



# HOLY DIOCESE OF GLDANI GEORGIA



■ Yet another unforgettable spiritual experience

## Pastoral Visit and Pilgrimage to the Holy Land of Georgia

August 13-18, 2016 (Old Style)



**Under** the Protection of the *Panagia Portaitissa* and of St. Nina, Equal to the Apostles, His Eminence, Metropolitan Cyprian of Oropos and Phyle, in his capacity as *Locum Tenens* of the newly-established Holy Diocese of Gldani, once again made a pastoral visit and pilgrimage to the Holy Land of Georgia, in order to celebrate

the Great Feast of the Dormition of the *Theotokos* together with the *Small Flock* of our Church in that country.

**H**e was accompanied by a group of pilgrims comprised of Subdeacon Antonios Hagiokyprianites, ten laypeople, and two nuns from the Convent of the Holy Angels.

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**A**round 3:30 a.m., on Friday, August 13, all of our Priests and many faithful gave their Shepherd and his companions an enthusiastic welcome at the airport of Tbilisi, bearing banners and Icons and chanting hymns, in accordance with Georgian ecclesiastical custom, which is distinguished by its pro-



found and heartfelt piety and reverence towards Hierarchs, love for Greece, and unrivalled hospitality.

Everyone together went to the Cathedral Church of the *Panagia Portaitissa* in Gldani, where His Eminence conveyed to the faithful the best wishes of His Beatitude, Archbishop Kalinikos and of the Holy Synod.

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That afternoon, the group of pilgrims visited the early holy places of Georgia: Mtskheta, the ancient capital of Georgia, the Holy Cross Church of Jvari, the Church of the Twelve Apostles (known as the Svetitskhoveli, or "the Living Pillar"), the Monastery of St. Stephen, the Convent of St. Nina, the bush and chapel of St. Nina, and the tombs of the Holy Monarchs Mirian and Nana, where the group called upon the Enlightener of the Iberians to grant them, among other things, an edifying and fruitful ministry among our Georgian brothers and sisters.

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On Saturday, August 14 (Old Style), the Forefeast of the Dormition of the *Theotokos*, Hieromonk Father Grigol celebrated the Divine Liturgy at the parish Church of the Resurrection in Tbilisi, of which he is the Rector, with our Most Reverend Shepherd in prayerful attendance.

That afternoon, the group of Greek pilgrims attended Great Vespers for Sunday and the Feast of the Dormition, served



at the Cathedral Church of the *Panagia Portaitissa* in Gldani, which was filled to capacity. After midnight, as is the local custom, the Supplicatory Canon to the Mother of God was chanted, followed by a procession around the Church.

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**S**unday, August 15 (Old Style) the festivities of the Great Feast of the Dormition of the *Theotokos* took place, which Feast Day is one of Georgia's national holidays.



**H**is Eminence liturgized, assisted by the Reverend Fathers Basili and Vakhtang (Rectors of the Church), Father Grigol, and many Subdeacons under the guidance of Father Antonios Hagiokyprianites.

**T**he women's choir invited the nuns from Greece to add some Byzantine hymnody to the Georgian liturgical tradition.

**T**hronges of faithful of all ages came forward to commune of the Divine Mysteries.

**A**t the end of the Divine Liturgy, His Eminence spoke about the tender care of the *Panagia*, who consoles and strengthens the faithful in our difficult times, and prayed that "her blessings might be bestowed on all of our hearts" and fulfil the national yearnings of our Georgian brethren.

**H**e then spoke about St. Chrysostomos the New Confessor, whose sanctity was recently proclaimed by our Church, and distributed copies of his Icon to the faithful.

**T**he customary procession around the Church followed, with stops for petitions, readings from the Gospel, and sprinkling with Holy Water.



Various toasts were exchanged at the *agape* meal, following Georgian custom, at which our brethren expressed their gratitude to Archbishop Kallinikos, to the Most Reverend *Locum Tenens*, and to Metropolitan Cyprian of blessed memory (†2013) for their pastoral care of the Genuine Orthodox Christians of Georgia.



That afternoon, the faithful from Greece went to the historic center of Tbilisi, where they visited the Sion Cathedral (which treasures the Cross of St. Nina), the Metechi Bridge of the Holy Martyrs, the Church of St. Vasilissa Sousanik, the Monastery of St. David (with the Pantheon cemetery, where renowned Georgian Churchmen, politicians, writers, and artists are buried), and, late in the evening, the immense Patriarchal Church of the Holy Trinity.



In all of the Churches, it was pleasing to see praying men, women, and children, who, upon noticing the presence of our Metropolitan, would hasten to ask for his blessing, to the point of blocking the way of the Greek pilgrims.

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Monday, August 16 (Old Style), was dedicated to a pilgrimage to the Convent of St. Nina at Bodbe, which contains one of the most precious spiritual treasures of Georgia: the Grace-filled tomb of St. Nina, in which the sacred Relics of the Holy Enlightener of the Iberians lie to this day.

The group of pilgrims was then able to go down into the forest and receive grace and blessing from the spring of Holy Water.

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On Tuesday, August 17 (Old Style), the final day of the pastoral visit, His Eminence and his travelling companions went to the





Zedazeni mountain in order to celebrate the Divine Liturgy at the Community of the Precious Cross, whose small and simple Church is dedicated to the Nativity of the *Theotokos*. Fathers Basili and Grigol were in attendance, a large number of the Community confessed,

and nearly everyone communed.

After the compunction-evoking Mystagogy, the members of the Community gave the pilgrims from Greece a tour of the spartan complex of cells and workshops, where seventeen lay members reside, and they offered them an *agape* meal.

On the occasion, a supporter of the Brotherhood asked to interview His Eminence regarding his relationship with, and his impressions of, the Community.

After this stirring experience, the pilgrims visited the nearby Monastery of St. John, located on the same mountain, and then, during their return journey, the Monastery of St. Shio, one of the twelve disciples of St. John. Every holy place "recounts" the yearning for the wilderness, the self-abnegating ascetic struggles, and the Divine love of these Saints, who simultaneously proved to be great missionaries.



In Gldani, where the pilgrims returned so as to take farewell of the Church of the *Panagia Portaitissa*, they tasted one last time of the unparalleled hospitality of our Georgian brothers and sisters.

Later, around 4 a.m., at the airport of Tbilisi, they once experienced the Georgians' self-sacrificial love and profound esteem for their Shepherd and his companions: all of our Priests and a throng of





faithful of all ages had come, despite the early morning hours, in order to see them off and express their gratitude.

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**May** the Protection of our *Panagia* and the intercessions of St. Nina fortify and bestow ever

more Grace on the pious faithful of the blessed land of Georgia, and may our bonds of love in Christ and mutual edification remain strong!

**T**he pilgrims returned to Greece, glorifying our All-Merciful Lord for such a constructive and unforgettable spiritual experience, which yet again showed forth the Divine Gift of Christian love, brotherhood, and friendship, under the Protection of the Most Blessed *Theotokos*.

**G**lory to God for all things!

