



“For the Edification of the Church”

- Annals • Pastoral Activities • Presentations •
- Gatherings • Homilies • Sermons • Feasts •
- Pilgrimages • Social Ministry • Publications •

■ On the occasion of the commemoration of St. Philothei of Athens

Festal Vigil and Pilgrimage in the Footsteps of the Patron Saint of Athens and the Patronal Feast of the Convent of St. Philothei in Sweden First Saturday of Lent, February 19, 2017 (Old Style)



On the first Saturday of Great Lent, February 19, 2017, our Church commemorated, together with the miracle of kollyva wrought by St. Theodore, the memory of the Holy Apostle Archippos and the Holy Nun-Martyr Philothei of Athens.

The Patron Saint of Athens (1522-1589), St. Philothei, was an illustrious figure during the dark period of the Turkish domination of Greece, and shone forth by the sanctity of her life, her faith, her courage, and her evangelical love. With self-sacrifice, she offered support to the poor, and especially to women, in order to protect them from their barbaric oppressors. She paid for her work of love with her life, becoming a Martyr of Compassion.

We remind you that St. Philothei has been designated the special Patron of our “Vigils of Repentance,” which were inaugurated by our Most Reverend Metropolitan Cyprian of Oropos

and Phyle in 2013. These All-Night Vigils are celebrated on a weekly basis at the Convent of St. Paraskeve (near Athens), for the sake of collective repentant prayer and the celebration of the Divine Liturgy on behalf of our beleaguered homeland and the whole world.



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Our Most Reverend Shepherd was the principal celebrant at the All-Night Vigil, assisted by the Reverend Fathers Constantine Soteriades and Jiří Ján, Hierodeacon Father Gabriel, and Subdeacons Monk Antonios, Demetrios Giatrakos, and Apostolos Phykias.

Many devout faithful were in attendance, the majority of whom partook of the Immaculate Mysteries.

In his homily, Metropolitan Cyprian spoke about the Life of St. Philothei and her social and philanthropic work. He stressed that:

“It would not have been possible to accomplish such a work, and indeed by a woman, in those difficult times, if St. Philothei had not been vouchsafed union with Christ, through purification of her heart. By means of this union, the Saint received the charism of self-sacrificial love, disregarded her personal comfort and safety, developed astonishing multifaceted philanthropic activities, and was counted worthy of the blessed end of a martyr. Her example censures us and awakens us today....”

At the end of the Vigil, our Most Reverend Shepherd exhorted everyone to participate in a pilgrimage later that day to the places within and around Athens where St. Philothei lived, was martyred, and reposed, as well as to the Metropolitan Cathedral of Athens, where her Holy Relics are preserved.

The Reverend Mother Justina then invited all present to partake of refreshments in the Convent’s large reception hall.

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Around 1:30 pm, our Most Reverend Metropolitan arrived with approximately forty pilgrims at the Metropolitan Cathedral



of Athens, in order to venerate the Holy Relics of the Patron Saint of Athens and to chant quietly the Supplicatory Canon to St. Philothei. Unfortunately, it is no longer possible to venerate the actual Reliquary, as it is “protected” by a glass case.

The pilgrims’ disappointment was mitigated, however, by

the pleasant surprise of seeing—on her Feast Day according to the Old Calendar—the glass case adorned with spring flowers, which a pious elderly nun places there every year in honor of the Nun-Martyr.

Having prayed to the Saint, the group also venerated the Holy Relics of the Holy Ethnomartyr Gregory V, Patriarch of Constantinople, which are enclosed in a marble Reliquary in the form of a tomb.



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After visiting, a very short distance from the Cathedral, the location where the first convent founded by St. Philothei, dedicated to the Holy Apostle Andrew the First-Called, once stood, the group moved on to the next stop in the footsteps of the Saint: the “Metochi of Kalogreza,” a monastic dependency she established on a family estate.

Having been mortally wounded by the Turks during the Vigil for the Feast of St. Dionysios the Areopagite, October 2-3, 1588, at another dependency, in Patesia, the Saint was brought to the Metochi of Kalogreza, where she was cared for by the nuns until her repose, a few months later, on February 19, 1589.

Twenty days after the Saint’s repose, a fragrance began to issue from her tomb, and when the translation of her Relics took place a year later, they were found to be incorrupt and covered by a fragrant myrrh.

As the ever-memorable Photios Kontoglou writes:

...Her holy body was buried at the little convent in Kalo-



greza and from there her relics were translated to the Church of Saint Andrew, which is now in the Archbishopric. Many years later, since the Church had nearly collapsed, they took the relics to the Church of Saint Eleftherios, and from there to today's Cathedral Church, in the Altar. On her tomb were inscribed the following words:

“Under this sign lies the pure body of Philothei, while her soul rests with God in the highest, among the blessed.”

