, Hieromonk Sergey. Father Marco has always cherished a profound love and respect for Metropolitan Cyprian and the Fathers of our monastery in Phyle.

Three subjects were discussed at the *Synaxis*:

1. Authority in the Church. The meaning of authority was reversed by Christ’s Incarnation and Death on the Cross. The first is now called upon to be last and a minister unto all. The Shepherd must receive the prodigal son in his fatherly embrace with affection, tenderness, and love, in the image of the Heavenly Father. The pyramid has been turned on its head: the top has become the base. The Shepherd is not a ruler, but a Minister, and washes the feet of his sheep. The Shepherd—and, by extension, every believer—receives authority not over people, but only over unclean spirits.

2. The Divine Eucharist. The two Bishops explained at length to the faithful that it is the duty of Christians to commune at every Liturgy they attend, with proper preparation, to be sure, which is determined by one's spiritual Father. We must aspire not merely to regular or frequent, but *constant* communion, according to Sts. Nicodemos the Hagiorite and Makarios of Corinth. The faithful, however, should not rebel against those Shepherds who forbid them to do so; rather, they should try to help them to understand the need for it. The Bishops spoke about the zeal of the first Christians for Holy Communion and gave a modern-day example, to show that this zeal has not completely disappeared in our age.

3. The lack of infallibility among the Saints. Some Saints did not accept this practice of constant—or at least frequent—communion. This, however, does not diminish their sanctity. The Saints, being human, are not infallible. Bishop Cyprian cited the example of St. Gregory of Nyssa and St. Epiphanius of Cyprus, who, though they are considered great Fathers of the Church, nevertheless expressed views that the Church did not adopt. He also set forth, by way of example, the clarification by St. John Chrysostomos regarding the matter of oaths: Even though Christ in the Gospel absolutely forbade oaths, the Great Apostle Paul swore on oath. We respect the person of the Holy Apostle, though we always prefer to follow with precision the commandment of the Lord.

Following this edifying *Synaxis*, around 9:30 p.m., the guests were treated to refreshments in the monastery courtyard, after which everyone retired to their rooms, except for the two Bishops, who remained well past midnight discussing various ecclesiastical matters regarding the Holy Synod in Resistance, in a spirit of profound love, respect, and mutual esteem.

At 3:30 a.m., the pilgrims from Greece left for Milan, from where they would travel by air to Sweden.



This unforgettable visit was truly a great gift of our Lord! It strengthened the unity among Greek and Italian Old Calendarist Orthodox faithful, and it helped us to become better acquainted with our brothers and sisters in Italy and to esteem their struggle on behalf of the Orthodox Faith. Conditions in this country are extremely difficult, since they have to deal not so much with Roman Catholics, as with the prevalent worldly mentality and with the representatives of various “official” Churches (of Constantinople in particular, as well as of Moscow, Serbia, and Romania). We marvelled at the Providence of God, in His love for mankind, which illumines and guides well-disposed souls in divers ways to the Truth of Orthodoxy. Our brothers and sisters in Italy, together with their Most Reverend Bishop, expressed

their profound gratitude and their feeling that our visit left them with much peace and love in Christ.

In Stockholm, Sweden, on the Occasion of the Feast Day of Sts. Constantine and Helen

On Monday, May 18/31, at 12:40 p.m., we flew from the Malpensa International Airport in Milan to Arlanda Airport in Stockholm, where we arrived at 3 p.m. Father Anders Åkerström, Deacon Father Stefan Jaerpenberg, his wife Victoria, and a number of the faithful from our parish in Stockholm were there to welcome Bishop Cyprian and the other pilgrims from Greece.

