



## “For the Edification of the Church”

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### ■ Prefestal Pilgrimage to the Manger of our Lord

## Visit to the Rehabilitation Center for Disabled Children in Voula, Athens

“I was sick, and ye visited Me”

Friday, December 16, 2017 (Old Style)



**O**n Friday, December 16, 2017 (Old Style), the fifth Saturday of the Nativity Fast, with the blessing, participation, and guidance of His Eminence, Metropolitan Cyprian of Oropos and Phyle, we made our fourth visit to the Rehabilitation Center

for Disabled Children in Voula (near Athens), which shelters seventy children with special needs, who were either abandoned by their parents or removed from their custody for their own protection.

With the permission of the director of the institution, Mrs. Thaleia Stephopoulou, Metropolitan Cyprian and a group of seventy people, including many children and teenagers, were able, shortly before the Feast of the Nativity, to venerate our Coming Savior in the person of *these little ones*.

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The “pilgrims” were welcomed by Assistant Director Elsa Malamatina, our beloved Ms. Vasiliki Koskina, who made a point of coming to the Center for our visit, and several of the children, with whom we





became acquainted during our previous visits. We were given a tour of the wards, where our Archpastor and the rest of the group had the opportunity to express to the children, close up and in person, their tenderness and affection in Christ.

Both Elsa and the Sponsorship Director, Mr. Evangelos Slamkas, informed us about the dire conditions that prevail at the institution, which now subsists primarily on private donations.

Members of the “Hellenic Orthodox Heritage” chorus, under the direction of Hieromonk Father Dionysios (from the Monastery of Sts. Cyprian and Justina), sang traditional carols and other seasonal folk songs in each ward, to the joy of our small brothers and sisters, and also of their care-givers, who look after them with exemplary love and self-denial.

In the hall of the fourth ward, where they were awaited by the children who are able, to some extent, to take care of themselves and to communicate with others, the “Hellenic Orthodox Heritage” chorus put on a veritable concert, accompanied by folk instruments, for the sake of the children and personnel, who sang along and clapped with emotion. Father Konstantinos did not neglect to draw several of the more nimble children into the folk dance!

The St. Philaret Guild then supplied the institution with various necessities (e.g., shampoo, toothpaste, and beverages). There followed a group photo, which brought to a conclusion this blessed pilgrimage to these *little* brothers and sisters of our Lord.

Upon leaving the institution, Metropolitan Cyprian exhorted all of us not to forget the messages that we received from this visit, and to keep in our daily prayers both the children and those who care for them with such admirable affection and self-denial.

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**The pilgrims** then went to the Convent of St. Deme-





trios, in Amphile Piraeus, where they were greeted by His Eminence, Metropolitan Gerontios of Piraeus and Salamis, members of his clergy, and the Reverend Mother Thekla, Abbess of the Hesychasterion.

The purpose of our visit was to venerate the Relics of St. John of Amfiali, the Founder of the Hesychasterion.

St. John (†January 27, 1966), whose name is to be officially placed in the Church's Festal Calendar, is already honored as a Saint both locally and abroad, as much for the sanctity of his life as for the multitudes of great miracles that he worked during his lifetime, and continues to work, by the Grace of God, following his holy repose.

In view of the upcoming Proclamation of his sanctity, the pilgrims especially prayed for his heavenly assistance in the composition of a Divine Service in his honor and the painting of his Icon.

The radiant and fragrant skull of the Saint, which is amber in color, immediately "responded" to the devoutness of the pilgrims, filling everyone with compunction and spiritual consolation. Next to the reliquary were piously displayed the Saints chain and prayer ropes, witnesses to his ascetic endeavors.

The Reverend Mother Thekla, who entered the convent when she was sixteen years old, spoke with emotion and reverence of the beneficial guidance of the holy Elder, which she received for many years, as well as of his countless alms and miracles.

Mother Thekla and Sister Theologia then treated the pilgrims to heartfelt hospitality, while the Bishops and clergy had a cordial and edifying discussion, in which they reminisced about various virtuous personages that have adorned our Church during the last few decades.

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With feelings of glorification and



gratitude for the gift of the day's twofold pilgrimage, the pilgrims all perceived, once again, how close our Lord and God is to us, filling our hearts with compunction by His presence, as much through the illness and sorrow of our brothers and sisters, as through his holy and humble Saints.

