

## Consolidation of our Missions in Central Africa

### Pastoral Visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and to the Republic of the Congo

**B**y the Grace of God, His Grace, Bishop Ambrose of Methone made yet another pastoral and missionary visit to Central Africa in July, acting as representative of our ailing Metropolitan Cyprian, for the coördination and strengthening of the presence and witness of the Orthodox in Resistance in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire) and the Republic of the Congo (Congo-Brazzaville).

On Tuesday, June 30/July 13, 2010, Bishop Ambrose departed from Athens by air and arrived, via Paris, that evening in Kinshasa, the capital of the Congo, where he was given hospitality in the house of Father Léonide Kaseya. The next day, he visited the half-completed Church of St. Nectarios, outside of Kinshasa, where he met with two of our Priests—Fathers Théodore and Paul—and Deacon Father Antipas.

On Thursday, 2/15 July, following unimaginable hardships, delays, and expense, Bishop Ambrose managed to arrive by air in Kananga, together with Father Léonide. Here, he was warmly welcomed by clergy and laypeople at the Church of St. Nectarios. He was then given a second welcoming reception at the Monastery of the Holy Trinity, which is under construction outside of Kananga.



The next day, His Grace held a gathering with our clergy (fourteen Priests and three Deacons) in this region, in which they discussed many pertinent practical, pastoral, and liturgical matters.

On Saturday, July 4/17, Bishop Ambrose celebrated the Divine Liturgy with many of our Priests and Deacons in the adobe Church of St. Nicholas in Nganza. A choir of young people chanted beautifully, and



Holy Communion was distributed to the faithful for a good half hour. The Divine Liturgy was followed by a frugal meal, a festal celebration with Congolese singing and dancing, and the provision of material aid (to the extent possible) to the most unfortunate of those in need.

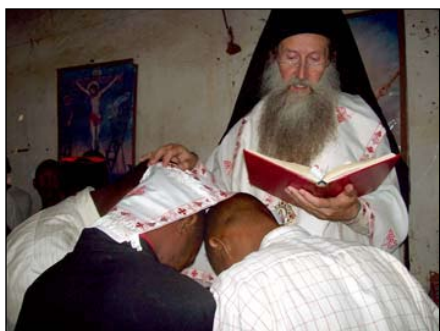
On Sunday, 5/18 July, the Divine Liturgy was celebrated in the Church of St. Nectarios in Kananga with the participation of six Priests and two Deacons, with an accomplished choir and hundreds of faithful in attendance. Before the Liturgy, Bishop Ambrose read the Prayer of Absolution over Father Simon Mukania, who was thereby fully received back among our mission's clergy, from which he had imprudently fallen into schism a few years ago. During the Liturgy, Deacon Father Thomas Tsigunda was ordained a Priest. At the conclusion, small Icons were distributed to all of the faithful. His Grace met with the clergy that afternoon and throughout the following day.



On Tuesday, 7/20 July, during the Divine Liturgy at the Church of St. Nectarios in Kananga, Bishop Ambrose tonsured a number of readers and ordained Martin Mbamba-Kasonga—one of the original parishioners, who is married with ten children—a Deacon. As for Father Sylvestre Tshunza from Mbuji-Mayi, he travelled all night by the region's primitive means of transport in order to take part in the Liturgy.



The next day, Bishop Ambrose went to the Church of St. Charalambos in Tshiluba, in order to bring about a reconciliation between Father Sylvestre Tsimanga—the Priest who served the parish before being rashly drawn into schism a few years ago—and the parishioners (including his relatives), who had remained faithful to our Holy Synod. Following a long discussion, the members of the parish were convinced of the fallen Priest's repentance, and he was received back following the reading of the Prayer of Absolution by the Bishop, and after he and the parishioners asked each other for forgiveness.



The next three days were spent in an unexpectedly long wait, due to the delay of the return flight to Kinshasa. This delay can be counted among the journey's numerous other difficulties, such as a lack of electricity, water, adequate food, and sanitary facilities, etc. On Friday afternoon, Bishop Ambrose and Father Léonide were finally able to return

to Kinshasa by means of a different airline, without being reimbursed, needless to say, by the first.

On Sunday, July 12/25, following a long delay, and with great trouble and expense, Bishop Ambrose, Father Léonide, and Archimandrite Marc—the Synodal Representative for the Congo, who had just arrived back in the country from Greece—crossed the Congo River into Brazzaville, the capital of the Republic of the Congo. This country presents an entirely different picture—one far better—than the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Finally, then, the delayed Divine Liturgy was celebrated at our mission's Church of St. George, with the participation of the two local Priests, Fathers Emmanouel and Georges, and the Bishop's companions, Fathers Léonide and Marc. At this time, Bishop Ambrose tonsured two Readers and ordained to the Diaconate Kosmas Loubassou, a married man who has been Orthodox for five years and who is distinguished by his zeal. Around three hundred faithful were present at the Liturgy, which was chanted by a good choir. That afternoon, the newly ordained Deacon gave a reception at his house.



On Monday, 13/26 July, during the Divine Liturgy celebrated once again at the Church of St. George, Bishop Ambrose ordained Deacon Father Kosmas a Priest, so that he will be able to serve as Rector of the Church of the Annunciation of the *Theotokos* in a suburb of Brazzaville.

This was followed by visits to the faithful and a meeting with the country's Minister who advises the country's President about matters concerning our mission. Late that afternoon, His Grace and the two Priests accompanying him returned to Kinshasa.



On Tuesday, 14/27 July, during the Divine Liturgy celebrated at the Church of the Venerable Forerunner in Kinshasa, Bishop Ambrose ordained to the Diaconate Angel Lusoladio, who, though elderly, is distinguished by his youthful zeal

and his activity. Fathers Léonide and Marc took part in the Liturgy.

Later that day, Bishop Ambrose visited our mission's "St. Cyprian" school, where he was given a warm welcome and met with the school's principal, teachers, and students.

After a brief visit to the Church of St. Nectarios, Bishop Ambrose left for the Kinshasa airport, where, with far less difficulty than expected (a happy surprise!), he boarded the plane and arrived, by the Grace of God, in Athens on Wednesday afternoon, July 15/28, 2010.

This important pastoral visit to Central Africa once again gave a consolidating boost to our mission's witness, despite all of the difficulties, with good hope and a sacrificial spirit.

Glory to God for all things!