Everyone went directly to the Church of Sts. Constantine and Helen,



in Vårberg, southwest of Stockholm, where His Grace, Bishop Johannes of Makarioupolis welcomed Bishop Cyprian and those with him with great joy. Shortly thereafter, Greeks and Swedes alike were served dinner at the house of Hierodeacon Theochares' biological mother. During the meal, Bishop Johannes was able to tell us very edifying stories from his

long experience in the missionary field of Sweden. Bishop Cyprian offered Bishop Johannes, Father Anders, and Deacon Father Stefan various gifts as blessings from his recent pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

That evening, the clergy were accommodated at the Bishop's residence attached to the Church of Sts. Constantine and Helen, while the laypeople stayed at the houses of families belonging to the parish.

On Tuesday, May 19 (Old Style), we went to the Convent of St. Philothei of Athens, located near Villberga, Grillby, where Bishop Cyprian celebrated a Hierarchical Divine Liturgy with Father Anders, Father Jiří, Deacons Theochares and Stefan, and Subdeacon Antonios. Mother Justina from the Convent of St. Paraskeve chanted. She was assisted by the Rev. Mother Taxiarchia, Abbess of the Convent of the Holy Angels (Aphidnai, Attica), who had already arrived in Sweden on Saturday, May 16/29, with one of her nuns, Mother Magdalene (who is originally from Sweden). The two had joined Mother Philothei at her convent on Sunday afternoon, after attending the Liturgy at the Church of Sts. Constantine and Helen. This was Mother



Taxiarchia's first visit to Sweden and to her spiritual daughter, Mother Philothei, a native of Sweden, who is no longer able to travel to Greece every year, as she used to do, on account of illness and old age.

This *Hesychasterion* is located in tranquil surroundings, surrounded by fields and forests. Mother Philothei, a former orthodontist and Lutheran deaconess, has resided here some twenty-two years now. She was baptized into Orthodoxy in 1986 by Bishop Johannes, whom she had come to know when taking Iconography lessons from him, and was tonsured a nun at the Convent of the Holy Angels in 1987.

Our visit took place during the most beautiful season in Sweden, when everything is green and in bloom. It was a glorious, sunny day, and the birds were warbling cheerfully in the trees. The natural surroundings were resurrectional. . . .



In his sermon, Bishop Cyprian reminded us that the Fast of the Holy Apostles had just begun, which serves as another opportunity to make a good start in repentance. Repentance, however, is interwoven with trials and the voluntary or involuntary afflictions of asceticism. He spoke to us about the need for afflictions and trials in our lives: These should not come as a surprise to Orthodox Christians; we should be surprised when we do *not* encounter them. Patience and magnanimity are needed, however. The Saints sought out tribulations as a sign that God had not forgotten them. He spoke about a certain monk who, while undergoing a great affliction, saw a vision of people dressed in white who encircled the Throne of God. During their lives, these people had passed through the “noetic river of afflictions” with patience and thanksgiving, for which reason they had “put on Christ.” And now they ever chant around his Throne the well-known liturgical hymn: “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. Alleluia.”

His Grace conveyed the blessing of our ailing Elder, Metropolitan Cyprian, to Mother Philothei, to whom he gave several Icons and other gifts. He

reminded us, with particular emphasis, that this small Convent of St. Philothei is the fruit of the love of our Metropolitan, but no less of his *boldness*. A light meal followed in the garden, at the end of which Mother Philothei answered at length questions about her journey towards Orthodoxy and monasticism.



At 6 p.m., we left with several Swedish friends for Lake Mälaren. Sweden's third largest lake, it reaches all the



way to the center of Stockholm, eventually emptying into the Baltic Sea. Its water is so clean that it serves as Stockholm's drinking water. There, in the forest, next to the lake, the Greek visitors admired the cleanliness that prevails in the Swedish outdoors, as well as the methods employed to preserve it.

At 7:30 p.m., we arrived back at the Church of Sts. Constantine and Helen, where we dined with Bishop Johannes and other parishioners in an atmosphere of great spiritual love and prayer. That night, two more pilgrims joined us from Greece to take part in Thursday's Feast Day celebration.

