



“For the Edification of the Church”

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“When did we see Thee...in prison and came unto Thee?” (St. Matthew 25:39)

Eighth Pilgrimage to the Rural Prison of Kassaveteia, Volos

† Third Saturday of the Nativity Fast,
December 4, 2016 (Old Style)

On Saturday, December 4, 2016 (Old Style, commemoration of the Great-Martyr Barbara and St. John of Damascus), the third Saturday of the Nativity Fast, with the blessing and guidance of His Eminence, Metropolitan Cyprian of Oropos and Phyle, we made our eighth visit to the rural prison of Kassaveteia, Volos.



The packages containing personal care items, which were distributed to 135 prisoners, were prepared by volunteers of the St. Philaret the Merciful Orthodox Women’s Guild, which once again undertook the responsibility for the organization of this visit.

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As is our custom on such pilgrimages, the forty pilgrims made good use of the three-hour bus ride by reading morning prayers and the special prayer for our visits to Correctional Institutions, and by chanting Matins and the Supplicatory Canon to St. Philaret.



Our Most Reverend Metropolitan then once again read several of Aesop’s Fables and discussed their mor-

als, which show forth the spiritual power of the Fables and their timeless message.

His Eminence distributed copies of the Supplicatory Canon to St. Chrysostomos the New Confessor (†September 7, 1955 [Old Style]), and also a memento with passages from texts regarding the relationship between the Bishop and his Flock, according to the teaching of the Orthodox Church.



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Around 10:30 a.m., we arrived at the rural prison, where we met its warden and social workers, who gave us a hearty welcome before leading us into two courtyards. There we met our incarcerated brothers in a warm and moving atmosphere.



Father Soterios, the fellow minister of our Shepherd, introduced the group of visitors to our brothers. His Eminence then spoke to them words of love and encouragement, referring to the *other prisons*, namely, that of our passions, by which we “free citizens” are bound.



Moved, our incarcerated brothers thanked us for our concern and avowed that, though they are “imprisoned in body, they struggle to remain free in soul.”

Accompanied by the chanting of the nuns and folk songs and carols, our Shepherd gave all the inmates an embrace full of paternal love and distributed the care packages.



Finally, we visited the prison chapel dedicated to St. Eleftherios, where the Holy Icon of our Lord, “I am in Prison. Come unto Me,” which our Guild gave the prison some years ago, is kept.

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On the return journey, our Metropolitan spoke about his conversation with the prison’s social workers, who informed him about the tragic situation of the released prisoners: it is not uncommon that former prisoners attempt to return to confinement in order to survive. Social conditions, the mentality of people in the world, or their own advanced age, among other things, render the prison a more hospitable place than the world—it is regarded as a place of “refuge!”

After a two-hour drive, we arrived at the Monastery of St. Agathon, located in a beautiful setting on the slopes of Mt. Oite, which was already capped with snow.



In the monastery’s main Church, we were vouchsafed to venerate the wonderworking Icon of the Mother of God and the skull of St. Agathon, the founder of the Monastery.

We were warmed by the heat of the fireplace, located in the center of the guesthouse, and the hospitably offered by the monastery. Our Most Reverend spiritual Father also warmed our hearts by his words reminding us that our visits to various institutions help us to cultivate love, so that, in time, we might be granted the gift of loving like the Apostle Paul, that is “in the tender mercies of Jesus Christ.”

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On the final leg of our journey, following the reading and discussion of passages from the Epistles of St. Paul regarding love “in the tender mercies of Jesus Christ,” we chanted Resurrectional Vespers *troparia* to St. Sabbas the Sanctified, that *lover of the things on high and dweller of the desert*.

We returned to Athens with renewed strength, having been vouchsafed rich spiritual blessings, so as to continue our journey towards the Cave of Bethlehem, in view of the upcoming Great Feast of the Nativity, whereby *Christ our Savior hath visited us from on high*, in order to free us from the prison of our own selves.

