



“For the Edification of the Church”

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■ “Having our gaze fixed on the victory of love and unity”

Cyprus: November 14-17, 2015 (Old Style)

An Exceptional Experience of Love and Hope

When, during the Regular Meeting of our Holy Synod on Wednesday, November 6/19, 2015, I put forward for consideration the possibility of my going to the island of Cyprus, in order to be in prayerful attendance at the Consecration of the Reverend Abbot Father Epiphanius to the Episcopacy, I had a profound sense of the great significance of such an act.

My first visit to this island of Apostles and Saints took place some sixteen months earlier, in July of 2014, with the blessing of the Holy Synod. At that time, I was vouchsafed initial experiences of love and hope when I was counted worthy to come into contact with His Eminence, Metropolitan Sebastianos of Kition, of the Genuine Orthodox Church in Cyprus, which was founded by Metropolitan Epiphanius of blessed memory († 2005) and which is in communion with the Holy Synod in Greece under Archbishop Stephanos.



This year, I would have the special pleasure of meeting even more of the Hierarchs in their Holy Synod, of coming into closer contact with our Brothers, of praying and rejoicing with them at the elevation

to the Episcopacy of the virtuous and blessed Father Epiphanius, and, finally, of helping—with the aid of the *Theotokos*—to facilitate the desired union and Eucharistic communion between our two Synods.

With this in mind, placing my trust in the prayers of my fellow Hierarchs and invoking the protection of all the Saints and of the *Theotokos*, and undeterred by my heavy pastoral schedule or the unfavorable climate for travelling, owing to the ominous clouds on the horizon of the Middle East, I eventually made a four-day visit to the “wounded” island of Cyprus, where the Apostles once trod and which is fragrant with the Grace of the Precious Cross.



The Saints of Cyprus

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A. Friday, November 14/27, 2015, commemoration of the Holy Apostle Phillip.

At 11:52 a.m., Hierodeacon Father Joseph (from the Monastery of Sts. Cyprian and Justina), Mother Thekla (from the Convent of the *Panagia Myrtydiotissa*, near Athens), and I landed at the Larnaka airport on the island of Cyprus.

We were met by the biological father of Bishop-elect Father Epiphanius, Mr. Christos Siekkes (he and his wife Evrydike have eight children, of whom Father Epiphanius is the eldest [born in 1984]).

1. We first visited the Hesychasterion of the Life-Giving Spring, in Avdellero, where Metropolitan Epiphanius of Kition († 2005) of blessed memory used to reside, and where his grave is now located.

2. We then went to the nearby Convent of the Transfiguration, where the Abbess is the Reverend Mother Lampadia and the Superior is Mother Synkletike (Metropolitan Sebastianos’ sister). We were received with love and courtesy, and after visiting



The Convent of the Transfiguration

the Church were served a lunch prepared with much care.

We noticed the concerted efforts of the nuns and other lay helpers to prepare everything to the best of their ability for the Consecration, which would take place on Sunday, November 16/29 at the convent, since it is better equipped, more suitable, and perhaps even larger than other venues for such an important event.

3. After experiencing this abundance of love, both material and spiritual, we left for the center of Larnaka, where the famous Church of St. Lazarus (the “four days dead and friend of Christ”), which once housed his sacred Relics, is located. Mother Thekla remained overnight at the Convent of the Transfiguration, while we went to our own lodging.

4. We were previously informed about the truly lamentable and protracted division among the Old Calendarists in the autonomous local Church of Cyprus and about the ongoing decade-long legal disputes, in particular following the repose of Metropolitan Epiphanius of blessed memory. His successor, Metropolitan Sebastianos, as we ascertained, continues his line of moderation, forgiveness, wisdom, and prayer. Most assuredly, these are the qualities that bring about Christian victory and solutions and that heal schisms and divisions, which are sown and cultivated by the enemy of our salvation.

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B. Saturday, November 15, commemoration of Sts. Gourias, Samonas, and Habib; beginning of the Nativity fast.

1. In the morning, we made a brief visit to the house of Christos and Evrydike, where we met some of their children and relatives.

A rather long conversation began, in a unitive and friendly spirit, in which we informed our brothers and sisters about the work of our Holy Synod and our Holy Metropolis, and our prospects for union.

They were noble, charming, and hospitable people, who took

care of us throughout our sojourn on the island, were visibly moved by our vision of unity, and expressed their wish that it become a reality.

