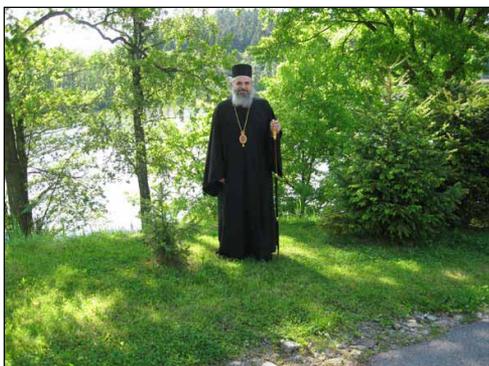


Pastoral Visit to the Czech Republic and Slovakia

By the Grace of God, His Grace, Bishop Klemes of Gardikion made his fourth pastoral visit to our communities in the Czech Republic and Slovakia belonging to the Church of the True Orthodox Christians of Greece, this time in his new capacity as Locum Tenens of the Holy Diocese of Moravia, which was recently established by our Holy Synod.



Accompanying His Grace were the Reverend Father Jiří Ján—a Czech Priest who serves our Church in Greece and who acted as translator—chanter Eleutherios Karametses, and Subdeacon Christos Giarakos.

The delegation arrived by air in Prague at noon on Monday, May 6/19, 2014, and was welcomed by Hieromonk Gorazd, Petros Martakides, and Sister Martha. They then travelled by road to Jezdovice, a village located in the middle of the country near the cities of Telč and Jihlava, where we have a Church dedicated to St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco. Upon their arrival, they were welcomed by the Reverend Father Jeremias Cvak and his family.

That afternoon, Bishop Klemes met with Father Jeremias and a catechumen in the parish hall, where he informed them about matters relating to the union of True Orthodox Christians and the positive outcome thereof.



Later on, a visit was made to the historic city of Telč and then to an exceptionally beautiful landscape in a forest with a clear lake.

On Tuesday, May 7/20, Bishop Klemes and those accompanying him set out by road for Michal'any, Slovakia, by way of Hungary, arriving in the afternoon of the same day after a tiring journey of eight hours. They were awaited by the Reverend Father Vladimir Mohorita together with a small group of faithful, whereupon Vespers was served in Slavonic and Greek in honor of St. John the Theologian and St. Arsenios, at the Church of St. Rostislav.

A gathering for spiritual discussion then took place with the faithful at the house of Father Vladimir, where the visitors from Greece were offered hospitality.

On the morning of Wednesday, May 8/21, Orthros was served in the Church, followed by a Hierarchical Divine Liturgy. Bishop Klemes liturgized together with Fathers Vladimir and Jiří, with a small group of faithful in attendance.



In his sermon, Bishop Klemes spoke about love of Truth and Truth in love as preconditions for peace with God, our neighbor, and our own selves. This is accomplished and experienced liturgically, to the extent that we have repented and been reconciled with others. St. John the Evangelist, whose Feast Day it was, guides us to the true Wellspring of Love, the Triune God, explaining that He is Love and does not simply have love. The Evangelist exhorts us to love and demonstrated this love by his own example, as when, following the example of Christ the Good Shepherd, he hastened, despite old age, to save one of his disciples who had become a robber. His Grace expressed the wish that we also demonstrate our theoretical confession of the Truth Faith in our lives in practice by acts of love, that we might prove to be genuine children of the Holy Enlighteners Cyril and Methodios, and also of Metropolitan

Cyprian, of blessed memory, who had a special devotion to St. John the Evangelist, loved missionary work, and has left us a spiritual legacy of love.



A procession was then made around the Church, followed by the Prayers of Thanksgiving after Holy Communion and the Dismissal.

After lunch, a discussion took place regarding the better organization of our witness and regarding Divine services. That afternoon, meetings and discussions were also held in order to deal with matters of immediate concern.

