

## Pastoral Visit to the Czech Republic and Slovakia

**B**y the Grace of God and with the blessing of His Eminence, Metropolitan Cyprian, who is ailing, His Grace, Bishop Klemes (Clement) of Gardikion made his third pastoral visit to our small communities in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, with especially good and auspicious results.

### Czech Republic

Bishop Klemes, accompanied by Subdeacons Apostolos Phykiyas and Cyprian Koutsaliakos, flew to Vienna on Thursday June 15/28, 2012. From there, he travelled by road to Jezdovice, in the Czech Republic, near the city of Jihlava, the driver being the Reverend Father Jiří (George) Ján, a Czech Priest who serves our Church in Greece and who acted as translator on this, as on previous visits. In Jezdovice, Bishop Klemes was welcomed by the Reverend Father Jeremias Cvak and his large family at the Church of St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco.

- On Friday, June 16/29, after a conversation with Father Jeremias in the newly built parish hall, which is small but functional, arrangements were made for adorning and frescoing the Altar of St. John's Church.



At noon, His Grace and those accompanying him went to the city of Boskovice, whose recorded history goes back seven hundred and ninety years, about fifty kilometers north of Brno, the second largest city in the Czech Republic. There, His Grace was honored by a warm welcome at the town hall from

the Mayor of the city, Mr. Jaroslav Dohnalek. He had an amicable discussion with the Mayor, in the course of which he broached the prospect of establishing an Orthodox Church in the city. Hieromonk Dr. Gorazd from Prague also came for the meeting. Jan Mahač, a Reader belonging to our Church and a physician by profession, coördinated this meeting and the overall program for Bishop Klemes in Boskovice. After a brief tour of the city, His Grace inspected the property (a house with adjoining land) on which, with God's help, our new Church will be constructed.

Afterwards, in the city's art gallery, next to the town hall, Bishop Klemes gave a lecture on the subject: "The Economic Crisis in Greece and the World: A Spiritual Approach." The lecture was delivered in Greek, with simultaneous translation into



Czech by Father Jiří, before an audience of dozens of erudite and educated people. It aroused great interest, and the members of the audience asked many questions. This afforded His Grace an opportunity to present the Orthodox viewpoint on a number of important issues, thereby offering a clear and sincere witness to the Truth and encouraging his hearers to ask themselves some serious questions. Moreover, by way of an historical retrospective he diagnosed the maladies of contemporary Western civilization, which are due in large part to the estrangement of Western Christianity from the Church, initially through Roman Catholicism and subsequently through Protestantism.

In general, our sojourn in Boskovice left us with a sense that, by God's Grace, a door is opening, that seeds have been sown, and that there are grounds for hoping that this situation will continue, especially if, as envisaged, an Orthodox Church can be established in the city.

- On Saturday, June 17/30, Bishop Klemes discussed matters of ecclesiastical concern with Fathers Jeremias and Gorazd in the Church hall in Jezdovice. Later on, together with Father Jiří and others, they walked up a nearby hill in order to become better acquainted with the exceptional beauty of the surrounding countryside.



In the afternoon, His Grace had an open-air meeting in Jezdovice with a number of people, both Orthodox and non-Orthodox, including the Mayor of the village. The Bishop responded to numerous questions from those in attendance on spiritual, historical, and doctrinal issues and on current affairs. The interest shown by some of the heterodox was impressive, and we fervently wish that this will yield good results.

Afterwards, Bishop Klemes presided at Resurrectional Vespers in St. John's Church, which was chanted, together with the Service to St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco, in Czech, Greek, and Slavonic.

- On Sunday, June 18/July 1, the Feast of St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco was celebrated one day in advance, in order to



make it easier for the faithful to attend the solemnity. At the Festal Divine Liturgy that was celebrated after Orthros, Bishop Klemes liturgized, together with Father Jeremias, Hieromonk Gorazd, Father Jiří, and Father Chariton Mrázek, who is now residing in the Czech

Republic. A good many of the congregation, both adults and children, communed. Also present, in addition to the Czech faithful, were the two Greek Subdeacons, a family of Romanian Old Calendarists from Vienna, and an Orthodox Christian from Slovenia. Thus, at the celebration of his Feast Day in his Church in the Czech Republic, St. John assembled an inter-Orthodox flock, to their spiritual joy.

