



“For the Edification of the Church”

- Annals • Pastoral Activities • Presentations •
- Gatherings • Homilies • Sermons • Feasts •
- Pilgrimages • Social Ministry • Publications •

“When did we see Thee...in prison and came unto Thee?” (St. Matthew 25:39)

Tenth Pilgrimage to the Rural Prison of Kassaveteia, Volos

† Saturday of the Akathist Hymn
March 11, 2018 (Old Style)

On Saturday of the Akathist Hymn, March 11, 2018 (Old Style, commemoration of St. Sophronios, Archbishop of Jerusalem), with the blessing, participation, and guidance of His Eminence, Metropolitan Cyprian of Oropos and Phyle, and the blessing of the local Hierarchy, Metropolitan Photios of Demetrias, there took place the tenth visit to 140 of our incarcerated brothers at the Rural Prison of Kassaveteia, near Volos, in northern Greece.



The packages containing personal care items, which were distributed to the prisoners, were prepared by volunteers of the St. Philaret the Merciful Guild, which, as always, undertook the responsibility for the organization of this visit.

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Before the customary morning prayers (including portions of Matins, the Supplicatory Canon to St. Philaret, and the special prayer for our visits to correctional institutions) during the bus ride, Metropolitan Cyprian invited the travelers to sing hymns of thanksgiving and doxology to the Guardian Leader, the Most Holy



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Mother of God, to whom our Church on this day chants the Akathist Hymn.

Metropolitan Cyprian then read excerpts from St. John Chrysostomos regarding **spiritual almsgiving** and the **missionary responsibility** of Christians. During the joint discussion of this text, it was pointed out that we have a duty to pray not just occasionally, but on a daily basis for all of our brothers and sisters who are suffering in various ways.

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At the prison, the pilgrims first met with the exceptional personnel, and then were led in turn to three courtyards, where they would encounter our imprisoned brothers.

Our Most Reverend Metropolitan asked the family of Panagiotes Routsos, who were joined by other young people, to play and sing traditional folk songs. He then spoke a few words of love and support to our brothers, exhorting them to undergo their tribulation with patience, hope, and prayer, and to return to their loved ones with new resolutions.



Father Soterios, the co-minister of Metropolitan Cyprian, “seized hold” of several of the prisoners as representatives and gave them the opportunity to speak. They expressed their longing for freedom, gratitude for the concern and presence of the visitors, and best wishes for the upcoming Feast of Pascha.

Then, with the folk songs continuing in the background, our Shepherd paternally greeted each inmate one by one, distributing to them the care packs and a brief text in three languages (Greek, English, and Arabic): *“To our imprisoned Brothers: A Breath of Love and Hope”* and other small gifts as a blessing.

The family-like atmosphere, the unconstrained cheerfulness of the dialog and the folk songs, the springtime weather, and the approaching Feast of the Resurrection gave our brothers a small respite, a taste of purity and selfless love, and a breath of fresh air amidst the difficulties of their daily lives.

Before leaving each courtyard, the group of pilgrims parted from our brothers by singing





the hymn of victory and redemption, "Christ is Risen," to which many of the inmates spontaneously joined their voices.

The visit finished with a stop at the small prison chapel dedicated to the Patron Saint of prisoners, the Holy Hieromartyr Eleftherios.

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Leaving the prison, the pilgrims visited the Convent of the Life-Giving Spring, in Rizomylo Belestinou, with the blessing of the local Hierarch, His Eminence, Metropolitan Photios of Demetrias.



Nuns Christonymphe and Akakia lovingly welcomed the pilgrims, who, in the monastery's guest house, shared the frugal lunch that they had prepared beforehand.

On the return journey, they sang Resurrectional Vespers in honor of St. Mary of Egypt (Fifth Sunday of Lent) and read a special prayer of thanksgiving.

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The pilgrims returned to their home base with feelings of gratitude to our Lord and His All-Hymned Mother, for once again not only were they covered by Their Grace during their humble ministry to our brothers in prison, but also were filled with joy and contrition of heart before the gateway of Great and Holy Week.

Great is the responsibility of all of us who are vouchsafed such solicitude and guidance at the hands of our Most Reverend Archpastor, whereby we are given regular and divers opportunities to learn by experience the ethos of the Gospel and to explore in greater depth our Christian identity.