On Thursday, May 9/22, the delegation from Greece left Michal'any by road and headed for west-central Slovakia where, after a journey of six hours, they arrived near the village of Valaská Belá, in a landscape of mountainous wilderness, in order to visit two families among our new spiritual children. In one of their houses there is a chapel dedicated to St. John the Evangelist. After lunch was served, a long discussion took place about spiritual, apologetic, confessional, and, in general, edifying matters.



Late that afternoon, the delegation drove back to the Czech Republic, arriving late in the evening in Jezdovice.

Around noon on Friday, May 10/23, Bishop Klemes and those with him met with the Mayor of the city of Velké Meziříčí, in the central region of the Czech Republic (Moravia), Mr. Radovan Necid, who, together with his Deputy Mayor and a member of the municipal council, received the visitors with honor. They discussed matters pertaining to our mission and thanked the municipal authorities for granting the use



of a building in the city that has now been transformed into a Church dedicated to St. Cyril and Methodios of Thessalonica, the Enlighteners and Equals to the Apostles, who arrived in the region 1151 years ago (in 863).

Following this meeting, the visitors were given a brief tour of the city center, including the spot where the two rivers that run through it conflow. This is an ancient city of Moravia, the history of which has been lost in the mists of time. There is, however, a living tradition that Sts. Cyril and Methodios passed through here sometime between 863 and 865, even staying overnight. In a local pharmacy, the contemporary visitors from Greece were especially moved to see an Icon of these Saints with a short explanatory note detailing this tradition, according to which this was the precise spot where the Saints had stayed while passing through. Wondrously enough, just a dozen or so meters away from that spot stands the building granted to us by the municipality, an edifice which has been transformed into a beautiful Church dedicated to Sts. Cyril and Methodios!

In this newly built Church, which is small but graceful, Bishop Klemes performed, that afternoon, the official Thy-ranoíxia (“Opening of the Doors”) with the Blessing of the Waters, which was followed by Vespers in honor of the Feast of Sts. Cyril and Methodios, served in Greek and Slavonic. A small group of faithful was present, including four catechumens.

Bishop Klemes, who presided, spoke a few words at the end of the service about the significance of our presence in this re-



gion, as a continuation of the wondrous arrival of the Saints being honored, who preached the Gospel of salvation, displayed an abundance of virtue, and transmitted Christian civilization. Just as they were bound together with the local inhabitants in the Truth of the Orthodox Faith, so we also bear the same Gospel, the same salvific Faith, and are united in the same Truth with those who embrace this Truth. His Grace also expressed the wish that this Church constitute a center of True Orthodoxy, of God's blessing, and of the presence of Sts. Cyril and Methodios. He then thanked those who helped to transform the building into a Church, and especially its warden, Petros Martakides.



On Saturday, May 11/24, Bishop Klemes celebrated the Divine Liturgy with Fathers Jeremias and Jiří at the aforementioned Church on the occasion of its Feast Day, with a small group of faithful in attendance. The Liturgy was celebrated in Greek and Czech.

In his sermon, His Grace spoke about the spiritual joy and emotion arising from the fact that the Saints are being honored in the country where they served as missionaries. The Saints not only brought an alphabet and civilization to this land but also that which is even more important: knowledge of the True God, life in accordance with His Will, virtue, the worship of Him in Spirit and in Truth, the Holy Mysteries, and, in a word, the Pearl of Great Price, the True Light, the Living Water, and Freedom in the Spirit—that is, all those things that nourish and give drink to the spirit of man unto the remission of sins and life everlasting, insofar as, to be sure, man reciprocates and accepts these gifts by means of faith and repentance. If one does not obey God and become reconciled with Him, this brings about, or continues, the “death” of his soul. This occurs by reason of heresy and error or through sin. Sts. Cyril and Methodios themselves, together with their disciples, were persecuted in this region by the agents of sin and error, but they continued to defend



the true Faith concerning the Holy Spirit and the purity of virtue, for which reason the Grace of the Divine Comforter abode in them and delivered them from their bonds and hardships. The Grace of God is with all those who belong to the Truth, even if they constitute a minority, and not with those who deviate therefrom, even if they constitute a majority and dominate by means of force and arbitrariness. In the cradle of the mission begun by Sts. Cyril and Methodios, then, the Grace of the Holy Spirit has inspired a few souls in our own days to become affiliated with our Holy Monastery [in Phyle, Greece] and, through Metropolitan Cyprian, of blessed memory, to receive the Grace of redemption, whereby the Truth has begun to be sown, and it is already bearing worthy fruit. Our presence serves the witness of True Orthodoxy in the spirit of Sts. Cyril and Methodios and their disciples for the spiritual quickening of all those whom the Lord calls to His salvific Truth.



