

The Concelebration of the Feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos, in Sofia, Bulgaria



With the blessing of our ailing Metropolitan Cyprian and with the approval of the Standing Holy Synod, His Grace, Bishop Klemes of Gardikion went to Sofia, Bulgaria, in order to take part in the Feast Day of the Cathedral of the Dormition of the Theotokos, headquarters of His Eminence, Bishop Photii of Triaditza, First Hierarch of our Sister Old Calendar Orthodox Church of Bulgaria.

Bishop Klemes, accompanied by Hierodeacon Joseph Agiokyprianites, arrived by air on Thursday afternoon, August 13/26, 2010, and was welcomed by Bishop Photii, who showed them exemplary hospitality at his Episcopal residence, located not far from the Cathedral.

- In late morning on Friday, 14/27 August, the two Bishops visited the Convent of the Holy Protection of the Theotokos, in Knyazhevo, a suburb of Sofia, where they were very kindly greeted by the large and blessed monastic Sisterhood. At Bishop Photii's prompting, Bishop Klemes spoke briefly to the Sisters who were gathered in the Church about prayer, humility, and obedience to the Most Holy Theotokos, and about how she is to be emulated in particular by monks and nuns con-



secrated to God. By way of example, he related a striking account of those whom the Theotokos invisibly blesses and perfumes with incense by her Grace during Church services, and those whom she does not.

At the convent, the two Bishops also visited the beautiful newly built Chapel dedicated to the Russian Confessor and Hierarch, St. Seraphim (Sobolev, †1950), with whose blessing the convent was founded by its first Abbess, the Rev. Mother Seraphima (†2004) [in the world, Princess Olga].

- On Friday afternoon, the eve of the Great Feast, Vespers and Matins were served in the Cathedral according to the Slavic *Typikon*. During the *Polyeleos*, the two Bishops were vested and Bishop Photii censed the Church. He then read the Gospel and anointed the multitudes of faithful with holy oil, while Bishop Klemes distributed the blessed bread from the *Artoklasia* [Blessing of the Five Loaves].

- On Saturday morning, 15/28 August, Bishop Photii presided with solemnity at the festal Divine Liturgy. Bishop Klemes took part, along with many Priests and Deacons, and a large number of Subdeacons, who contributed to the impeccable celebration of the Liturgy. Many hundreds of faithful communed from three Chalices for over half an hour. (We should note that a few of our parishioners from Northern Greece also took part in the festivities).

The customary procession around the Church then took place, with stops to offer up petitions and to bless the four sides





of the Church with the Icon of the Dormition of the Theotokos and with *Agiasmos* [Holy Water].

Back in the Church, following a Service of Supplication [*Deisis*] and the chanting of the *Polychronion* [“Many Years”] to the Hierarchs, Bishop Photii asked Bishop Klemes to deliver a festal homily in Greek, which was simultaneously translated into Bulgarian. By way of summary, His Grace said the following:

“We take part in this Feast Day celebration of our Bulgarian brethren as representatives of our clergy and people in Greece, hymning and glorifying the Dormition and Translation of the All-Immaculate Mother of God. All generations, regardless of nationality, bless the Ever-Blessed and All-Blameless Theotokos in the Truth of the Orthodox Faith, in accordance with the

Church Calendar handed down by the Fathers.

“This Feast, which is rightly called a ‘second Pascha’ or ‘summer Pascha,’ constitutes a confirmation and guaranty that our very bodies will be resurrected and that all of the faithful members of the Church—that is, all who emulate the *Panagia*’s humility, obedience, and purity, according to their ability—will be rendered incorrupt.

“The Mother of God was vouchsafed such great glory and honor because she was first crucified in spirit along with Christ and was sorely tried during the Passion and Crucifixion of her Son and God. At that time, she suffered a twofold pain, and her heart was pierced by a fearful



sword. The bodily death of her Son signalled the victory over death and the beginning of eternal life. Death thereafter feared the Mother of Life; and when God so permitted, it came not with domination, but with trepidation, and for no other reason than to deliver her from corruptibility and mortality and to send her forth to eternal life, just as

we pass gold through fire not in order to burn it, but rather to purify and brighten it (St. John Damascene).

“Thenceforth, though partaking of eschatological glory and incorruption in body and soul, the *Panagia* has not abandoned the world, and especially not the children of the Church. She continues to rejoice in their joys and to sorrow over the pain of the Church in general, which is the Body of her Son, just as she grieves over the pain of every believer individually and personally. She is our true Mother, and to her must we ever turn for refuge.

“In our days, the Church is sorely tried by the confusion and division caused by the heresy of ecumenism and the innovations deriving therefrom, and we may certainly infer that the *Panagia* sorrows and grieves over this. Her joy and consolation are the anti-innovationists worldwide, who have not succumbed to the process of apostasy. Her joy in Bulgaria are Bishop Photii, his good clergy, his monks and nuns, and the faithful people, who preserve the Faith inviolate by dint of self-sacrifice. This observation should not lead us to triumphalism. It is our duty to help our innovationist brethren by our prayers and by maintaining an attitude of discretion, and also to draw them towards us by the example of our virtue. We will not be saved by our confessional standpoint alone, since it is necessary to put our Faith correctly into practice (orthopraxy) and to be consistent in our lives.

“Mark, a disciple of St. Gregory of Sinai, had a revelatory and prophetic vision: The All-Holy Theotokos was sitting in unsurpassed glory on a throne besprinkled with sunbeams, on a gold-entwined tower, in a twelve-walled city, and was being hymned by the Holy Apostles, all the ranks of Saints and Angels, and a large throng of clergy, monastics,

and lay people. In the distance, a foul harlot was employing every kind of shamelessness to attract the attention of the people, and many of this world were watching and admiring her. As time went by, alas, the children of the Church gradually began to leave off hymning the purity of All-Holy Virgin, hastening to join the side of those who admired the unclean harlot, to the great sorrow and chagrin of the Mother of God and of the Saints.

“This image, which is being fulfilled in our days, not only with regard to the Faith, but also regarding the inconsistency of our way of life, should frighten us and make us careful and steadfast, lest we be deceived and fall far from salvation. St. Seraphim of Sarov offers us the comforting assurance that those who put their hope in the shelter and protection of the All-Holy Theotokos will not be put to shame by the demons!”

After this homily, Bishop Photii offered Bishop Klemes a beautiful Icon of the *Panagia*, and the two exchanged best wishes and sentiments of gratitude.

- That afternoon, Bishop Photii served Great Vespers and Matins in the compunction-evoking Chapel of St. Mark of Ephesus at the Bishop’s residence, where he also celebrated the Divine Liturgy on Sunday morning, 16/29 August, in the presence of Bishop Klemes and a few faithful.



- That afternoon, Bishop Klemes and Hierodeacon Joseph left Sofia by air for Athens, both feeling great gratitude for the rich spiritual and material hospitality shown to them by Bishop Photii and his able coworkers, the two monks who serve at the Bishop’s residence, and by his elect and pious flock.



Most Holy Theotokos, save us!

