



## “For the Edification of the Church”

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

## Pilgrimage and Visit to the Rural Detention Facility of Kassaveteia March 3, 2024 (Old Style)



**O**n Saturday, March 3, 2024 (Old Style), at the threshold of Great Lent, His Eminence, Metropolitan Cyprian of Oropos and Phyle made his fourteenth visit, by the Grace of God, together with a group of forty faithful, to the Rural Detention Facility of Kassaveteia, near the city of Volos, in northern Greece.

The St. Philaret the Merciful Guild once again organized this pastoral activity, preparing care packages for 120 inmates that contained items donated to the Guild.

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**D**uring the bus ride, following the customary morning prayers, the Supplicatory Canon to St. Philaret, and the prayer for visiting our incarcerated brothers, Metropolitan Cyprian spoke about the upcoming period of Great Lent and how we should combine bodily fasting with prayer and active solicitude for our neighbor, so that our efforts will not be self-centered, but rather lead us to love for God and our fellow man.

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**T**he pilgrims arrived around 11 a.m. at the Rural Detention Facility, where they met the social workers and our imprisoned brothers in a hall and in three courtyards.

The first meeting, with the working inmates, took place in the



facility's large hall, which is designed to accommodate primary and secondary school classes and to host events.

In a particularly familial atmosphere, the inmates and social workers described the life of their community: the tasks they share, how they help one another, and the spirit of self-sacrifice both among the inmates—who work diligently, often overtime, in the gardens and fields and with the animals—and among the social workers, who publicly apologized with emotion to the inmates for not being able to devote as much time as they would like to them, since the facility's juvenile offenders take up most of their time and energy.

The two excellent social workers pointed out that being with these prison workers gives them the opportunity to get to know each one of them individually, their history, their maturity, their pain—things that do not appear in the files that the judges receive. The judges examine the files, while the social workers sympathize with their souls....

Among those present was an inmate who, although his sentence had expired two months previously, was still incarcerated. He has been waiting for two months for his file to be stamped so that he can go home.

After addressing them with words of love and encouragement, His Eminence bestowed on them the treasure of his paternal tenderness, embracing each one individually, while the Guild's volunteers distributed the care packs containing simple but necessary items.

The social workers then took the visitors to three courtyards, two of which are home to juvenile inmates, who had a warmhearted conversation with our Most Reverend Shepherd. They admitted that they tend to coexist like “cats and dogs,” owing to the great tension caused by their confinement (the wards are closed from 6:30 p.m. to 7:00 a.m.). At the same time, they expressed with sincerity their faith in Christ and their love for our Most Holy The-





otokos, as well as their intention to confess at the beginning of Lent. They also expressed their gratitude for what they are being taught at the facility, which, it is hoped, will help them to be better members of society when they leave prison.

Finally, the visitors venerated the Icons in the Church of St. Eleftherios, in the central courtyard of the detention center, giving thanks to God for this instructive experience. His Eminence prayed that the visit might serve as a stimulus to daily prayer for the prisoners and their caretakers.

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**After** leaving the Detention Facility, the pilgrims stopped at the Convent of the *Panagia* “*Kato Xenia*,” where they venerated the miraculous Icon of the Theotokos and a portion of her holy Cincture preserved at the convent.



Before singing Vespers during the drive back to Athens, Metropolitan Cyprian read aloud an article about how Christians today can give a credible witness to their faith. The example of two people who put into practice the words of the Gospel, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends,” by voluntarily taking the place of two people about to be executed, gave rise to discussion about the authenticity of our Christian identity.

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**The** group of pilgrims returned home enriched by the Grace of our Panagia and the lessons derived from their visit to these “least brethren” of our Lord. May these spiritual provisions—*praxis* and *theoria*—strengthen our resolve to embark on a more sincere and profound repentance, and to open our hearts to God and our neighbor!

