



## “For the Edification of the Church”

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“I was in prison and ye came unto Me” (St. Matthew 25:36)

## Twelfth Visit to the Detention Center of Amphissa

†First Saturday of Souls, January 28, 2018 (Old Style)



**O**n the **First Saturday of Souls**, January 28, 2018 (Old Style, commemoration of Sts. Ephraim and Isaac the Syrians), with the blessing, guidance, and participation of His Eminence, Metropolitan Cyprian of Oropos and Phyle, there took place our twelfth visit to the Detention Center of Amphissa.

Since Pascha is early this year, the first Saturday of Souls fell within the month of January, and thus the year 2018 was inaugurated with a philanthropic activity by the St. Philaret the Merciful Guild.

Members of the Guild and of our Metropolis' Association of Volunteers worked together to prepare the care packages containing personal care items, which were donated to our Guild by private individuals and stores, in order to be distributed to 160 of our incarcerated brothers.

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**Wintery** weather, ceaseless rain... How would the group of pilgrims be able to meet our “least brethren” in the courtyard of the detention center, so as to give them a few moments of refreshment?





**M**etropolitan Cyprian exhorted the travellers to leave the matter prayerfully to the providence of the Mother of God. After the customary rule of prayers for these pilgrimages, he made use of the travel time with hymnody and the reading of a text regarding the *Synaxis of the Holy former Prison Guards, Executioners, Mimes, and Sorcerers*, which is celebrated on the Sunday of the Blind Man. The service in their honor was composed by Father Gerasimos Mikragiannanites of blessed memory.

In accordance with law number 46002/30.9.1966, prison directors are obligated to provide for the celebration of this Synaxis with a Divine Liturgy at the prison chapel, in the presence of the personnel and the prisoners. Such was the solicitude of the Greek Orthodox nation fifty years ago...

The pilgrims were given a memento with Patristic messages, entitled: "Our Neighbor Comes First."

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**T**en minutes or so before the pilgrims arrived at the detention center, the rain ceased!

The chief warden and the prison social worker warmly greeted our Most Reverend Shepherd and the rest of the group and led them to the inner courtyard, where the Director of the facility arrived and the inmates gathered.



**A**t His Eminence's exhortation, the Routse family, together with other children, played and sang rhythmic Greek folk songs, to the strains of which prisoners and visitors joyfully clapped along in time.



**S**uddenly, a young man from Nigeria leaped forward and began a *Kalamationo* folk dance! An experienced Greek man was quick to join him, with the discrete "assistance" of Father Soterios.

**M**etropolitan Cyprian, delighted by the spectacle, then stepped forward to greet and offer encouragement to our brothers, quite a few of whom responded to the friendly invitation of Father Soterios to say a few words to the joint audience.



The prisoners expressed their gratitude and wishes for the twofold freedom (both external and internal) of all those present. One person even spoke about the renewing power of compunction....

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**F**ollowing this immensely moving and protracted meeting in the courtyard, His Eminence and the group of pilgrims moved on to the visiting hall.

Here, he met with each prisoner individually, accompanied by the chanting of the nuns, and gave them the care packages (containing the personal care items) with his characteristic smile and paternal affection. At his side, Father Soterios distributed small icon prints, crosses, and prayer ropes.

When it was his turn, the Nigerian man fell in Metropolitan Cyprian's embrace and confided in him that, upon seeing him in the courtyard with the group of visitors, "something sweet filled my heart," which led him to express his joy in dance.

\* \* \*

This blessed visit concluded with a cordial conversation with the amiable director and the facility's exceptional personnel, after which His Eminence and the pilgrims had to hurry onto the bus, since the rain started up again just then!

During their return journey, the group once again made a pilgrimage to the renowned Monastery of St. Luke of Steirion and his Grace-filled Relics.



The gracious guestmaster led the pilgrims out of the rain and into a warm room, where they shared the food they had prepared beforehand, with the distinct feeling that St. Luke himself was offering them hospitality in his house.

The lit fireplace and the folk songs sung

by the children contributed to the festive and familial character of this frugal *apage* meal.

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**Yet** again, the participants in this pilgrimage returned home with hearts invigorated by the practice and taste of love in Christ, moved by the maternal providence of the Mother of God, and with gratitude to our Lord and his faithful servants.

**A**t the gateway of the Holy and Great Fast, this pilgrimage to our imprisoned brothers provided the participants with a vivid reminder that the general effort of temperance and asceticism during this blessed period is devoid of meaning and blessing unless it is joined by the practice of evangelical love.