Philothei was proclaimed a Saint under Ecumenical Patriarch Matthew II (1595-1600). Metropolitan Neofytos of Athens, having examined the life and martyrdom of the Saint, wrote a report for the Patriarchate, together with the bishops of Corinth and Thebes and the most eminent citizens of Athens, to have her placed among the ranks of the Saints. This Synodal letter also contains the following: “Since it has been amply demonstrated that the most holy body of the blessed Philothei is full of fragrance and is constantly producing myrrh and that it gives healing to those who are sick, approach and pray to be cured... because of this it seemed good to the whole of the holy Synod of bishops here present that she should be written into the choir of the saints and blessed women, so that she may be honoured and celebrated each year.”

(Translation from the website Pemptousia)

At the Metochi of Kalogreza today, there remain only the Church, dedicated to the Entrance of the Theotokos, and ruins of a few cells and of the outer walls of the convent. The Church is closed, since it is undergoing renovations by the Greek Archeological Society, but the convent grounds are open, and that day transmitted to the pilgrims a sense of springtime tranquillity.

From the Metochi of Kalogreza, an underground escape tunnel some 400 meters in length ends at the cave of St. Philothei. The cave was discovered accidentally during quarrying. At that time, it was still in the form of a natural cave, which was gradually transformed into a small chapel. After the discovery of the



The cave of St. Philothei

cave, Nea Alexandria (then a village) was officially renamed Philothei in her honour.

Not far from the cave there is a twentieth-century Church dedicated to the Saint, where the visitors venerated her incorrupt hand and were transfixed by the Icon of the Saint painted by the ever-memorable Photios Kontoglou, which is of unparalleled spiritual beauty. A warden at the Church graciously distributed to the pilgrims small copies of the Icon.



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Our last stop on our pilgrimage was the monastic dependency in Patesia, on the Plateia Amerikes in Athens, where the convent Church of St. Andrew, built sometime after 1550, remains to this day.

Photios Kontoglou writes:

The Church at the dependency that the Saint built in Patesia fell into disrepair with the passage of time and because the Christians were not able to maintain it before

the Revolution of 1821 for fear of the Turks...

Under the guidance of Mr. [Anastasios] Orlandos, some devout Christians restored it and now it looks exactly as it did in the time of St. Philothei—



a humble yet priceless jewel amid the tasteless and incongruous buildings that have been built around this timeworn chapel. God counted me worthy of adorning it with frescos, as I had so wished. Among other things, I painted the monastery as it would have looked at the time, with Saint Philothei and the nuns going to Church.



The beautiful Church is once again in need of restoration today: the dampness has blackened the walls and has begun to eat away at the frescos.

On the left side of the Church, in front of the Templon, there is preserved a portion of the column to which the Turks tied St. Philothei in order to flay her.

With the visit to this “humble yet priceless jewel,” our pilgrimage in the footsteps of the Patron Saint of our Vigils of Repentance came to an end.



This spiritual experience, on the occasion of the commemoration of the Saint, imprinted more profoundly—indeed indelibly—the figure and message of the Nun Martyr in the hearts of the pilgrims: a message of complete consecration of one’s being to God, which is expressed hesychastically by the foundation of Holy Monasteries, and socially by the creation of various philanthropic institutions.

“Master, which is the great commandment in the law?” Jesus said unto him, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (St. Matthew 22:36-40).

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Meanwhile, in snowy Sweden, the Convent of St. Philothei of Athens celebrated its Patronal Feast for the twenty-eighth time since its foundation.



On Saturday morning, Orthros was chanted in Swedish, Greek, and English, followed by the Divine Liturgy, which was celebrated by Father Anders Åkerström, the convent's serving Priest, and Father Stefanos Jaerpenberg.

In his homily, Father Anders spoke about the Life of St. Philothei and her philanthropic work during the dark years of the Turkish Yoke, and exhorted our flock in Sweden to pray to her especially on behalf of modern-day Greece.

The faithful were given the opportunity to venerate a small portion of the Relics of the Saint at the conclusion of the Liturgy, after which the customary procession with the Relics and the Holy Icon was made around the Church, ending with a Trisagion at the grave of the Founder of the Convent, the Reverend Mother Philothei (†2012).

Finally, all those in attendance were served an agape meal, during which they were also spiritually nourished by the reading of the Life of the Nun-Martyr by Mother Magdalene, who then described the various places of pilgrimage associated with the Saint in Athens, which the nuns visited when they were in Greece.

The faithful gave thanks to God and St. Philothei for having been given the opportunity to celebrate this blessed feast day in the warm atmosphere of their family in Christ, which strengthened them in their good struggle during Great Lent and on their journey to Pascha.



An Icon of the Saint by
Photios Kontoglou