



“For the Edification of the Church”

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**A new period begins
for the Small Flock of Sardinia**

Fifth Pastoral Visit and Pilgrimage to the Blessed Island of Sardinia

January 14-17, 2017 (Old Style)

By the Grace of God, with the blessing of His Beatitude, Archbishop Kallinikos, and under the Protection of the Theotokos, an especially important and promising pastoral visit and pilgrimage took place to the blessed island of Sardinia, Italy, from January 14 to 17, 2017 (Old Style), the first visit after the repose in the Lord of the ever-memorable Bishop Michael of Nora (†August 31, 2016 [Old style]).



His Eminence, Metropolitan Cyprian of Oropos and Phyle was once again invited by the Small Flock of our Mission in Sardinia to participate in the Feast Day of the Church of the Holy Martyrs Cyprian and Justina and the Holy Great Martyr Efisio, which is celebrated annually on the Sunday after January 15, the day of the Martyrdom of St. Efisio. The Church is located in the municipality of Selargius, Cagliari, the capital of the island. His Eminence was also invited to participate in the Patronal Feast of the Monastery of St. Anthony the Great, in Marrubiu.



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Despite his heavy schedule and pressing synodal responsibilities, His Eminence resolved to go to Sardinia with a group of fourteen pilgrims from Greece.

This visit would have a special character, since it would inaugurate a new period in our two small communities of Genuine Orthodox Christians in Sardinia, following the repose of Bishop Michael of Nora, of blessed memory.

And indeed, through the latter's prayers and those of the two founders of our Mission in Sardinia—Metropolitan Giovanni of Sardinia (†July 13, 2002) and Metropolitan Cyprian (†May 13, 2013) of blessed memory—our Most Reverend Shepherd's presence and determination were unifying and renewing, bringing to an end a causeless estrangement of many years and giving a new stimulus to the vision of the re-evangelization of the island.

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On Friday morning, January 14 (Old Style), Hieromonks Father Antonio (Pompianu) and Father Mariano (Orrù) and a few of the faithful welcomed the group of visitors with joy and gratitude at the airport of Cagliari.

They then went to the Church of the Holy Martyrs Cyprian, Justina, and Efsio, where, following the customary reception of





the Hierarchy, Father Mariano showed our Most Reverend Metropolitan the office of Bishop Michael of blessed memory, which is filled with photographs and mementos from his life.

That afternoon, the group visited the old town of Cagliari and the city Cathedral, dedicated to the Mother of God.

In the large crypt under the Church's sanctuary, the Holy Relics of hundreds of Saints—the majority of them Martyrs from the first centuries of Christianity—are preserved behind the walls. The pilgrims chanted the Apolytikia to All the Saints of Sardinia and one to the Holy Great Martyr Efsio, written by our Most Reverend Metropolitan.



The Cathedral

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On Saturday, January 15 (Old Style, commemoration of Sts. Paul of Thebes and John the Hut-dweller), the group went with Father Mariano



on a pilgrimage to the small island of Sant'Antioco, named after St. Antiochus the Unmercenary Physician, the Enlightener and Patron Saint of the island and all of Sardinia. In the sixth century Church dedicated to St. Antiochus, which is built over his tomb, his Holy Relics

are displayed for veneration.

Under the Church is preserved a portion of the ancient catacombs that served as a pre-Christian necropolis. This is where St. Antioch struggled in asceticism and preached the Gospel. He reposed in the year 127, while at prayer, as the Roman soldiers waited for him so as to lead him to execution.

A Christian cemetery was created in these catacombs, in use until the seventh century.



The Tomb of St. Antiochus



The Holy Relics of St. Antiochus

Following Great Vespers that afternoon, our Most Reverend Shepherd visited one of our ailing parishioners at his house and read the pertinent prayers over him, inspiring in his family hope and trust in the providence of God.

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The Feast Day of the Holy Great Martyr Efsio (†January 15, 303) was transferred to the next day, January 16 (Old Style), the Sunday of Zacchaeus. Resurrectional Orthros, with hymns to the Saint, was chanted in Greek.



Before the Divine Liturgy, His Eminence read the “Prayers at the Making of a Catechumen” over three of our brothers and sisters in Christ— Vinicius, Carlos, and Lucia—marking their official entrance into the rank of Catechumen. God willing, they will receive Holy Baptism at Pentecost.



Our Most Reverend Metropolitan presided at the festal Divine Liturgy, with the participation of Archimandrite Father Mariano (the parish Rector), Father Antonio, and, from the Monastery of Sts.

