

## Pastoral Visit to Sweden

### Another Great Gift of Love and Unity in Christ

**U**nder the protection of the Theotokos and with the blessing of our much-revered Elder, Metropolitan Cyprian, we once again found ourselves “on the wings of the winds...”

Our destination: scenic Sweden, in order—among other things—to take part in the Feast Day celebration of the center of our missionary community in this country, the Church of Sts. Constantine and Helen the Equals-to-the-Apostles, which also serves as the Bishop’s residence.

Our group of ten people, with His Grace, Bishop Cyprian of Oreoi, Acting President of the Holy Synod, at its head, came prepared not for relaxation and leisure, but rather for seven days of intensive spiritual and pastoral work.

**A.** On Monday afternoon, May 17/30, 2011, we flew from Athens to Munich, where we arrived at 5:40 p.m. Our three-hour layover at the airport gave His Grace an initial opportunity to speak with Nuns Seraphima and Magdalene, from the Convent of the Holy Angels (Aphidnai, Attica), about the matters we would be dealing with in Sweden, and in particular those concerning our small Convent of St. Philothei, in Villberga, Grillby.

At 9:35 p.m. (local time), we arrived in Stockholm, where we were met at the Arlanda Airport by Father Anders Åkerström, Deacon Father Stefan Jaerpenberg and his wife, and a small group of faithful and friends, who accompanied us to the Bishop’s residence in Vårberg, southwest of Stockholm. Following a prayer of thanksgiving in the Church, the visitors from Greece departed to various homes, inside and outside the city, of parishioners who had offered to extend them hospitality. It was by now nearly midnight. His Grace, Bishop Johannes of Makarioupolis had retired to his cell earlier that evening, owing to serious health problems.

**B.** On Tuesday, May 18/31, after a brief tour of the historic center of Stockholm, we returned to the Bishop’s residence. Here, with the blessing of Bishop Johannes, a lengthy and fruitful consultation took place (4:30-7:50 p.m.) between Bishop Cyprian, Father Anders (Rector of

our parishes in Sweden), and Nuns Seraphima and Magdalene. Bishop Johannes remained for only a short while, owing to his ailments.

We dealt with the following matters: The need to ordain Deacon Father Stefan (a native Swede) to the Priesthood, so that he might serve as



a second Rector; how to deal with the Copts, Ethiopians, and Maronites that attend Church here, and who need catechism and Chrismation in order to become full members of our parish (our service for the return of Monophysites has been translated into English); the writing of a brief history of Orthodoxy in Scandinavia, with special reference to the important work of His Grace, Bishop Johannes of Makarioupolis in this area (since 1976); the composition of an annual report of parish activities; the compilation of a list of Scandinavian Orthodox Saints; the translation into Swedish of liturgical texts (the full round of daily services, as well as services from the *Menaion*, *Octoechos*, *Triodion*, *Pentecostarion*, and others); translations of lives of Saints from the Orthodox *Synaxarion*; the Convent of St. Philothei (a dependency of the Convent of the Holy Angels, Aphidnai, Attica, Greece): its new legal entity, matters of organization, and the health of Mother Philothei, who is in need of assistance.



This was followed by an *Agrypnia* for the *Apodosis* of Pascha (10:00 p.m. to 1 a.m.), at which Bishop Cyprian liturgized, assisted by Father Anders, Hierodeacon Theochares, and Subdeacons Monk Antonios and Raphael. Bishop Johannes prayed and communed

in his cell adjacent to the Church.

C. On Wednesday, May 19/ June 1, we left at 9 a.m. for the region of Järbo, approximately 270 kilometers north of Vårberg, where we visited a park, near Ockelbo, that shelters reindeer. That afternoon, we arrived at the property of our parishioners Laurence and Maria (Marjo), where, following a meal, we performed the Small Blessing of the Waters in the



place where they are constructing a Chapel, and then chanted Vespers for the Feast of the Ascension. We stayed the night in the neighboring picturesque village of Järbo.

This lengthy excursion was a wonderful experience. Everywhere, the beauty of nature had an uplifting effect on us. Endless combinations of greens and blues, painted with the ineffable artistry of the Divine brush...

**D.** On the Thursday of the Ascension, May 20/ June 2, we headed south and arrived, after two and a half hours, at the Convent of St. Philothei, in Villberga, Grillby, in order to serve the Divine Liturgy. On our way, we were informed that Mother Philothei had unexpectedly been admitted to the hospital in the city of Enköping, located some seven

and half kilometers from the convent.



At the *Hesychasterion* of St. Philothei, we were met by Father Anders, Deacon Father Stefan, and other faithful. The Holy Angels nuns chanted in Greek for the Divine Liturgy, with Bishop Cyprian serving as

a Priest. Following the makeshift meal, during which we had an edifying conversation, we left for the hospital to commune Mother Philothei. In her hospital room, we found her as cheerful as ever, despite her old age, serious illness, and nearly complete blindness. We chanted Church hymns, she communed, and then we discussed the future of the convent. We listened to her proposals and promised that we would take care of everything, following prayer and consultation with the people involved.

At 4 p.m., we left for the home of Sister Magdalene's parents, in

Norrsviken, Sollentuna, a suburb twenty kilometers north of Stockholm. Present at the meal were the Greek visitors, Fathers Anders and Stefan, other Swedish faithful, and Sister Magdalene's entire family: her parents, Per-Åke and Åsa Jonsved, her two sisters, and her brother, a Lutheran Pastor, who is married with three small children. Sister Magdalene (36 years old) is the eldest child.



