



## “For the Edification of the Church”

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“I was in prison, and ye came unto me...” (St. Matthew 25:36)

## Visit to the Rural Prison of Kassaveteia

June 27, 2021 (Old Style)



**O**n Saturday, June 27, 2021 (Old Style, commemoration of St. Sampson the Hospitable), towards the end of the Apostles’ Fast, with the blessing, participation, and guidance of His Eminence, Metropolitan Cyprian of Oropos and Phyle, we made our eleventh visit to the Rural Prison of Kassaveteia, located in northern Greece near the city of Volos.

It was with special joy that we organized this visit after a three year hiatus (our last visit being in March 2018), since the rural prison had temporarily prohibited group visits for safety reasons. During this time, the St. Philaret the Merciful Guild continued, of course, to send packages to the facility for the sake of the prisoners.

Owing to the restrictive measures (on account of the pandemic), however, it was not possible for the customary large group of *pilgrims* to visit the prison, nor were we permitted to meet the inmates individually in the facility’s courtyard, as had been our custom.

Metropolitan Cyprian and our small group personally delivered the care packages prepared by members of our Guild for eighty inmates. The warden and his coworkers warmly welcomed and thanked Metropolitan Cyprian and the Guild for their continuing support. They described the life of the inmates, who are given the opportunity to live in a rural environment,

near nature and animals, and to receive an education and technical training, though more needs to be done to facilitate their reintegration into society after they are released.



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Then, to our joy, the warden allowed us to meet with approximately thirty prisoners, for the most part young, in the facility's large auditorium. Complying with the health regulations, we were requested to keep a distance, but the atmosphere was very friendly. The inmates gladly answered the questions of Metropolitan Cyprian, who discretely led them to ponder on the meaning of their tribulations and of true freedom.

The inmates described their daily lives, how they strive to help and respect each other, and also their desire to "make a new beginning" when they return to the outside world. One person, during the dialogue, stated: "If you don't have love, you aren't a human being." Many of them, especially the Muslims, regularly devote time to prayer.

Of course, they also expressed their pain at their lack of freedom and separation from their families, their uncertainty about how they will reintegrate into society, and their difficult experiences at other prisons.

From this dialogue with the inmates and the directors of the prison, we discerned the genuine concern of the personnel for the standard of living of the inmates and for their future, and also the excellent relationship between the caretakers and their charges.

Our visit ended with a stop at the prison's small chapel dedicated to the Patron Saint of the imprisoned, the Holy Hieromartyr Eleftherios (whose name in Greek means "freedom").

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After a visit to one of our small convents in the area, we returned home, giving thanks to God, and more sensitized to the needs of our well-disposed incarcerated brothers and their caregivers. May conditions be such that we will soon be able to visit them again as a large group.