

Pastoral Visit and Pilgrimage to Georgia

With the blessing of our ailing Metropolitan and Father Cyprian, Bishop Cyprian of Oreoi, Acting President of the Holy Synod in Resistance, along with a party of ten monastics and laypeople, made a seven-day pastoral visit and pilgrimage (March 7/20-March 14/27, 2012) to the blessed land of Georgia.

• Bishop Cyprian and those accompanying him arrived in Tbilisi on the afternoon of Tuesday, March 7/20, and were given a warm welcome by our two Priests in Georgia, Protopresbyter Basili Mkalavishvili and Archpriest Vakhtang Mariani, and dozens of faithful, Subdeacons, and women chanters bearing the Precious Cross, banners, and Icons, and chanting hymns in Greek. Following this, there was a reception for the visitors from Greece in the Church of the *Panagia Portaitissa*, in the suburb of Gldani, Tbilisi. The fervor and zeal of the Georgian faithful warmed up the interior of the enormous Church amid the bitterly cold weather.



• On Wednesday, March 8/21, the Greek delegation visited two historic monasteries, those of the Forerunner and of St. David, in the wilderness of Kakheti, in Gareji, south-east of Tbilisi, both of which are situated in natural caves. In ancient times, there were eighteen monasteries in this desert area and some thirty thousand monks.

• On Thursday, March 9/22, a Hierarchical Liturgy of

the Presanctified Divine Gifts was celebrated in the Church in Gldani. Bishop Cyprian liturgized, together with Fathers Basili and Vakhtang. Several dozens of the faithful were in attendance, and many of them communed. In his homily, Bishop Cyprian spoke about the Holy Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, whose Feast Day it was, emphasizing that we are “intimidated” by their courage, since we cannot offer such great sacrifices to Christ and all too easily descend from our own cross; we can, nonetheless, offer small sacrifices by displaying patience, humility, and self-reproach in afflictions.

The Greek pilgrims next went to Mtskheta, the ancient capital of Georgia, where they visited the historic Church of the Holy Apostles (Svetitskhoveli), the Convent of the Transfiguration, and the historic Holy Cross Church of Jvari.

- On Friday, March 10/23, after celebrating the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts in the Church in Gldani, Fathers Basili and Vakhtang served a Memorial Service for the reposed, as they do daily in this Church during Great Lent. During a meal following the



services, Bishop Cyprian spoke with the clergy and faithful about ecumenism and about the ecclesiology of our Synod in Resistance.

- On Saturday, March 11/24, a visit was made to the Bridge of the Hundred Thousand Martyrs slain by the Persians in the thirteenth century, in the historic center of Tbilisi.



Later on, the services of Vespers, Compline, Orthros, and the First Hour were celebrated in the Church of the *Panagia Portaitissa*, during which the two Priests confessed the faithful. It should be noted that both of our Priests in Georgia work with astonishing self-denial, remaining essentially almost all day in Church in order to serve the faithful, receiving in recompense only small offerings from their flock and having no insurance or access to health care.



- On the Fourth Sunday of the Fast, the Sunday of St. John of the Ladder, March 12/25, Bishop Cyprian celebrated the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great in the Church of the *Panagia Portaitissa* with Fathers Basili and Vakhtang, many Subdeacons, and

a large crowd of faithful, nearly 150 of whom communed from two Chalices.



Following the meal after the Liturgy, Bishop Cyprian discussed with the two Priests, among other matters, the establishment of a convent in honor of the Dormition of the Theotokos, the construction of a guest house near the Church, the founding of Churches and communities in other parts of the country, and the possibility of ordaining new clergy, etc.

- On Monday, March 13/26, the Greek delegation travelled to Eastern Georgia, where they visited three historic monasteries: the Convent of the Nativity of the Theotokos in the region of Shuamta, founded in the sixteenth century, an amazing edifice, 940 meters high, with seven-

teen nuns, where the wonderworking “Khakhuli” Icon of the Mother of God (an example of the “Hodegetria” prototype) is kept; the Monastery of St. George in Alaverdi, dating from the sixth century, an equally astounding edifice with an enormous Church built by St. Joseph, one of the twelve Holy Fathers from Syria; and finally, the Convent of St. Nina in Bodbe, which also houses the tomb of the Enlightener of Georgia.

- On Tuesday, March 14/27, in the early hours the visitors departed by air from Tbilisi, with a stopover in Constantinople. There, until their flight for Athens, they had time to visit, among other places, the Holy Monastery of the Life-Giving Spring (Baloukle), the Monastery of Blachernæ, the Patriarchal Cathedral of St. George in the Phanar, and Hagia Sophia. That same evening, the Greek delegation arrived safely in Athens.

- This pastoral visit and pilgrimage to Georgia was, by God’s Grace and through the intercessions of the *Panagia Portaitissa*, very fruitful and edifying. The bonds of love in Christ with our Georgian brothers and sisters have become deeper and stronger. The zeal and self-denial of shepherds and flock are manifest and impressive, and their hospitality is nonpareil. The prospects for further expansion and consolidation of Orthodox resistance in Georgia are excellent. Our Georgian brothers and sisters are in need of our prayers and support, since they are under direct and indirect pressures from all sides, as long as their Orthodox resistance continues to be a source of “vexation.”

Glory to God for all things!

