

FURTHER COMMENTARY ON THE REPOSE OF MOTHER VASILIA OF THE ANNUNCIATION CONVENT IN LONDON, ENGLAND

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A Letter Sent to the Clergy and Laity of the American Exarchate
of the Holy Synod by Archbishop Chrysostomos of Etna

23 February 2013 (Old Style)
Holy Martyr Polycarp,
Bishop of Smyrna

Dear Exarchate Clergy and Faithful:

May God bless you.

As a follow-up to the report that we sent out about the recent repose of Mother Vasilia (Vasiliya) at our Synod's Annunciation Convent in London, England, I am sending the following touching tribute to her, written and sent to me this morning, through a close friend of the sisterhood, by the Abbess of the Convent, Mother Vikentia (Vinkentiya).

As I wrote earlier in reporting Mother Vasilia's repose, His Grace, Bishop Auxentios and I visited the Annunciation Convent several years ago, on our return from a Synod meeting in Greece. Our experiences there created lasting impressions of a truly holy and exemplary sisterhood that wholly captured our affection. The convent was founded by a Saint and visited by many luminaries of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad (ROCA), to which the nuns were loyal throughout their lives, until that body, theretofore a bastion of resistance, joined with the Moscow Patriarchate in 2007.

Despite the advanced ages of all of the nuns, and at great personal cost and loss, they unhesitatingly, along with another well-known monastic community in England, the St. Edward the Martyr Brotherhood, petitioned to be received under the jurisdiction of Metropolitan Cyprian and our Holy Synod in Resistance. Though doing so with absolute resolve, the Mothers acted without denigrating or speaking ill of those whom they nonetheless considered wrong in the unconscionable act of following the vast majority of the ROCA into union with Moscow and compromised "world Orthodoxy."

From Mother Vikentia's tribute to Mother Vasilia, I believe that one can readily see the refined spirituality and loving spirit that mark these nuns, true representatives of an Orthodox spiritual life lived and formed in strict accordance with Holy Tradition and far removed from the diluted, weakened Orthodoxy that we see holding forth especially in this country, and sadly growing worldwide. Simply entering the stately Annunciation Convent is to enter another world, a holy world, an older and more genuine Orthodox realm, untouched by the arrogance, externality, and institutional quality of contemporary world Orthodoxy.

I might add that the nuns, in addition to possessing immense spiritual stature, are also talented in many other ways. All of them speak fluent Arabic (their native language), Russian, and, as evidenced by the eloquent tribute below, English. They also for many years supported themselves by bookbinding, having become so proficient that major research libraries in England, seeking skilled work on old and rare volumes, availed themselves of the sisterhood's talents in this area.

Least Among Monks, † Archbishop Chrysostomos

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MOTHER VASILIIYA

Mother Vasilia was born in Palestine and spent her childhood in the Holy City of Jerusalem, just a stone's throw from the church of the Holy Sepulchre. At the age of ten she was sent to the Orthodox Boarding School in Bethany, it being the only Orthodox school in the region at that time. These two factors were the catalysts that formed her and sustained her seventy years of monasticism within the Convent of the Annunciation, which was founded in London by our beloved Archbishop John (Maximovich), now our heavenly benefactor St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco.

Mother Vasiliya was a multitalented person who had a flair for invention, mechanical aptitude and an artistic eye. She used her talents fully, both in the practical ways of being the maintenance person of the convent but also most diligently in enhancing and beautifying the House of God and the services. She was given the obedience of being the *Panomarka* (sacristan), and undertook this obedience with deep love and devotion. Over the years, many clergy have served at the Convent, from newly ordained deacons to Metropolitans, the young and old, both sick and healthy, and so many commended her on her kindness, help and attention to liturgical detail. One elderly Russian priest, Father Cheremeteev, wrote to thank her saying, 'I could not serve if you were not with me.'

As an individual, she is probably remembered for being the 'naughty one', because she had a spark that endeared her to people, although as an individual she was a very reserved and private person who shunned attention. Having said that, she was always direct in dealing with people.

Mother suffered ill health from childhood, and over the years developed quite a number of chronic conditions requiring continuous monitoring and hospital visits. She bore this long-suffering cross stoically and never complained. She attended to church services through to the end of last year, when finally her illness took the wind out of her sail and she could no longer physically fulfill her duties.

Her funeral took place a week after her repose. The service was officiated by Bishop Ambrose, together with our local Clergy and some of the servers whom she taught. Her funeral was attended by her brother Musa, nurses and doctors who attended her and many friends who had travelled long distances to bid their farewell to a loved one.

She was interred alongside her beloved Abbess Elisabeth and her blood sister, Susanna (Abbess Seraphima). May her memory be eternal and may she rest in peace.

March 2013