

Pastoral Visit to the Czech Republic and Slovakia

Following an invitation by our “small flock” and with synod approval, His Grace, Bishop Klemes of Gardikion made a pastoral visit, by the Grace of God, to the communities of the Orthodox in Resistance in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, in Central Europe. His Grace acted as representative of His Eminence, Metropolitan Cyprian, who is ailing.

Traveling along with Bishop Klemes were Father Jiří Ján (c.Th.D.), a Czech Priest who serves the pastoral needs of our Church in Greece, and who acted as translator on this visit; Chrestos Papadopoulos, philologist and chanter, and Bishop Klemes’ brother according to the flesh; and Chrestos Giatrakos, Subdeacon.

• Bishop Klemes and his companions arrived by air in Prague early Monday morning, June 17, 2008 (Old Style), where they were met by Hieromonk Dr. Gorazd (Vopatrný) and some of the faithful, along with Borislav Rudić, a Serb, who offered them generous hospitality at his house in Prague.

That afternoon, Father Gorazd, Director of the Institute of Eastern Christian Studies at the Charles University, Prague, gave Bishop Klemes a tour of the historic Church of St. Clement of Rome, in Levý Hradec, near the capital. This was the first Church erected in Bohemia during the time when St. Methodios of Thessalonica, Equal-to-the Apostles, was active in Moravia in his capacity as Archbishop, in the second half of the ninth century. The remnants of this Church are preserved under the later, frescoed Church, which remains to this day.



His Grace then visited an apartment in Prague’s New Town, which houses a small chapel for our community in Prague—also dedicated to

St. Clement of Rome (Bishop Klemes' Patron Saint)—, in which Hieromonk Gorazd officiates. The visitors were served an *agape* meal here, and took part in an informative and edifying conversation.

- On Tuesday, June 18, 2008 (Old Style), Father Gorazd gave the delegation from Greece a tour of Hradčany (Prague Castle) in the beautiful city of Prague, which constitutes the geographical “heart” of Europe. The visitors saw the remains of the second Church of Bohemia (ninth century), dedicated to the Mother of God, and venerated the tomb of St. Ludmila (†921), the national Saint of the Czechs, in the historic



Church of St. George. At the Gothic Cathedral of St. Vitus, they venerated the tomb of the Patron Saint of the Czechs, Martyr-King Wenceslaus († 935), and portions of the Relics of Sts. Vitus, Cyril the Equal-to-the-Apostles, Wenceslaus, Ludmila, and Procopios of Sazava. The visitors then admired the city's renowned pa-

latial buildings and, later, the picturesque streets of Old Town. They also visited the Orthodox Cathedral of Sts. Cyril and Methodios, where they learned about its past and recent history.

- On Tuesday afternoon, Bishop Klemes and his travelling companions went by road to the village of Jezdovice, which is situated in a beautiful region near a lake, over two hours south-east of the capital, where Father Jeremias Cvak—a married Priest belonging to our Synod, who now has five charming children (Tamara, Stephen, Savvas, Ambrose, and Lydia)—has built a new Church, dedicated to St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco, the Wonderworker. The Church is located on the lakefront, next to Father Jeremias' house.

Following necessary preparations, Bishop Klemes presided at the Festal Vespers service to St. John the Wonderworker, which was chanted in Czech, Slavonic, and Greek. After Vespers, His Grace performed the *Thyranoíxia*, or “Opening of the Doors” (with the Blessing of Waters) of the new Church. Fathers Jeremias, Gorazd, and Jiří took part, with numerous



Orthodox faithful in attendance, and also neighbors, who followed the service from the narthex with evident interest.



In his homily, Bishop Klemes discussed the historical significance of this new anti-innovationist Orthodox Church in the Czech Republic, spoke about the message to be drawn from the life of our contemporary Saint, Archbishop John of Shanghai and San Francisco, and also about the ecclesiastical mission of our Holy Synod, which—especially in this region—constitutes an organic continuation, renewal, and transmission of the teachings and legacy of Sts. Cyril and Methodios of Thessalonica.

• On Wednesday, June 19, 2008 (Old Style), the commemoration of St. John the Wonderworker, the first Patronal Feast of the newly-built Church in Jezdovice was celebrated. Matins was chanted in Greek, using the service composed and published by the Monastery of Sts. Cyriac and Justina, Phyle, Attica. (For an English translation of this Vigil Service, see <http://www.synodinresistance.org/pdfs/2008/06/30/20080630aVigilServiceforStJohnofSanFrancisco%20Folder/20080630aVigilServiceforStJohnofSanFrancisco.pdf>) Before the Divine Liturgy, Bishop Klemes ordained John Machač—a pathologist and father of two children, who is distinguished for his zeal and love for the Church—a



Reader. Fathers Jeremias, Gorazd, and Jiří once again took part in the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy, with numerous Orthodox faithful in attendance.

In his homily, Bishop Klemes spoke about St. John's chief characteristic: his love for God, expressed by his pure and unceasing prayer; his daily celebration of the Divine Liturgy and partaking of Holy Communion, and his love for his fellow men, demonstrated by his constant self-sacrifice on their behalf and his forbearance in the face of temptations and scandals. The Holy Archbishop John was a genuine exponent of the Orthodox ethos, in accordance with which we love the person, no matter how sinful, while abhorring the sin, and love the heterodox, while turning away from heresy.



After the Divine Liturgy, a festal meal was served, before and after which the faithful eagerly asked the Bishop numerous questions on spiritual matters. That afternoon, after Vespers, a lengthy gathering was held at Father Jeremias' house, during which Bishop Klemes had the opportunity to give detailed answers to questions by the faithful about matters of ecclesiastical and spiritual concern.