2. We then visited the Monastery of St. Epiphanius in Avdellero, Larnaka, which is under the direction of Father (now Bishop) Epiphanius and houses ten monks.



The Monastery of St. Epiphanius of Cyprus

We were informed of the developments of the legal disputes with the schismatics under Romanian Bishop Parthenios (of Lemesos), and thus were once again given the opportunity to discuss our vision of unity, keeping constantly in mind the Holy Synod in Greece under His Beatitude, Archbishop Stephanos and our brothers in Cyprus under His Eminence, Metropolitan Sebastianos.

Our interaction with Father Epiphanius was very heartfelt and edifying.

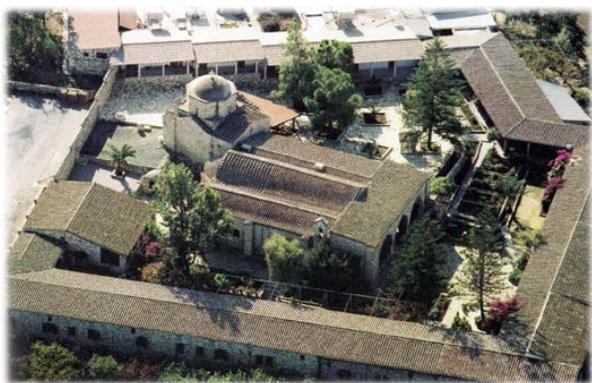
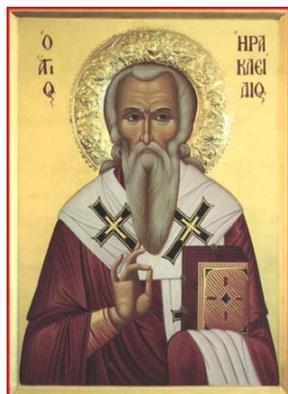
3. Around 12:30 p.m., we visited Levkosia (Nicosia) for the first time, and lamented the protracted and gross injustice of the partition of the island and of the city by the Turks (since 1974).



The Holy Icon of the *Panagia Phaneromene*

We walked through the buffer zone musing sadly, visited the astonishing Church of the *Panagia Phaneromene* (a wonderworking Icon from the fourteenth century), mingled with our gregarious Cypriot brothers and sisters, noticed the large influx of foreign tourists, but also were grieved by the secularization that unfortunately prevails, which is the island's second "gaping wound".

4. During our return, we were granted the great gift of visiting



Above: St. Herakleidios and the Convent named after him.

the Convent of St. Herakleidios (†September 17) in the village of Politikon, just south-west of Levkosia. In this place, St. Herakleidios met the Holy Apostles Paul, Barnabas, and Mark (45-53 A.D.), who had come to evangelize the island, and who catechized, baptized, and consecrated him first Bishop of Tamasos.

5. We arrived back in Larnaka at 4 p.m., which gave me sufficient time, despite my fatigue, to put my thoughts in order and record my impressions and conversations from my stay thus far on the island.

- Metropolitan Sebastianos has three Churches in Levkosia: those of St. Nicholas, of the Holy Apostle Andrew, and of St. Nectarios. The schismatics under Parthenios do not have any parishes in Levkosia and are active primarily in Lemesos, where they have just one fading parish, which the faithful are steadily abandoning.

- In the city of Larnaka, Metropolitan Sebastianos has a parish dedicated to the Holy Unmercenaries. At the nearby Monastery of St. Epiphanius in Avdellero, the Divine Liturgy is celebrated every Sunday for the faithful in its Church for public worship.

- Metropolitan Epiphanius of Kition of blessed memory was a Hierarch distinguished by his wisdom in Christ and his discretion: he was moderate, irenic, and showed understanding, so as to avoid divisions and schisms. After his repose (in 2005), however, those with divisive tendencies and extremist views (primarily among the clergy) were no longer restrained from expressing themselves, thereby confusing and scandalizing the simple faithful.