In his homily, Bishop Klemes talked about the calling of St. John, a contemporary Saint, to consecrate himself to God. St. John fulfilled this vocation superbly in his exemplary Apostolic and missionary work, and this, because Christ lived in him through the holy virtues, prayer, and daily partaking of the Immaculate Mysteries. In this way, through the whole of his life in Christ, the Saint revealed Christ and, as an admirable missionary, constantly offered Him to innumerable people, regardless of ethnicity, in almost every continent of the earth. St. John the Wonderworker, as a good and discerning Shepherd, helped people to see their sinfulness and guided them to true repentance and union both with God and with one another. He summons us, too, today to purify our consciences, to detach ourselves from the ephemeral concerns of this world of corruption and sin, to illumine our souls, and to fulfill our Christian vocation, which is a call to sanctification, in a worthy manner. It is vital for our salvation that we be Orthodox Christians not only in name and in words, but also in practice and in truth. The struggle to preserve the purity



of the Faith from false teachers must be accompanied without fail by our wholehearted dedication to God-pleasing deeds of sacrifice and love. St. John wishes all of us Orthodox, whatever our ethnic background, to be united in the true Faith, so that together we might hymn and glorify the Name of the Holy Trinity.

After expressing his best wishes to the clergy and faithful, His Grace performed the *Artoklasia* in front of the Church and distributed gifts as blessings.

A small reception with refreshments was hosted outdoors on the grounds of their house by Father Jeremias' parents, Vladimir and Anna, who received Holy Baptism just a year ago and are distinguished for their good works.

In the afternoon, His Grace spoke at length with one of our Czech Priests about personal matters.

The sudden ordeal that befell Bishop Klemes on account of an upset stomach caused him discomfort for the remainder of his visit, but the program, with God's help, continued unaltered.



## Slovakia

On the morning of Monday, June 19/July 2, Bishop Klemes and those accompanying him set out by road for southeastern Slovakia (Carpatho-Russia), by way of Hungary. After a long journey, tiring



on account of the heat, they arrived in the village of Michalany, Slovakia, in the afternoon of the same day.

There, in the courtyard of the house of our Priest, the Reverend Father Vladimir Mohorita, a Church of relatively small dimensions has been

constructed. It proved necessary to erect this Church, since hitherto there has been only a Chapel inside the Priest's house.

In the Church, where preparatory work went on until the last moment (!), His Grace performed the *Thyranoíxia*, or "Opening of the Doors" (with the Blessing of Waters) in Greek, with the assistance of Father Jiří. Thereafter, with His Grace presiding, Father Vladimir served Vespers in Slavonic in honor of the Patron Saint of the new Church, St. Rostislav, Equal to the Apostles, King of Greater Moravia (ninth century). At the end of Vespers, Bishop Klemes offered brief greetings to the few assembled faithful, expressing his joy over the beautiful Church and his best wishes and thanks to all who had labored in or contributed in any way to its construction.

Later on, in the Priest's house, at a gathering with the faithful who were present, among whom was a family of our faithful from Kraków, Poland, the Bishop imparted spiritual counsels for the edification and fortification of our small flock, which is so far removed from us geographically. Father Vladimir mentioned some recent interventions of St. Rostislav which enabled them to find solutions regarding the construction of the Church.

- On the morning of Tuesday, June 20/July 3, after Orthros, which was chanted in Slavonic, Bishop Klemes celebrated a Festal Divine Liturgy with Fathers Vladimir and Jiří. The few Orthodox faithful in the area came for the service, as did some interested heterodox and the Mayor of the village.



In his homily, His Grace spoke about the love of St. Rostislav for God and his neighbor and, by extension, as ruler, for his entire nation. The Saint loved God "with all his heart, soul, and mind," but abso-