Following group conversations full of love and respect, the exchange of gifts, and a tour of the picturesque house, Bishop Cyprian, Per-Åke and Åsa, and Nuns Magdalene and Seraphima sat down for a short, private discussion. Sister Magdalene's parents were informed that their daughter would soon move to the Convent of St. Philothei, what this move would entail, and what the prospects are. These truly noble and warmhearted parents, pious Lutherans who, ten years ago, had given their consent to their daughter's journey towards Orthodoxy and the monastic life, expressed their thoughts and suggestions, as well as their gratitude for our trust in them and for this consensual approach to such an important step.

We returned late that evening to Stockholm to rest, because we would be celebrating the Divine Liturgy the next morning.

**E.** On Friday, May 21/June 3, the Patronal Feast of the Church of Sts. Constantine and Helen, a simple Divine Liturgy was served, with a fair number of faithful present. The main celebration had been transferred to the following Sunday so that all of the parishioners would be able to attend.

Another discussion followed with Father Anders, during which he asked many questions about various pastoral matters, particularly with regard to Baptisms, weddings, and other parish issues. We also discussed the possibility of a men's *Hesychasterion* and took measures towards that end.

In the early evening, Hierodeacon Theochares' mother, Mrs. Justina (also known as Rosa) Benjamin, served a light dinner for all of the visitors from Greece and several other faithful at her house in Rönninge, approximately ten kilometers south of Vårberg. This was a good op-



portunity for edifying discussions, with the rest of the Orthodox family also in attendance.

**F.** On Saturday, May 22/June 4, we left for Uppsala, in south-central Sweden, at 8:30 a.m., in order to celebrate the Liturgy at our parish Church of the Dormition of the Theotokos. We arrived at 9:30 a.m., and Bishop Cyprian, Father Anders, and Deacons Theochares and Stefan served, with Monk Antonios assisting as Subdeacon. The entire congregation was made up of twenty-five of our faithful. It was a great blessing for us to liturgize in this historic Lutheran city and beautiful university town, which unfortunately is ignorant of the honor due to the Theotokos, our guide to the Kingdom of Heaven.



At the house of Father Anders, his wife, Presbyteria Birgitta, an excellent hostess, served us a fine meal. While we were in Uppsala, we took the opportunity to visit our dear parishioner, Elizabeth, in the hospital. Her husband Zacharias was at her side. We gave her words of encouragement, read her prayers for the sick, and embraced them both.

We then returned to Stockholm, since at 6:30 p.m. we would begin Resurrectional Vespers in honor of Sts. Constantine and Helen. On the way, Bishop Cyprian and Father Anders continued discussing the pressing problems of our community in Sweden, which must be dealt with for the progress of our Orthodox witness in an environment that is increasingly becoming de-Christianized, but which nevertheless thirstily seeks the genuineness of Truth and Life.

At 6:30, at the Cathedral of Sts. Constantine and Helen, we began the evening service: festal Vespers and Small Compline, with the Akathist

Hymn to the Saints. The reading and chanting were in Swedish and Greek. Bishop Cyprian officiated. We then had a light supper. Bishop Johannes remained in his cell, next to the Church.

**G.** On Sunday, May 23/June 5, we began the Midnight Office at 8 a.m. and the Divine Liturgy around 10:00. Most of Matins was read and chanted by the Greek visitors. At the end of the Liturgy, a procession was made around the Church, with the participation of the large congregation. At the entrance to the Bishop's residence hung the Swedish



and Greek flags. Bishop Cyprian then spoke about “our lost ideal, our forgotten vision”: our prelapsarian virginity and innocence; the sacredness of the place and time in which we live (in our “un-virginal” and, consequently, “inhuman” world); and our calling to become “children,” that we might enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.



After the festal meal at the Bishop's residence, Bishop Cyprian had time to talk with the faithful and hear confessions until 6 p.m., at which point he held a parish *Synaxis*, which lasted until 9 p.m.



At this *Synaxis*, we jointly read and discussed compunction-evoking texts of our holy Tradition, in a prayerful atmosphere. Many of our parishioners were in attendance, as well as several Lutherans. Bishop Johannes also took part, despite his illness. All present showed great interest and were substantially edified. The topics discussed were related to those touched upon during the sermon that morning. The texts had been translated into Swedish and were handed out to the faithful for individual study.

**H.** On Monday, May 24/June 6, we once again visited Mother Philothei in the hospital in Enköping, and stayed at her side for around forty minutes. She was in very good humor; we chanted and talked together, and promised that we would take care of her small convent with special concern.

At 5:40 p.m., we left for Frankfurt, and landed in Athens at 1:40 a.m. on Tuesday morning, where we were met at the airport by our beloved faithful in Christ.

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Glory to God for all things! This pastoral visit was full of blessings and spiritual consolation. With the aid of the Theotokos, its program functioned constructively towards the realization of its goals. The presence of the visitors from Greece strengthened our brothers and sisters in Sweden, whose zeal for life in Christ was revived. We hope that this edifying communion will continue, for the growth in Christ of our Orthodox community in Sweden.

*Bishop Cyprian of Oreoi*