



“For the Edification of the Church”

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“When did we see Thee...in prison and came unto Thee?” (St. Matthew 25:39)

Pilgrimage to the Rural Prison of Kassaveteia, Volos

† Saturday of the Akathist Hymn, April 3, 2016 (Old Style)

On Saturday of the Akathist Hymn, under the Protection of the *Theotokos*, and in accordance with our custom of visiting our imprisoned brothers at the beginning and end of Great Lent, His Eminence, Metropolitan Cyprian of Oropos and Phyle, together with a group of fifty faithful, made a seventh visit to the rural prisons of Kassaveteia, Volos.



The St. Philaret the Merciful Orthodox Women’s Guild once again undertook the responsibility for the organization of this pastoral and social activity.

The 180 inmates were each given a “care package” containing items to meet their basic and personal needs, which were kindly donated to the Guild by its various sponsors, private individuals, and stores.

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As is our custom on such pilgrimages, we began our journey with morning prayers, then chanted festal verses from Lauds, followed by the Supplicatory Canon to Saint Philaret.



Our Shepherd took the opportunity during the rest of the journey to inform us about various ecclesiastical matters, and read and discussed some of Aesop’s Fables, as well as excerpts from the Life of Saint Mary of Egypt.

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Around 10:30 a.m., we arrived at the rural prison, where we met our incarcerated brothers in groups, in four courtyards.



Our Shepherd, or rather *Father*, spoke to them heartfelt words of love and support.

Accompanied by the chanting of the nuns, he then tirelessly embraced each inmate individually, with genuine paternal affection.

One could read on many of their faces how they were inwardly affected; all traces of hesitation or irony vanished as they accepted his guileless embrace.



Father Soterios gave our brothers an opportunity to speak, and they replied with wishes for a good Pascha, but also that: “each of us find his faith again,” “we leave here [spiritually] alive,” “we weigh the consequences of what we have

done,” and that God grant “peace for the whole world.” A few anxiously asked, “What will happen since we are not able to fast here?” And they received the reassurance, “We will fast for you.”

The Guild members then handed out the care packs with the simple but necessary personal care items.



Finally, we visited the prison chapel dedicated to St. Eleftherios, where we chanted hymns of thanksgiving.

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On the return journey, our Shepherd continued to nourish his flock, this time with a discussion of almsgiving and the refuge crisis.

After a two-hour drive, we arrived at the Monastery of St. Agathon, located in a beautiful setting on the slopes of Mt. Oite.



In the monastery's main Church, we were vouchsafed to venerate the wonderworking Icon of the Mother of God and the skull of St. Agathon. In an adjacent chapel are preserved the incorrupt Relics of Elder Bessarion of blessed memory.

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On the final stage of our journey, following the reading of a text by St. John Chrysostomos about the meaning of Sunday in relation to almsgiving, we chanted Great Vespers with troparia to St. Mary of Egypt, whom our Church sets forth as an exceptional model of repentance on the Fifth Sunday of the Fast.

When we finished the Small Compline and were approaching our home base, we were maternally greeted by the Icon of the *Panagia Eleousa* ("the Merciful"), which was being carried in procession by the Kleiston Monastery in Fili.

Thus did the *Theotokos* seal our pilgrimage to the prison of Kassavateia with her mercy.



*What shall we render unto our Lord
and His Holy Mother
for all that They have rendered unto us?*