

The Convent of the Holy Angels:

Feast Day, Tonsures, and a Monastic Gathering

On Saturday, November 8/11, 2009, the commemoration of the *Synaxis* of the Venerable Heavenly Bodiless Powers, the Convent of the Holy Angels, in Aphidnai, Attica, celebrated its Patronal Feast.

The principal celebrant at the All-Night Vigil in honor of the incorporeal Patrons of the Convent, His Grace, Bishop Cyprian of Oreoi, Acting President of the Holy Synod, was present from the beginning of Vespers. Also taking part were Father Jiří Ján, Hierodeacon Joseph and Monk Antonios (brothers of the Monastery of Sts. Cyprian and Justina), and Subdeacons Demetrios Giatrakos and Apostolos Phykias.

A large number of the faithful were in attendance and partook of the Immaculate Mysteries, including the Reverend Mother Makrina and her Sisterhood (from the Convent of St. Paraskeve in Acharnai, Attica), the Reverend Mother Evpraxia and her Sisterhood (from the Convent of the Panagia Myrtidiotissa in Aphidnai, Attica), and the Reverend Mother Hilaria, with one of her nuns (from the Convent of the Transfiguration in Sykaminon, Oropos).

During the Divine Liturgy, following the Small Entrance, Rasophore Nuns Myrophora and Makaria (Malamo and Maria Kaïdatzes, 35 and 32 years old respectively), who are biological sisters, cel-



ebreated the Mystery of their spiritual nuptials, being vouchsafed to receive the Great and Angelic Schema. Their sponsor was our spiritual mother, Abbess Taxiarchia, who presented them to Christ their Bridegroom. They were tonsured by Bishop Cyprian.

Before Holy Communion, His Grace delivered a special homily entitled: “The Church’s Ethos of Ministry and the Holy Angels” (see the full text below).

At the end of the compunctious *Agrypnia*, a procession with the Icon of the Holy Angels was made through the Convent grounds (with four stops for prayerful intercessions) and the Rite of the Blessing of the Loaves was performed.



During the *agape* meal that followed, His Grace spoke with the faithful (with the visual aid of a short video) about the necessity and spiritual power of hope, by which we can keep the flickering candles of peace, hope, and love from being extinguished. He then read the very moving Life of the Holy New Martyr Daniela of Bucharest (1967 - April 6, 2004).

That afternoon, we held our first monastic gathering in Period III of our customary “Angelic Gatherings,” which were inaugurated on November 8, 2007 with the blessing of the Convent’s much-revered founder and Elder, Metropolitan Cyprian. The sisters expressed their gratitude to their spiritual Father, Bishop Cyprian, for these extremely edifying talks, as well as for his self-sacrificing support and guidance of our Sisterhood. During the thirty-nine such gatherings held to date, we have jointly read, discussed, and analyzed 177 texts in an atmosphere of prayer.

At the present gathering, we studied nine Patristic and contemporary texts, which dealt with three main subjects: a) further cultivation of love for the Theotokos; b) a renewed in-depth examination of prayer (in both its “external” and “internal” forms); and a discussion, yet again, of the necessity of afflictions in our lives, as a sign of Divine election.

The gathering was sealed by a Resurrectional Divine Liturgy, at which Bishop Cyprian liturgized. Since Sunday was also the Feast Day of our Father among the Saints Nectarios the Wonderworker of Ægina, Bishop Cyprian spoke briefly about the great patience of this Saint.

Glory and thanksgiving to the Bestower of abundant gifts, our Lord and God, through the mediation of the Most Blessed Queen of the Angels and of the Heavenly Patrons of our sacred cœnobion!

Convent of the Holy Angels



The Church’s Ethos of Ministry and the Holy Angels

Glory to God for all things!

To the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the only True God, is due glory, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen!

The Grace of the Holy Spirit has gathered us together today at this resplendent “inn”¹ of the Holy Angels, extending us generous hospitality and treating us to peace, light, and hope.

Our ancient ancestors used to say: “A life without feasts is a lengthy road devoid of inns.”²

Glory and thanksgiving to our Lord, for that the entire annual Church Calendar, the entire course of the year, and also the entire course of our life on earth has so many Feast Days—so many inns—such that Christians ultimately live in an atmosphere of constant festivity; their entire life is one Feast, one Doxology, and one Thanksgiving.

