

## Pilgrimage and Fraternal Visit to Bulgaria\*

A sign of our fellowship and love in Christ

His Eminence, Metropolitan Cyprian made a pilgrimage to our brethren in Christ in Bulgaria on the weekend of 3-4 November 2002 (Old Style), accompanied by Brothers of our Monastery, the Priest of our parish in Katerini, Father Vitalios Almanides, and about fifty Faithful from Athens and (Greek) Macedonia.



At the border between Greece and Bulgaria, on Saturday, 3 November, the Greek pilgrims were welcomed with sentiments of heartfelt joy and love by His Eminence, Bishop Photii of Triaditza, who heads the Old Calendar Orthodox Church of Bulgaria.

At the border city of Sandanski, the pilgrims visited the very beautiful Church of the Life-Giving Spring, which is under construction, where the parishioners provided a very warm welcome for the visitors from Greece and offered them a lavish meal. The pilgrims also made a visit to the historic Monastery of St. John of Rila and venerated his Grace-filled Relics.

On Sunday, 4 November, a festive Hierarchical Liturgy was celebrated at the Cathedral of the Dormition of the *Theotokos* in Sofia. Metropolitan Cyprian presided and Bishop Photii took part, along with His Eminence, Archbishop Chrysostomos of Etna and His Grace, Bishop Auxentios of



Photiki, who had come for the occasion, and about ten Priests from among the Bulgarian clergy, assisted by the Cathedral Deacons.

The peace-bestowing Grace of Our Lord was especially obvious in the unanimity of faith among the clergy, in the good order and prayerfulness of the laity, and in the general fervor of spirit which permeated the souls of all those in attendance. For half an hour or more, the Faithful communed from three chalices!

On Sunday afternoon, the pilgrims visited the flourishing Russian Convent of the Holy Protection

of the *Theotokos* in Knjazhevo, a suburb of Sofia. The Abbess of the Convent is the very virtuous Mother Seraphima and its spiritual Father is Archimandrite Sergius, who is full of zeal, simplicity, and love. The indefatigable Father Sergius, despite the weight of his advanced years, remains a symbol of confession of and struggle for the Faith. Formerly an Assistant Professor at the School of Theology in Sofia, he was forced to retire from the School in 1968, together with another professor, Archimandrite Seraphim (Alexiev, †1993), on account of their refusal to accept the calendar innovation in the Bulgarian Church, and was subjected to reprisals, although he did not cease to strengthen the small flock of the anti-innovationist Orthodox of Bulgaria.



This blessed fellowship with our Orthodox brethren in Bulgaria was a cause of joy and edification for all of the Faithful and of glory to our Holy God.

\* Source: *Άγιος Κυπριανός*, No. 311 (November-December 2002), pp. 180-181.