



“For the Edification of the Church”

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■ Prefestal Pilgrimage to the Manger of our Lord

Visit to the Rehabilitation Center for Disabled Children in Voula, Athens

“I was sick, and ye visited Me”

Saturday, December 18, 2016 (Old Style)



On Saturday, December 18, 2016 (Old Style, commemoration of the Great Martyr Sebastian and those with him), the fifth Saturday of the Nativity Fast, with the blessing, participation, and leadership of His Eminence, Metropolitan Cyprian of Oropos and Phyle, our third visit took place to the Rehabilitation Center for Disabled Children in Voula (twenty kilometers from downtown Athens), which houses seventy children with special needs, who were either abandoned by their parents or removed from their custody for their own protection.

Our Shepherd had urged the members of the St. Philaret the Merciful Orthodox Women’s Guild not to be daunted by the truly unfavorable weather forecast and the snowfall, but rather to take measures to ensure that this final “station on our journey to the Cave of Bethlehem” take place without fail.

And indeed, a group of seventy people, including many children and adolescents, were counted worthy, shortly before the Feast of the





Nativity, to venerate our Coming Savior in the person of *these little ones*: the charming children who, apart from all their “special needs,” are primarily in need of love and affection, and who, their various disabilities notwithstanding, have a special gift of reciprocating love that is shown to them with sincerity and warmth of heart.

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The “pilgrims” were welcomed by our beloved Mrs. Vasilike Koskina, who, with several of the Center’s children at her side, gave them a tour of the rooms, where our Shepherd and the rest of the group were able to show each child at least a few minutes of Christian tenderness and affection. They distributed gifts as members of the “Hellenic Orthodox Heritage” ensemble sang traditional holiday carols.

The personnel, who take care of their small charges with maternal love and self-sacrifice, then offered the group refreshments in a large hall, where the carols and folk songs began again. Soon enough, all were singing along—children and adults, visitors and residents alike. In this familial atmosphere of spiritual recreation, the children from “outside” joined hands with the children from “inside,” as they danced to Cretan melodies.



The St. Philaret Guild then supplied the Center with various necessities (bed covers and beverages). There followed a group photo, which brought to a conclusion our pilgrimage to *these little ones*, in whose presence one gains



an experiential understanding of the words of our Savior: “...in Heaven their Angels do always behold the face of My Father Who is in Heaven.”

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On the return journey, the group had the great blessing of visiting the Metropolitan Cathedral of Athens, wherein are treasured the Relics of the Holy Nun-Martyr Philothei, the Patron Saint of our weekly “Vigils of Repentance” at the Convent of St. Paraskeve, and also the Relics of the Holy Hieromartyr Gregory V, Patriarch of Constantinople.

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With feelings of gratitude and spiritual *joyful sorrow* following the profoundly moving experiences of the day, the pilgrims all understood the duty each of us has frequently to address to our Merciful Savior two prayers: one entreaty on behalf of our brothers and sisters with special needs, and one prayer of thanksgiving for the gift of physical and mental health, which is a *talent* that we are called upon to increase in Christ, to the glory of God, in service to our brethren, and for the salvation of our souls. Amen!

