

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

(August 14-15, 2011 [Old Style])

**W**ith the Protection of the Most Blessed Mother of God, the Holy Synod in Resistance participated once again this year in the Feast Day of the Cathedral Church of the Dormition of the *Panagia*, in Sofia, headquarters of our Old Calendar Orthodox brethren in Bulgaria.

- **With** synodal approval, and with the blessing of our much-revered Elder, Metropolitan Cyprian, His Grace, Bishop Cyprian of Oreoi, Acting President of the Holy Synod, accompanied by Subdeacon Father Antonios, a monk of the Holy Monastery of Sts. Cyprian and Justina, arrived in Sofia by air just before midnight on Friday, August 13/26, 2011. He was welcomed by His Eminence, Bishop Photii of Triaditza and a monk under obedience to him, Father Panteleimon, and taken to the Episcopal residence, which houses a very beautiful Chapel in honor of St. Mark of Ephesus.

- **On** Saturday morning, August 14/27, Bishop Cyprian and Subdeacon Antonios, with the permission and blessing of Bishop Photii, went to the historic Convent of the Holy Protection in Knyazhevo, where they attended the Liturgy in the Church of the Holy Apostle and Evangelist Luke and communed of the Immaculate Mysteries.



- **Following** the Divine Liturgy, during morning tea, in the presence of a small group of senior nuns, Bishop Cyprian spoke at length about the ecclesiastical tradition of constant (not merely frequent or regular) partaking of the Immaculate Mysteries. This was

followed by a tour of the cemetery and other places containing the tombs of renowned people associated with the history of the convent (the Reverend Abbess Seraphima [the former Princess Olga], Archimandrites Panteleimon, Seraphim, and Sergei, *et. al.*), the workshops (Icon Studio, printing and bookbinding shops), the greenhouses and other places of cultivation, the outbuildings, and also the various buildings where the approximately sixty nuns live, separated into groups, on nearly three acres of land covered in lush vegetation (approximately 700 meters above sea level).

• **After** a light lunch and brief rest at the Episcopal residence, Bishops Photii and Cyprian and the Subdeacon went to the nearby Cathedral, where the service of Great Vespers for the Feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos began at 5 p.m., followed by Matins, according to the Slavic *Typikon*.



With a large crowd of faithful in attendance, Bishop Photii was the principal celebrant, assisted by many Priests, Deacons, and Subdeacons, who—accompanied by the superb choir—served with admirable order, harmony and reverence, which contributed to an indescribable overall atmosphere of prayer for the most part unknown within the domain of Greek worship. This short, but so very exceptional, *Agrypnia* finished around 9 p.m., a prelude to the blessings of the morrow.

■ **On Sunday**, August 15/28, preparations for the Divine Liturgy began around 8 a.m. At 9 a.m., Bishop Photii was solemnly received by the Priests and was vested on the special podium in the center of the Church, surrounded by the people. After the reading of the Third and Sixth Hours, the Liturgy began around 10 a.m., with Bishop Cyprian concelebrating in a place of honor.

This was truly an ascent, in which time and place were transfigured; Orthodox worship yet again revealed her mysteries, with sound, sight, movement, fragrance, tears, the heavenly and the earthly, people and Angels and Saints gathered around the Mystical *Trapeza*, the Throne of the Lamb, with one mouth and one heart....



• **At 11:45** a.m., the large crowd of faithful began to receive the Holy Mysteries from three Chalices, finishing at 12:10 p.m. This was followed by a procession of the Holy Icon of the Dormition of the Theotokos around the Church, with four stops to offer up petitions, read the Gospel, and bless [the four sides of the Church] with the Icon and Holy Water.

• **Once again** inside the Church, after the dismissal, Bishop Pho-tii asked Bishop Cyprian to speak to the large congregation on the occasion of the radiant Feast and celebration. His Grace delivered an address entitled: “[The Theotokos as an Initiator into the Mystery of God’s Compassion](#),” which was simultaneously translated into Bulgarian.



The Liturgy ended at 1:30 p.m., without our feeling any fatigue or indisposition, but rather with a sense of sorrow that our lives do not correspond to a Liturgy on a Feast of the Mother of God.

• **Lunch** at a nearby restaurant followed, attended by the two Hierarchs and the Presbytery, during which time the Bishops exchanged gifts and best wishes. The unity among Greek and Bulgarian anti-ecumenists became deeper and stronger, with ever-greater



commitment, to the glory of the Divine Founder of the Church.

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**Around 9 p.m.** on Sunday, Bishop Cyprian and Subdeacon Antonios were back at the Athens airport, after a comfortable sixty-minute flight, filled with blessed impressions and

feelings of thanksgiving to our Lady the Theotokos and gratitude to our Bulgarian brethren for their heartfelt hospitality, both material and spiritual, which served as a veritable “ladder to Heaven...”