lutely not according to the corrupt teaching of the Frankish German missionaries; for they professed and taught not only the heresy of *Triglossia*, that is, that God is to be worshipped, supposedly, solely in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, but also the heresy of the *Filioque*, which degrades the Holy Spirit and strikes at the Mystery of the Holy Trinity and hence at the very Essence and Source of love. Perfect love of the truth was made known to the ruler and people of Moravia by the Thessalonian Saints Cyril and Methodios, the Equals to the Apostles, who were sent from Constantinople at the request of St. Rostislav. The love of St. Rostislav for his neighbor, and in general for his entire nation, was expressed by his good and socially beneficial deeds and his solicitude for their evangelization, and also in his steadfast struggle to provide the Church in Moravia with an organizational structure and to safeguard national independence through freedom and justice. However, his missionary endeavor for his people was curtailed by the enemies of the Truth, both external and internal, and St. Rostislav eventually received a glorious Martyr's crown in Germany. And we today, if we truly love God, must readily obey His commandments and be aware that, even if great and wondrous deeds are accomplished through us, we are simply doing our duty, as "unprofitable servants" (St. Luke 17:10). God expects of us that we rise above *natural* love only towards those who love us and that we ascend to *voluntary* love even towards those who hate us. We attain this to the degree to which we banish pride from ourselves and humbly receive the Grace of the All-Holy Spirit, which purifies us and raises us up from the human level of thought and behavior to the charismatic and Divine level. Finally, His Grace expressed his wish



to the Rector, Father Vladimir, and his helpers and fellow workers that they offer a witness of faith and truth in love.

Afterwards, the Icon of St. Rostislav was carried in procession round the Church and the *Artoklasia* was celebrated.

In the festal meal that followed, the Mayor of Michalany expressed his goodwill towards our small community and said how profoundly impressed he was by all that he had seen and heard. Particularly striking was his admission that the Uniates of the area had vehemently objected to granting permission to erect our Church on the property of our Priest, Father Vladimir, because they did not wish the Old Calendarist “conservative Orthodox” to have a Church! However, justice and truth prevailed, and the Uniates were put to shame.

In the afternoon, Bishop Klemes discussed various topics of spiritual and current interest with the faithful. Later on, he gave Father Vladimir instructions regarding the furnishing and adornment of the Church and also provided him with spiritual clarifications of matters that concerned him.

### **Visit and Pilgrimage to Historic Monuments**

- On the morning of Wednesday, June 21/July 4, Bishop Klemes and his party began the long return journey to the Czech Republic, again via Hungary. Prior to entering the Czech Republic, they took a detour in order to visit a unique Church in Slovakia, near the village of Kopčany. This Church dates back to the ninth century, a period in which Christianity flourished in Greater Moravia, and has been preserved intact and exactly as it was, except for the more recent tiled roof. While standing in front of this impressive monument, they discovered that it had been a Baptistery.





From there, they went across the border to the city of Hodonín, in the Czech Republic, and then to Mikulčice, where an archeological excavation during the twentieth century uncovered impressive examples of one of the important sites, if not the very center of Greater Moravia (the Old City, or Veligrad).



In the local museum there are impressive finds and exhibits from the different historical periods of the city that evince its cultural

development and particularly its significant Christian tradition. After that, in this region of especial natural beauty they took a walk round the foundations of representative buildings that have been unearthed: small Churches, the large Basilica, the rotunda, the palace, etc. In the ninth century, this was an impregnable fortress, surrounded by rivers, where the holy ruler of Greater Moravia, St. Rostislav, evidently had his capital, with a developed civilization and an intense religious life. It is certain that Sts. Cyril and Methodios passed through here during their visit to Moravia, and also that St. Methodios had this city as his see during the final years of his life as Archbishop of Pannonia and Moravia. In all probability he reposed, and was possibly also buried, here in 885. The Greek visitors were truly moved by this exposure to the history of Greater Moravia; by seeing its monuments close up, they experienced a vivid connection with the heroes of its epic past.

Later on, while passing through the city of Brno, they were able to visit its only Orthodox Church, which belongs to the local Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia and is dedicated to the Holy King Wenceslaus of the Czechs. Unfortunately, however, it was closed.

Back in Jezdovice, Bishop Klemes had a final conversation with Father Jeremias about ways to consolidate, enhance, and expand the presence of the Orthodox in resistance in the Czech Republic, and especially in the capital, Prague, a truly urgent necessity and priority.

## **Return**

On the morning of Thursday, June 22/July 5, Bishop Klemes and two Subdeacons travelled by road to the airport in Vienna, from where they flew back to Athens, arriving home after midday, thanking God for the blessing of this wondrous missionary experience and above all St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco for his palpable help and protection.

To God be thanks and glory unto the ages!