On Wednesday, May 20 (Old Style), we travelled to Uppsala, the "city of students" and "of bicycles," which serves as the cultural, national, and religious capital of Sweden. In the Church of the Dormition of the *Theotokos*, located in the center of the city, Bishop Cyprian celebrated the Divine Liturgy with Father Anders Åkerström (the Church's Rector), Father Jiří, Deacons Theochares and Stefan, and Subdeacon Antonios.

In his homily, Bishop Cyprian pointed out the historic importance of this Liturgy, since it was served in Uppsala, the center of Lutheranism in Sweden. He said that our Liturgy served as a powerful witness to the Light and Truth, here in the center of heresies. He explained to us how Martin Luther fell into error by subjecting the Tradition of the Church to a rationalistic critique, and how one innovation led to another. It is of particular importance that our Church in Uppsala is dedicated to the Dormition of the *Theotokos*, since the heterodox deny the lofty and soteriological place of the *Panagia* in the Church, whereas the Orthodox venerate her as the First after

the Holy Trinity. In the person of the *Theotokos*, woman is honored to the highest degree; the Mother of God is the prototype of women.

His Grace gave Father Anders an Icon and other gifts, conveyed the blessing and prayers of Metropolitan Cyprian, and once again stressed, as



he had at the Convent of St. Philothei, that this parish is also the fruit of the Metropolitan's love and boldness. He had always desired to celebrate the Divine Liturgy in this parish, though he was never able to fulfill his dream. Nevertheless, Bishop Cyprian stressed, he was present in spirit at this Liturgy.

At Father Anders' apartment, located in the center of Uppsala, Presbytera Birgitta served the pilgrims a light meal with wonderful hospitality. Bishop Cyprian urged Father Anders to find a different building for the parish in Uppsala so that they would not be dependent on the Lutheran Church, from which they have leased their Church. He explained that our Metropolitan always wanted us to remain unfettered in our ecclesiastical work. He promised that the faithful in Greece will contribute towards the purchase of a new building, and gave Father Anders a symbolic donation to inaugurate this endeavor.

Among other things, Father Anders told us about St. Anna of Novgorod, the first Orthodox Christian Swede. His Grace stressed the great mission of our parishes in Sweden to lead other souls to Orthodoxy. At the end of the meal, he thanked Father Anders and his Presbytera, conveying to them his best wishes.

We then returned to Stockholm for Vespers for the Feast of Sts. Constantine and Helen. Bishop Cyprian officiated, assisted by Bishop Johannes, Fathers Anders and Jiří, and Deacons Theochares and Stefan. Afterwards, Bishop Johannes expressed his great pleasure and enthusiasm over the visit

by the pilgrims from Greece, who came to honor the parish's Patron Saints. He expressed the wish that these Saints grant the pilgrims strength and support in their spiritual struggles. It was clear at this moment that Bishop Johannes was experiencing a mystical visitation of Grace.

As we all dined in the Church hall, Bishop Johannes recounted to us how he became Orthodox, how he came to Sweden, and how he met his wife, Presbytera Monika, who was vouchsafed to be tonsured a Great Schema nun, shortly before her repose, with the name Nun Parthenia. More edifying conversation ensued.



On Thursday, May 21 (Old Style), the festal Divine Liturgy was served in honor of Sts. Constantine and Helen, Equals-to-the-Apostles, at the Church dedicated to them in Stockholm. Taking part were Their Graces, Bishops Cyprian and Johannes, Fathers Anders and Jiří, Deacons Theochares and Stefan, many Subdeacons, and a large crowd of faithful. The choir, directed by Reader Peter Magneli, chanted in Swedish, Greek, and Slavonic.