After the Divine Liturgy, refreshments were served and His Grace was able to speak with the faithful on the ground floor of the Church. Later, a meal was served in Jezdovice.

That afternoon, Great Vespers was chanted in the Church of St. John in Jezdovice, followed by a meet-

ing between the Bishop and the clergy and laity.

On Sunday, May 12/25, following Resurrectional Orthros, a Hierarchical Divine Liturgy was celebrated, in the same Church, in Greek and Czech. Bishop Klemes liturgized with Father Jeremias, Hieromonk

Gorazd (from Prague), Father Jiří, and Father Chariton (who for the time being is living in the city of Pardubice, Czech Republic, with the prospect of moving to Toronto, Canada within the next few months to serve at one of our parishes there). Between three and four dozen faithful were in attendance, including a number of catechumens and others interested in Orthodoxy.



In his sermon, Bishop Klemes spoke about the passion of envy, which blinds the ungodly, moving them to speak evilly against God and those who receive His benefactions. Bodily eyes discern sensory light, but there is also noetic Light, Which is Divine and, as the Grace of God, deifies us. We receive this Light at Divine Baptism, and it manifests itself when we live in a God-pleasing manner, when we love, and when we receive the Holy Mysteries in a spirit of repentance. When we do good, and especially when we pray, this Light increases and fills us. When, by contrast, we grow proud or acquisitive or fall into carnal sins, this Light departs from us and darkness overcomes us. We are in need of Divine illumination that we might tread unerringly the way of the Lord—as the Saints did—and lest we become conquered and darkened by the passions. Heresy and error also constitute profound darkness. Sts. Cyril and Methodios brought the Divine Light to the land of Moravia, but they were driven out by heretics, whereupon the darkness of error held sway in the region for many centuries. In our own days, the Light of Truth is being betrayed and mingled with darkness. Ecumenists such as Patriarch Bartholomew, who prayed together with Pope Francis in Jerusalem, by communing with the darkness of heresy, are blinded and fall into the depths of perdition. Howsoever much the people of this world might applaud them, God’s blessing is not upon them. And howsoever much they might condemn us as supposedly having broken away from the Church, they in fact condemn themselves; for we remain in the Truth

which has been handed down to us by Saints and Confessors of the past and today, such as the Patron Saint of this Church, St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco, and the Holy Metropolitans Glicherie of Romania and Philaret of the Russian Church Abroad. Through the prayers of our own Metropolitan Cyprian, of blessed memory, may we become children of the Light in word and deed, that we might be vouchsafed the Kingdom of Light.



After the Divine Liturgy, a gathering took place in the parish hall, with discussions of spiritual topics and incidents from Lives of the Saints. A meal followed.

That afternoon, another gathering with the parishioners was held in the parish hall, which lasted two hours. Bishop Klemes responded to questions about, inter alia, the relations between Greece and Europe, the Orthodox presence in Moravia, the situation in Russia and Ukraine, the upbringing of children, and the true meaning of love.



The Bishop was then able to speak with members of the clergy and laity individually about their own personal matters.

On Monday morning, May 13/26, Bishop Klemes and his traveling companions drove to Prague and departed by air for Athens in the

afternoon, filled with good memories of this arduous, yet truly blessed journey to the countries of the Czech Republic and Slovakia, for the Feast Day of Sts. Cyril and Methodios of Thessalonica, the witness of True Orthodoxy, and the assistance of a few souls who are fighting the good fight of faith and virtue, with auspicious prospects.

Unto God are due glory, honor, thanksgiving, and worship!

