



“For the Edification of the Church”

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“I was in prison and ye came unto Me...” (St. Matthew 25:36)

Visit to the Special Detention Center for Youth in Volos

Manifold blessings from the Mother of God

† Saturday of the Akathist Hymn, Great Lent
March 19, 2017 (Old Style)



On the afternoon of Friday, March 18, 2017 (Old Style), His Eminence, Metropolitan Cyprian of Oropos and Phyle was the principal celebrant at the Service of the Akathist Hymn chanted at the Convent of St. Paraskeve in Acharnes (near Athens), assisted by the convent’s serving Priest, the Reverend Father Dorotheos Xynarianos.

At the end of the compunctious service, His Eminence expressed words of thanksgiving to our Most Holy Mother of God, *who, by means of her Salutations, refreshes us in our ascetic journey to Holy Pascha and reveals to us the beauty of God: through the Theotokos, we come to know God’s all-encompassing compassion, which is poured forth on all of rational and irrational creation. The period of Great Lent coincides with the coming of springtime, the loveliest season of the year, during which the beauty of nature lifts us up to love for our Creator, through the Theotokos, who experienced such love to the highest degree, in this mutual relationship*

of love with our God and Savior, Whose saving Passion and Resurrection we will venerate in the following days.

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On the Saturday of the Akathist Hymn, under the Protection of our Most Holy Mother of God, and in accordance with our custom of visiting our imprisoned brothers at the beginning and end of the Great Fast, we made, with the blessing, participation, and guidance of His Eminence, Metropolitan Cyprian, our eleventh visit to the Special Detention Center of Volos.



Once again, the self-sacrificing members of the St. Philaret the Merciful Guild organized and made the necessary preparations for this visit to our incarcerated young brothers, some seventy-five in number.

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During the journey to the Detention Center, we read the customary morning prayers and the Supplicatory Canon to St. Philaret, as well as a text on a timely subject.

The pilgrims also had the blessing, in anticipation of the commemoration of St. Mary of Egypt (Fifth Sunday of the Great Fast), of venerating a copy of the Holy Icon of the Theotokos before which, according to tradition, St. Mary prayed and received the command to cross the Jordan into the desert. The Icon is preserved today at the Cave of St. Athanasios on the Holy Mountain, near the Great Lavra.

They also received a memento with passages from St. John Chrysostomos concerning glorification of, and thanksgiving to, God.

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We were honored and blessed by the participation of Metropolitan Photios of Demetrias, who met up with our Most Reverend Shepherd and the group of fifty pilgrims at the entrance to the Detention Center.

As always, the genteel Director courteously received the Hierarchs and the Board Members of our Guild, with whom he discussed the present conditions of the prisoners. The chief warden then led the visitors into the inner courtyard.

To preserve order, the inmates entered in small groups and received from our Most Reverend Shepherd, with Metropolitan Photios at his side, a paternal embrace of love and words of encouragement, a leaflet with greetings in three languages (in Greek, English, Arabic), as well as a bag containing items to meet their basic and personal needs. The process was accompanied by the chanting of the nuns and folk songs performed by the Routse family and other members of the group.



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Departing from the prison, the pilgrims followed His Eminence, Metropolitan Photios to the Convent of the Life-Giving Spring, in Rizomylo Belestinou, which is under the jurisdiction of the Holy Metropolis of Demetrias and the paternal care of Metropolitan Photios.

The convent was founded in the 1950s in fulfillment of a vow made by a pious married couple. After a period of prosperity, the number of nuns diminished, until the convent eventually remained empty. The faithful in the region, however, continued to come every Wednesday in order to read the Supplicatory Canon to the Mother of God of the Life-giving Spring, and to beseech her to bring life back to their beloved convent.



And the Theotokos, as a compassionate Mother, worked her miracle: in the summer of 2016, the Reverend Nuns Christonymphe and Akakia settled in the abandoned convent, with the blessing of Metropolitan Photios. Thanks to the eager and self-sacrificing assistance

of the faithful, the convent's liturgical life and grounds are being revived, and the entire region is thereby sanctified by the Grace of the Panagia.



After a tour of the grounds and light lunch prepared by our volunteers, our Most Reverend Shepherd and the pilgrims received the blessing of Metropolitan Photios and departed for Athens.

During the return journey, in an atmosphere of joy, thanksgiving, and prayer, Great Vespers was chanted for the Sunday of St. Mary of Egypt.

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We once again give thanks to the All-Hymned Theotokos, who abundantly bestowed her Grace on our pilgrimage before the Holy Days of the Passion and Resurrection of our Redeemer and Savior.

Thanks are also due to His Eminence, Metropolitan Cyprian, who guides us in works of self-sacrificial compassion, that our beings might be opened to the One Who is All-Compassionate.

■ **We** should not omit one very important aspect of these prison visits: each time, representatives of our entire Metropolis—clergy, monastics, and laypeople—participate.

By means of such shared activities and close contact, a profound feeling is cultivated that we all belong to one Family with a common vision, in the perspective of the prayer “Thy Kingdom come...on earth as it is in Heaven.”