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Today, in particular, we must give great and especial thanks to the hosts of this hospitable inn. Why so?

The Apostle Paul gives us the answer: The Holy Angels “are all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister unto them who shall be heirs of salvation.”³

God, in His love for mankind, shows such great providence and care for man that He has appointed His Angels to minister unto our salvation. The Holy Angels are all ministering spirits, sent forth by God to minister unto those who are to inherit eternal life. They are servants of our Lord, ministering unto us in various ways, until we enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

Just think, my brethren, to what glory the Goodness of our Savior has raised us: Bodiless Hosts are sent from Heaven to be our aids and helpers! The leaders and the powerful of this world are accompanied by security forces and advisors to protect and counsel them, whereas the lowliest and most insignificant Christian has as an escort the Angels—Heavenly and immortal beings, incomparably more powerful and wiser than any bodyguard or worldly sage.

These Angels, luminous and glorious, follow those who have been called to salvation with sincere and unflagging interest, and with vigilant affection and concern. They assist them in their struggles, strengthen them in their tribulations, grieve with them in their falls, and rejoice with them in their repentance and spiritual victories. They are their invaluable companions and guides when they depart from this world and enter the Heavenly abodes. It is thus a

supreme honor for every Christian to be invisibly accompanied and ministered to by a Guardian Angel!

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This Angelic ministry—that is, the salvation of man—powerfully reminds us of the Church’s ethos of ministry. This ministry is the work of Christ our Savior Himself, Who became man in order to minister to us, thereby becoming the Minister *par excellence* of our salvation: “The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many”;⁴ “but I am among you as He that serveth.”⁵

A ministry of such significance and importance—given that it pertains to the salvation and renewal of man, the image of God—has been transmitted to the Church as a whole, but also to each of its members individually.

Every Christian must come to realize that he is jointly responsible for the salvation of the world. He must adopt the Church’s ethos of ministry, “so that,” as the Saints say, “no one should neglect this ministry of human salvation, in that it is a Christ-like work, worthy of Angels.”⁶

Ministry, however, to which all of the members of the Church are called, means *humility*; it means *love*; it means *sacrifice*. Only by means of sacrificial offering is love realized. By the Grace of God, when an act of ministration is performed with a sacrificial disposition, it leads us to a revelation of our true selves, as an image of God. Whoever selfishly turns in on himself loses the opportunity to come to know not only his true self, but even God, since self-knowledge leads to knowledge of God.

Let us never forget the extraordinary words of our Lord: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.”⁷

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Interwoven with the ethos of ministry are loving humility, compassionate tolerance, and lifting our fellow man onto our shoulders. This is precisely what the Great Minister of our Salvation put into action, exhorting us to adopt it as a way of life: “But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant”;⁸ “he that is greatest among

you, let him be as the younger, and he that is chief, as he that doth serve.”⁹

Here we have a reversal of the pyramid of power, since Christian compassion ultimately means bearing the pain of our brother—when, however, we have already trustingly allowed Christ to lift us onto His own shoulders.

Unceasing vigilance is needed, such that, with the help of our Bodiless Ministers, the Holy Angels, we might serve our brother in a spirit of humility and self-sacrifice—we on the shoulders of the Great and Blameless Shepherd, and our brethren on the infirm shoulders of us, His unworthy servants, supported by the “ministering spirits,” who have been “sent to minister,” and protected by the preëminent Ministress of our salvation, the Queen of the Angels, the Most Blessed Lady *Theotokos*, unto the glory of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!

Bishop Cyprian,
Agrypnia for the Feast
of the Holy Angels
November 8, 2009

Notes

1. St. Luke 10:34.
2. Democritus (ca. 460 B.C.-ca. 370 B.C., an early Greek philosopher), fragment 230.
3. Hebrews 1:14.
4. St. Matthew 20:28.
5. St. Luke 22:27.
6. St. Nikodemos the Hagiorite, *Παύλου αἱ Δέκα Τέσσαρες Ἐπιστολαὶ Ἐρμηνευθεῖσαι ὑπὸ Θεοφυλάκτου Ἀρχιεπισκόπου Βουλγαρίας* [The Fourteen Epistles of St. Paul, Interpreted by Theophylact, Archbishop of Bulgaria] (Venice: 1819), Vol. III, p. 278 (on Hebrews 1:14).
7. St. John 12:24.
8. St. Matthew 23:11.
9. St. Luke 22:26.