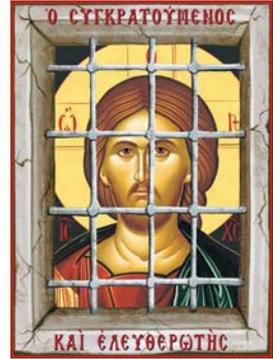


Pilgrimage to the Youth Prison of Volos

Saturday, February 12, 2011 (New Style)

THE ST. PHILARET THE MERCIFUL

Women's Guild undertook yet another of its pilgrimages to visit various Greek prisons, this time visiting the special detention center for youth in Volos, Greece [a coastal port city in Thessaly, situated between Athens and Thessaloniki and built on the site of the ancient city of Demetrias-*Trans.*]. The invitation to make the visit came from the director of the facility, Mr. Basileios Apostolakes, following a previous visit by the Guild to another prison in Volos early in January.



The Youth Detention Center in Volos has some 150 young inmates, primarily foreigners, almost all indigents detained for lacking entry visas into Greece.

Forty-eight pilgrims, as always under the guidance of His Grace, Bishop Cyprian of Oreoi, Acting President of the Holy Synod and the inspiration behind the philanthropic work of the St. Philaret's Guild for the Metropolis of Phyle, took part in the visit. Among them were also a number of clergy and monastics, including Father Constantine Soteriades, Subdeacon Monk Anthony, the Reverend Mother Taxiarchia, Abbess of the Convent of the Holy Angels in Aphidnai, Attica (outside Athens), along with representatives of her sisterhood, in addition to monastic representatives from the Convents of St. Paraskeve (in Acharnon, Attica) and of the Mother of God Myrtidiotisses (also in Aphidnai), who eagerly contributed to the preparations for the pilgrimage.



The reception that the director and personnel of the detention center had

readied for the pilgrims was especially warm, quite moving, and generous.

His Grace, Bishop Cyprian, both in the courtyard of the prison and in the cell blocks hallways, presented each inmate, whom he wholeheartedly embraced with words of encouragement and a kiss, with a “care package,” containing items to meet their basic and personal needs, which had been collected and packaged by the members of the St. Philaret the Merciful Guild.

During this meeting, which reached beyond the borders of ethnicity, religious affiliation, and color, all of the pilgrims lovingly offered prayerful help; as well, the nuns chanted several ecclesiastical hymns.

The inmates, the majority of them young people under twenty-one years of age, were all (with the exception of three Greeks) foreigners from Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Somalia, Sudan, Algeria, New Guinea, Turkey, the Palestine, Albania, Bulgaria, and Georgia. With immense emotion, many of them, including even the Moslems, responded to His Grace’s embrace by calling him “Papá.”

The facility director, Mr. Apostolakes, a man of the greatest gentility and filled with fatherly love for the inmates (like all of his co-workers and the prison personnel), deeply moved by the visit of the pilgrims, over and over again thanked Bishop Cyprian, the Guild, and all of the pilgrims, asking that they return again and that they not forget him and his staff.



On leaving the detention center, the pilgrims had the great blessing of stopping, on their return, at the historic (New Calendar) Convent of the Panagia Xenias (dedicated to an Icon of the Mother of God that dates back to the age of Iconoclasm), where they venerated a portion of the

Sash of the Theotokos. They were also very graciously offered refreshments in the convent’s refectory by the Abbess and the sisterhood.

The pilgrims arrived home from their visit late in the evening, at 10:30 p.m., filled with vivid feelings of love and sympathy for the inmates whom they had visited. As in their other pilgrimages to Greece’s

prisons, they benefited more than they gave. They benefited, in this instance, from the pure and open gazes of their incarcerated brothers, from their smiles, and from their enduring hope that they would shortly be free again and back in their own countries.