If my interlocutors are not mistaken, and if I understood them correctly, the Metropolitan held two positions which have perennial validity and which I considered worthy of recording:



New York, 1971: Metropolitan Kallistos of Corinth, St. Philaret of New York, and Metropolitan Epiphanius of Kition

a. He said about the well known iconological dispute [regarding the depiction of the Holy Trinity]:

“In our Church, the two types of this particular Icon have co-existed for centuries, and there was peace. Perhaps one of them is not so theologically correct and the other is entirely correct. We continue to use both, preferring to keep the peace. Preserving love among us, we wait for the Church to pronounce a Synodal and authoritative decision. Until then, let us calm down. Let us not be driven to extremes. This matter should not divide us. Love, peace, and unity come first, that God might speak by means of an Orthodox Synod.”

b. He would emphasize an essential criterion that constitutes proof of a genuine ecclesiastical mindset:

“We should not create schisms and divisions and dilemmas by asking: ‘Whom should we follow in the midst of this confusion, multitude of opinions, and agitation?’ We will by all means follow the Synod; therein lies security. It is impossible for everyone to be a self-proclaimed infallible expert; one cannot refuse to recognize the Synod and the ruling Metropolitan, and to act divisively and against the Synod, agitating the flock and banishing love. All problems should be dealt with in a conciliar manner, with prayer, humility, and love, always in a spirit of blessed and genuine obedience.”

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C. Sunday, November 16 (Old Style), commemoration of



In 1956, Metropolitan Epiphanius of Kition (seventh from the right) was consecrated.

the Holy Apostle and Evangelist Matthew.

1. The Midnight Office began at 6 a.m. at the Convent of the Transfiguration of our Lord in Avdellero, where the Consecration would take place.

Hierarchs and clergy had arrived from Greece on Friday and Saturday. In the

Church, surrounding Metropolitan Sebastianos, were Their Eminences, Metropolitans Lazarus of Amathous, Andreas of Thebes and Lebadeia, Ignatios of Larissa and Tyrnabo, Panteleimon of Phthiotis, and Antonios of New York.

Quite a few clergy took part, among whom was the venerable Archimandrite Father Neophytos, brother of Archbishop Stephanos.

The atmosphere was one of compunction and prayer. Everything was done with solemnity. The character of the Resurrection and of Pentecost held sway in the sacred texts. The Church, including the balcony, was filled to the brim with faithful of every age. The nuns did not chant, but rather two choirs of male chanters.

At 9 a.m., the Bishop-elect Father Epiphanius began reading the Confession of Faith and some half hour later the Divine Liturgy began.

Shortly after 10 a.m., Metropolitan Sebastianos prefaced the Consecration with a very important—one might say historic—sermon, which lasted fifteen minutes.

The main points of the sermon were as follows:

The Autonomous Church of Cyprus is being renewed. The Hierarchy of the Church of Cyprus is composed of Metropolitans Sebastianos of Kition, Lazarus of Amathous, and Epiphanius of Trimythous. The Church of Cyprus is in Eucharistic communion with the sister Church of Greece under His Beatitude, Archbishop Stephanos. This is the first Consecration in Cyprus of a Cypriot Hierarch since 1924. Two Consecrations took place previously, but they were in



Metropolitan Epiphanius
of Cyprus (†2005)

Greece: the first being that of (†) Spyridon of Trimythous and the second that of (†) Epiphanius of Kition. He then addressed moral and spiritual exhortations to the Bishop-elect, reminding him of the Apostolic admonition to St. Timothy: "Take heed unto thyself..."

There followed a sermon delivered by the Bishop elect, who was extremely moved. It was a wonderful homily, replete with spiritual messages and a monastic spirit, in which he regarded the Episcopacy as a service.

The actual Consecration began around 10:30 a.m., and was performed "in the name of the Holy Synod of the Church of Cyprus." The acclamation of "Axios" shook the Church like thunder.

At the end of the Liturgy, a message to the newly Consecrated Bishop from His Beatitude, Archbishop Stephanos was read by his brother, Father Neophytos, followed by words from Metropolitan Lazarus and Antonios.

After the refreshments in the monastery's outer Trapeza, a festal meal was served in a large building for the large throng of faithful and the Hierarchs, Priests, Deacons, and monastics, in a splendid atmosphere of love, peace, cordiality, prayerful chanting, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

2. We returned to our lodging at 4:30 p.m. with feelings of gratitude to God, the Founder of the Church, for the miracle that we experienced and the many and various expressions of edification and consolation in Christ, and this to an exceptional degree, within the perspective of unity and hope.

From the outset, I made it clear to our brethren in Cyprus, and especially to the Hierarchs, that I was not present as an individual, but as a representative of our Holy Synod, bearing tidings of love and unity.

