

Feast Day of the Convent of Saint Elizabeth the Grand Duchess

ON SATURDAY, July 5, 2009 (Old Style), the Convent of Saint Elizabeth the Grand Duchess, in Etna, California, celebrated its major Feast Day. In addition to some twenty-five monastics from the convent and the nearby Saint Gregory Palamas Monastery, a small number of visitors—two having travelled across the country to participate in the quiet and spiritually-uplifting festivities—were present for the Hierarchal Liturgy served on the morning of the Feast. His Eminence, Archbishop Chrysostomos of Etna and His Grace, Bishop Auxentios of Photiki presided, along with Archimandrite Akakios, Abbot of the Saint Gregory Palamas Monastery, the monastery Deacon, Father Nectarios, and Father George Mavromatis, serving Priest at the convent. Matushka (Presbytera) Agnieszka Ferens and her three daughters were also present for the feast, representing our Exarchate parish in San Diego, California.





The beautiful Liturgy was chanted in Greek, English, Romanian, and Slavonic by the convent's accomplished choir, which had prepared a number of Byzantine and Russian melodies for the celebration that they executed with remarkable skill and with touching contrition and sincere piety.

After the Gospel reading, Archbishop Chrysostomos delivered a short but moving homily, referring to the dual importance of the Grand Duchess Elizabeth for Orthodoxy today. On the one hand, he observed, she serves as a fine example for converts in the West of the Church's catholicity, on account of the Saint's non-Eastern ethnic roots (she was a granddaughter of Queen Victoria of England) and her conversion to Orthodoxy from Protestantism, not out of marital obligations (she converted *after* having married Grand Duke Sergei of Russia), but on account of a firm spiritual transformation by her association with the Orthodox Church before her conversion. On the other hand, she serves to remind so-called "cradle" Orthodox, he noted, to take to heart the great appeal of Orthodoxy to Westerners and, while respecting their own ethnic heritage, to speak to and address the West in its *own* language and from the perspective of its *own* experiences, thus fulfilling and not impeding, by ethnic myopia, the first of all Christian duties, given by Christ Himself: that of spreading the Faith.

The convent offered an elegant meal in the convent *Trapeza* (refectory) to almost a score of gathered guests, after the Liturgy, served in various courses by the nuns. Despite the small gathering for the fes-



tivities, greetings for the Feast Day were sent from our Synod faithful and monastic communities in a number of countries. All present were touched and edified by the obvious spiritual presence of Saint Elizabeth at the event and the good thoughts and prayers of those offering congratulations on the Feast.

