

Celebration of the Major Feast Day of the Saint Gregory Palamas Monastery

On the second Sunday of Great Lent, 2009, the St. Gregory Palamas Monastery celebrated its annual Feast Day. Much to the joy of the brotherhood, they were joined by His Eminence, Archbishop Andronik of Ottawa and North America, from our Sister Church, the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad (ROCA) under Metropolitan Agafangel, accompanied by the pious Nun Laurentia. His Eminence is much loved by our brotherhood and our faithful, and all were honored by his presence.

During the weekend celebrations, two auspicious events occurred in the life of the monastic brotherhood and the sisterhood of the nearby Convent of St. Elizabeth the Grand Duchess, both of which events deepened the spiritual significance of the Feast Day of St. Gregory Palamas.

First, with the blessing of Bishop Cyprian, Acting President of the Holy Synod, Archbishop Chrysostomos, and Mother Elizabeth, Abbess of the Convent of St. Elizabeth, on Saturday, during morning Liturgy at the convent, His Grace, Bishop Auxentios tonsured Sister Vera—who entered the monastic life, in very inspiring circumstances, at 87 years of age—to the Great Schema, retaining, at the request of His Eminence, Archbishop Chrysostomos, the name “Vera.” Her sponsor was Abbess Elizabeth. (*See below, left to right, Mother Vera, Bishop Auxentios, and Mother Elizabeth.*)

Schema Nun Vera was born in Pinsk, Belarus, into the pious Russ-



ian Orthodox family of George and Christina Lubenik. As with so many of her generation, her family was dispersed by the events of war. She found herself for almost two months in the infamous Dachau concentration camp, from which she was, by the Grace of God, transferred to a labor camp near Munich, Germany. From Germany, she was able to make her way to America, where she married and raised a family. She was well known in the Russian émigré community as a popular singer, and she also sang in, and directed, Church choirs for parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad.

Present for Mother Vera's tonsure were her daughter, Ekaterina Lukianov, her son-in-law, Alexis Lukianov, and one of their children—Mother Vera's granddaughter—Anastasia (Tasya).

Second, also with the blessing of Bishop Cyprian, Archbishop Chrysostomos, and Archimandrite Akakios, Abbot of the St. Gregory Palamas Monastery, on Saturday afternoon, at the conclusion of Great Vespers, Monk Sergius, 68—tonsured a Rasophore more than forty years ago by Archbishop John (Shahovskoy [† 1989]) of the Metropolia (today's OCA), and now a brother of the monastery—was tonsured to the Great Schema by Bishop Auxentios. The ceremony was transferred from the Liturgy on account of the Feast Day activities. Schema Monk Sergius retained his former monastic name (again at the desire of Archbishop Chrysostomos) and his sponsor was Archimandrite Akakios.

Father Sergius, who is attached to our Exarchate parish in San Di-



ego, CA, where he is greatly beloved, suffers from diplegia (lacking the use of both of his arms and hands) and related ailments. However, despite these illnesses, he is an indefatigable, uncomplaining, joyful, and dedicated servant of the Church, fluent in English, Russian, and Slavonic, and a gifted expert in the Church's *typikon* and Russian choral music. He is a graduate of the University of San Diego.

Visiting the monastery for the Feast were, in addition to Mother Vera's family, a few of our Exarchate faithful from several states: Protopresbyter Joseph Miller from Seattle, WA; Subdeacons Vasily Wylie and Romanos Wren from Houston, TX; Michael Groat from Southern California; and Joshua and Charis Vander Plaats from Lafayette, IN.

The various festal services were beautifully chanted and sung in English, Greek, Slavonic, and Romanian by the monastery and convent choirs. The visitors, who were provided accommodations and meals at the monastery and convent and with local families, were also treated to a delicious lenten luncheon, on the Saturday of the Feast, at the Convent of St. Elizabeth the Grand Duchess.

On the eve of the monastery Feast, the small group of guests and the clergy were invited to an informal community gathering, hosted by the married clergy—Fathers David Cownie, George Mavromatis, and Jerome Zubricky—and their wives, where questions regarding the Faith were discussed over lenten refreshments with the Bishops and married clergy. Archbishop Andronik also spoke about his fascinating experiences as former Chief of the ROCA Mission in Jerusalem.

See, below, scenes from the Feast Day: *(Left to right by row, Archbishop Andronik at the Artoklasia, or Blessing of the Five Loaves, in monastery courtyard; Archbishop Chrysostomos; Bishop Auxentios; clergy and nuns in procession; the Artoklasia; lunch in the monastery refectory for*



married Priests and visiting laymen; the brotherhood with Archbishop Andronik, two married clergymen from the Etna community, and several visiting Subdeacons).