Our brethren appreciated this, and the courtesy, refinement, love, and honor they showed my person were more than touching, that we might all experience together a communion of love. They gave me a place of honor in the Church, treated me with great courtesy, and we embraced each other with special cordi-

ality; in the reception room after the consecration, they gave me leave to convey a unitive greeting on behalf of our Holy Synod to the new Bishop and to offer a gift from the Synod as a symbolic “olive branch”; finally, I participated in the festal trapeza, where the rapprochement was of such a spiritual quality that all sense of differentiation was lost.

3. The sense of intimacy and brotherhood in Christ reached its highest—and simultaneously deepest—point at the meeting that evening at the *Hesychnasterion* of the Life-Giving Spring in Avdellero, within the precincts of the Convent of the Transfiguration.

The entire Hierarchy and a number of clergy from Greece and Cyprus, as well as some laypeople, were present at the approximately four -hour-long discussion, which was of great moment, and which took place in a spirit of mutual respect, esteem, and understanding, always in the context of the desired union.

Among other things, I answered various questions, clarified various matters, proposed that we promote the work of love and unity, asked to visit His Beatitude, Archbishop Stephanos, underscored the need to rediscover the profound reality that we are Brothers in Christ with a common Orthodox Faith (I described the primary elements of our common Faith), who ought to transcend the misunderstandings, misconstructions, and stereotyping of the past with magnanimity, so that, united at last, we might confront the whirlwind of ecumenism, and especially in view of [the planned Pan-Orthodox Synod of] 2016.

After this lengthy but warm and heartfelt discussion, which was capped by an abundant *agape* meal, one could sense a certain commitment to continue meetings of this sort in an endeavor to achieve unity. So be it.



The Church of
St. Lazarus the “four days dead.”

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In the reception hall at the Convent of the Transfiguration, following the Doxology chanted for the judicial ruling.

D. Monday, November 17 (Old Style), commemoration of St. Gregory of Neocaesaria.

It was our final day on the island, which held a surprise and great joy in store for us, and which crowned our visit to Cyprus with a gift of God that

served to united us yet more with our brethren.

The provincial Court of Justice of Larnaka announced its long-awaited, final judicial ruling on the irrational claims of the schismatics under Parthenios the Romanian against Metropolitan Sebastianos (that he is allegedly not the canonical Metropolitan of Kition), against the Convent of the Transfiguration (that it allegedly does not belong to the Sisterhood residing there under its Abbess, the Reverend Mother Lampadia), and that the Church under Metropolitan Sebastianos is allegedly not the Genuine Orthodox Church of Cyprus, but simply a conglomeration of people, a faction, and so on.

The ruling (fifty-one pages in length), an erudite text, describes methodically and with clarity the particulars of this long-drawn-out battle, which rocked and scarred our brethren in the Genuine Orthodox Christian Church of Cyprus.

It was thus right and proper for Metropolitan Sebastianos to direct that this gift from God should be celebrated in a special service of thanksgiving at the Convent of the Transfiguration, with the participation of a large throng of clergy, monastics, and laypeople.

The Bishops from Greece were still there and thus, united and already at home with the local Church and the People of God, I payerfully took part in this gladsome event.

The choir of nuns chanted in lofty tones of joy, special petitions and prayers were read, and Metropolitan Sebastianos spoke some gracious words redolent with modesty, moderation, for-

givenness, and love; indeed, His Eminence completely avoided all triumphalism and denigration of the schismatics and urged the clergy and people to continue to consider them to be their brothers, whose return to the unity of the Church they should await, and diligently to avoid judging, condemning, or disdain- ing them, as often happened during the lengthy ordeal.

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After this four-day spiritual banquet, which included the Consecration of a Bishop, the meeting of the local Synod, a legal victory, and acquaintanceship, cordial fraternization, and prayer- ful participation in the achievements and joys of our brethren, we were made fully conscious of the true magnitude of this blessing of our Lord.

Our return to Mother Greece, on Monday after midnight, and the resumption of the heavy duties attendant on our ministry, did not put an end to our heartfelt joy and enthusiasm in Christ over our wonderful experiences in Cyprus, having our gaze fixed on the victory of love and unity.

May we be vouchsafed this miracle as soon as possible, to the glory of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen!

November 30, 2015 (Old Style)
† The Holy Apostle Andrew

† Metropolitan Cyprian
of Oropos and Phyle



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TO GOD BE
GLORY AND THANKSGIVING!