- On Thursday, June 20, 2008 (Old Style), the delegation from Greece drove to Slovakia, passing through the large cities of Prešov and Košice, in Eastern Slovakia, before arriving late in the afternoon in the village of Michalany, in the south-east of the country, on the border of Hungary and very near Ukraine (*Zakarpattya oblast*). The region is primarily made up of Roman Catholics, Uniates, and Calvinists, and in every village one can usually see three Churches, belonging to each of these groups respectively.

Here, His Grace was welcomed by Father Vladimir Mohorita, a married Priest and former journalist, who for the time being maintains a chapel in his house in honor of St. Xenia the Fool for Christ.

- On Friday, June 21, 2008 (Old Style), Bishop Klemes celebrated a Hierarchical Divine Liturgy with Father Vladimir and Father Jiří in the chapel of St. Xenia, in honor of the Holy Prince Rostislav (†870), who invited Sts. Cyril and Methodios to Moravia and who was persecuted for his steadfastness in the Orthodox Faith by the Franks, by whom he was martyred. The presence of the Saint in the Liturgy was keenly felt!

Bishop Klemes preached a festal homily to strengthen the small flock of Orthodox faithful, which was followed by a conversation on spiritual matters and an *agape* meal.



Father Vladimir showed the Bishop possible areas where a proper Church might be built. Upon discussion of the matter, His Grace gave Father appropriate instructions for the accomplishment of this blessed and crucial work.

That afternoon, Vespers was served in Slavonic and Greek, followed by a short walk into neighboring Hungary! Between the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary, the borders are almost entirely free and open, without the slightest border controls.

- On Saturday morning, the visitors from Greece returned by road to the Czech Republic, this time via Budapest, Hungary, since the roads are in better condition and the journey considerably shorter!

Passing through Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia, they had the especial blessing of venerating the Relics of St. John the Merciful, Archbishop of Alexandria, in the Roman Catholic Cathedral of St. Martin. Owing to various historic vicissitudes, these Relics were taken from Cyprus to Constantinople, then to Venice and Budapest, finally ending up in Bratislava.

On Saturday afternoon, the delegation from Greece arrived once again in Jezdovice, via Brno. Bishop Klemes held a meeting with the clergy regarding pastoral and spiritual matters.

- On Sunday, June 23, 2008 (Old Style), His Grace celebrated a Hierarchical Divine Liturgy in the Church of St. John of Shanghai, before and during which hymns were chanted from the Greek service in honor of the Holy New Martyrs of the Turkish Yoke (Third Sunday of St. Matthew).

In his homily, Bishop Klemes spoke on the subject of Divine Providence and our confidence therein. He stressed that the seemingly griev-

ous events in our lives, when they have in view the health and salvation of our souls, are transformed into blessings. Our ancestors, during the Roman and Byzantine Empires, preferred to lose their bodily freedom rather than to suffer spiritual subjugation and captivity. Thus, they preferred the Turks to the Franks, and preserved their Faith—Holy Orthodoxy—and their ethnic conscience. They gave forth New Martyrs, ultimately gaining their ethnic freedom. Moravia, in Central Europe, on the other hand, though preserved from subjugation to the Ottomans, nevertheless very quickly lost its spiritual freedom and the tradition of Sts. Cyril and Methodios, falling under the influence of Western Christianity, which is heretical and distorted. Roman Catholicism degenerated into tyranny, joined the sword to the Cross, struggled for earthly power and dominion, unleashed persecutions and committed atrocities, preferred the earthly kingdom to the Heavenly one, and drove people to resistance, which resulted in Protestantism.



Our work in our own days is still one of liberation, having in view the liberation of well-disposed people from the most fearsome bonds that exist—that is, from the captivity of heresy and the captivity of sin. What is required of us Orthodox Christians is a confession of Faith and confirmation of our Faith in everyday life, that we might constitute the hope, light, and salt of the earth. Our responsibility is immeasurable, and we must not disappoint God or men.

That afternoon, Bishop Klemes presided at the Vespers service in honor of the Nativity of St. John the Baptist, conducted in Slavonic and Greek. The group then visited various historic cities in the region.

- On Monday, June 24, 2008 (Old Style), Bishop Klemes celebrated another Hierarchical Divine



Liturgy in the Church of St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco, in Jezdovice, with the assistance of Fathers Jeremias, Gorazd, and Jiří. In his



homily, he spoke on the spiritual themes of repentance and prayer.

On Monday afternoon, the visitors from Greece left by road for Prague, stopping by the historic Monastery of St. Procopius of Sazava (†1053)—a great local Orthodox Saint, hermit, wonderworker, and founder of the monastery, before the final Latin domination—, where fragments of his Relics are preserved.

- On Tuesday morning, they went to the place of asceticism, east of Prague, of yet another renowned local Saint: St. Ivan the Czech, the Cave-Dweller (†889). In the cave where he dwelt, there remain to this day wondrous traces of his asceticism, his struggle against demons and evil men, and of his repose. The monastery, dedicated to the Venerable Forerunner and built later on the same spot, preserves a portion of his Relics. A short distance therefrom, there is a Chapel dedicated to the Precious Cross, precisely on the spot where St. Ivan had a miraculous encounter with the Venerable Forerunner, when the latter gave him a Cross in order to expel the demons vexing him in his cave. They were indeed expelled!



- At midnight, Bishop Klemes and his companions departed by air from Prague, filled with memories, emotion, and nostalgia, arriving in Athens in the early hours of Wednesday, June 26 (Old Style).

By common consent, this was an abundantly blessed, fruitful, and profitable pastoral visit, to the glory, honor, and thanksgiving of Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our Faith. Amen!