Cyprian and Justina (Greece), Hierodeacon Father Joseph and Subdeacon Monk Antonios. The pilgrims from Greece, our Small Flock in Sardinia, and a number of catechumens and friends were in attendance.

By means of this Resurrectional Concelebration, the gift of the reunion of our faithful Orthodox Christians in Sardinia was myste-riologically sealed.





In his brief homily, His Eminence gave thanks to God for the participation of the pilgrims from Greece in the Feast Day and for the abundant blessings bestowed on them by Divine Grace.

He then spoke about the Gospel reading and the message that St. Zacchaeus, the former chief publican and subsequent Apostle, addresses to all those who wish to see Christ: *He gave no thought to his position in society, his reputation, or what others would say about him, but rather humbled himself and climbed up the sycamore tree to catch sight of our Savior. As for us, in order to fulfill our great Vision of beholding, of encountering, Christ, we must set no value on the glory of this world and must open our beings, through humility, to our Savior Who is to come.*

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Following the festal *agape* meal, the pilgrims went to the ancient city of Nora, approximately one hour south of Cagliari, accompanied by Father Mariano.

The city, founded between the eight and ninth centuries BC., reached its zenith during the Roman period (third century BC to fifth century AD), as one can ascertain from its impressive



The Tomb of St. Efsio



Relics of St. Efsio

ruins. It was abandoned in the eight century AD, however, as it steadily sunk into the Mediterranean Sea.



Near the archeological site, the visitors were able to venerate a portion of the Holy Relics of St. Efisio, in the eleventh century Church built in his honor over his tomb.

After the group returned to their lodgings, His Eminence visited yet another sick person and his family. Later that evening, he met with Father Mariano and discussed the new situation of our community in Sardinia following the repose of Bishop Michael, and the prospects for its future.

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On Monday, January 17 (Old Style), commemoration of St. Anthony the Great, the group went with Father Mariano and Mrs. Antonia, a long-standing member of our flock in Sardinia, to Mar-rubiu, located in the north-



west of the island, in order to participate in the Patronal Feast of the monastery founded by Hieromonk Father Antonio.

Our Most Reverend Metropolitan was the principal celebrant at the festal Divine Liturgy, assisted by Father Antonios, Father Mariano, Hierodeacon Joseph, and Subdeacon Monk Antonios, with the visitors from Greece and a few of the faithful in attendance. Father Joseph, from the nearby parish, together with the nephew of Metropolitan Giovanni of blessed



memory, was also present. The Divine Liturgy was chanted in Greek and Italian.

In his homily, His Eminence wished Father Antonio and the others who were celebrating their Nameday “Many Years,” “good repentance,” and that their service to the

Church bear abundant fruit. He then spoke about the message addressed to us by St. Anthony by means of his *Apolytikion*: “*Thou didst follow the ways of the zealous Elias, and the straight path of the Baptist, O Father Anthony. Thou didst become a desert dweller and support the world by thy prayers. Intercede with Christ our God that our souls be saved.*” This mes-

message is in essence a social message, whereby the Saint calls upon us—after we have, through repentance, temperance, and vigilance, prepared the way for God to come to abide in us—to become pillars of support for our brethren, in a society which is becoming increasingly dominated by the gloom of apostasy. Let us be imbued by a sense of our responsibility: the salvation of the world is in the hands of us Christians.



Following the Divine Liturgy, Father Antonio and the faithful offered some monastic refreshments, and various hymns were chanted, including one to the Mother of God written by the ever-memorable Metropolitan Giovanni in the local dialect.

Fathers Antonio and Joseph accompanied the visitors to the municipal cemetery, where a *Trisagion* was chanted at the graves of Metropolitan Giovanni (†June 13, 2002) and our Priest, Father Mario Bulla (†2001).

Everyone then went to the nearby town of Arborea for a festal meal, at the



end of which our Most Reverend Metropolitan's spiritual children congratulated him on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of his entry into the "arena" of the monastic life, expressing their love in Christ and profound gratitude for his self-sacrificial and compassionate solicitude.

After this moving dinner, the visitors from Greece departed for the airport, where several of the faithful were waiting in order to see them off and to ask for their prayers.

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Again and again we repeat "Glory to God for all things!" for this fifth pastoral visit and pilgrimage to our small flock in Sardinia.

During this decisive visit, the loving determination of our Most Reverend Shepherd brought, by the Grace of God, sweet fruits of unity and renewal to the heroic flock of Genuine Orthodox Christians on this blessed island.

Let us pray that this spiritual gift be consolidated, so that our brothers and sisters might become a source of strength and light to well-disposed souls, "speaking the truth in love."

