



■ A foretaste of spring in the darkness of winter

**Feast Day of the
Convent of St. Philothei of Athens
in Villberga, Sweden
February 21, 2016 (Old Style)**

On **Saturday**, February 21, 2016 (Old Style), with the blessing of His Eminence, Metropolitan Cyprian of Oropos and Phyle, the Convent of St. Philothei of Athens, in Grillby, Sweden, celebrated its Patronal Feast. The celebration was transferred to this day so that the faithful from Stockholm and Uppsala would be able to pay homage to the glorious Nun-Martyr Philothei, whose life and message are so relevant to us in our own troubled times.

Mother Magdalene and Sister Lydia chanted Orthros—portions of which had been translated for the first time into Swedish—followed by the Divine Liturgy in Greek and Swedish, which was celebrated by Father Anders Åkerström and Hierodeacon Father Theochares. In his homily, Fr. Anders spoke movingly about the Life of St. Philothei and the monastic dedication of the Convent's founder, Mother Philothei of blessed memory (†2012), who would steadfastly read all the daily services aloud in the solitude of her chapel.

At the conclusion of the Liturgy, the faithful venerated a





portion of the relics of St. Philothei (a gift from the Monastery of Sts. Cyprian and Justina) and the traditional procession with the Holy Icon and the Relics of the Saint was then made around the convent, ending at the grave of Mother Philothei, where a *Trisagion* was served.

Mother Magdalene read aloud the Life of St. Philothei during the simple *agape* meal, after which she thanked all those present for their continuing support of the convent. Indeed, it was very moving to see the presence of faithful who have been friends of the convent since its foundation in 1987, as well as new friends who were visiting the convent for the first time.

Among the latter was a Lutheran couple drawn to Orthodoxy through Iconography lessons at our Diocese's Episcopal Residence in Stockholm. In fact, the first Icon the husband painted was that of St. Philothei, even though at the time he knew next to nothing about her! Since the couple will move not far from



the Convent, they asked Mother Magdalene to accept them for Iconography lessons, for which Metropolitan Cyprian has given his blessing.

After the meal, the faithful were able to visit the Convent's other chapel, dedicated to St. Nicholas, to see the wall paintings the sisters have begun. They will paint primarily Scandinavian Saints and Equals-to-the-Apostles.

Finally, the sisters distributed Icon prints, which Metropolitan Cyprian had brought to the Convent on his last visit, as a small memento to the faithful.

St. Philothei's blessing and presence were perceptible on this day, as she continues to spread joy, light, and hope—just as she did in Athens during her lifetime—to us in today's secularized and predominantly atheistic Sweden: a foretaste of spring in the darkness of winter....