In his homily, Bishop Cyprian spoke about the life of St. Constantine and his importance in our Church, since, among other things, he delivered the Church from persecutions and convened the First Holy Œcumenical Synod in Nicaea, for the victory of the true Faith. St. Helen's contribution is also very great. She assisted St. Constantine and initiated him in the Faith, and built 365 Churches in the Holy Land, one for every day of the year. In the Life of St. Constantine the Great, there are certain things that, using human reason, one would not expect to find in the life of a Saint, since he acted as Emperor in accordance with the mores of his time. God's criteria, however, are different from human criteria. The Holy Emperor had an exemplary, Christian end, received Holy Baptism with conviction and deep contrition, and has been glorified by God to such an extent that his reliquary exudes Holy *Myron*.

Finally, Bishop Cyprian expressed his best wishes to Bishop Johannes and presented him with an Icon painted in one of our monasteries in Greece depicting the Good Shepherd bearing the lost sheep. A procession with the Holy Icon of Sts. Constantine and Helen was then made around the Church, after which Bishop Cyprian distributed various small Icons and a text translated into Swedish to all present.



A festal meal followed in the parish hall, around 1 p.m., to which everyone was invited. Bishop Cypryan was thereby afforded the opportunity to speak about the sanctity of meals, during which, in accordance with the



ethos of the Orthodox Church, a conscientious Christian ought to occupy himself inwardly with thanking God, reproaching himself, and praying for the hungry, among other things, thereby avoiding vain conversations and other worldly activities, such as watching television during the meal. He also expressed his joy over the eighty-year-old Bishop Johannes' improved health, and the progress of our mission in Sweden in general. He spoke about the importance of "filial piety," i.e., the gratitude of spiritual children to their spiritual parents, which should be expressed in word and deed, when the latter are in need of the former's help. He thanked Bishop Johannes, Father Anders, and all of the parishioners for their love and hospitality. One of the pilgrims, Andreas Giatrikos, then spoke on behalf of the



laypeople from Greece, expressing how moved they were by the sacrificial love, warmth, and hospitality of the faithful in Sweden. Bishop Cyprian exhorted our Greek brothers and sisters to offer their assistance to the missionary work in Sweden, by means of the St. Philaret the Merciful Orthodox Women's Guild, and in other ways as well.

We left around 2:15 p.m. for a brief tour of the historic section of Stockholm. Descending to the Old Town, we visited various sights (such as, for example, the capital's famous palaces), and took a boat tour of Stockholm's waterfront. We marvelled at the overall cleanliness and order, and enjoyed the fresh air, the clear water, and the greenery.



We returned to the Bishop's residence around 7:45 for dinner. Bishop Cyprian spoke about the importance of the contributions made by laypeople to the pastoral work of the Church, recounting some amazing examples he has encountered during his activities as a Bishop and spiritual Father. At the end, we all embraced each other, said our goodbyes, asked forgiveness for any ways in which we might have erred during our visit, and returned to our various accommodations with spiritual joy and gladness.

Following this meal, Bishop Cyprian had a long conversation with Fathers Anders and Jiří, Deacon Father Theochares, and Nun Magdalene, in which they spoke about the past, present, and future of the Orthodox mission in Sweden. They discussed practical matters and planned the steps to be taken by May of 2011. Father Anders would later set forth everything that had been decided to Bishop Johannes, who had not participated in the conversation on account of fatigue.

On Friday, May 22 (Old Style), we left Stockholm for Milan, where we stayed overnight before departing for Athens at noon the next day. Upon arrival at the Athens airport, glorifying God and thanking the Most Blessed *Theotokos*, we were met by our brothers and sisters in Christ, who had come to welcome us back to our homeland with Christian love and fragrant flowers.



After our return, we were informed about the joy and strength afforded by our visit to the Shepherds and faithful in Italy and, even more so, to those in Sweden. They were particularly moved by the love and lively interest shown to them by Bishop Cyprian, and especially by the desire he so clearly showed for the progress of the work of the mission in Sweden. We all, Greeks and Swedes alike, felt that the bond of love and unity of Faith have grown deeper and stronger between us, such that we truly constitute one large family in Christ, under the protection of the *Panagia* and all of the Saints.

Glory to God for all things!

Nuns Vasilia and Magdalene,
Convent of the Holy Angels