

Pastoral Visit to the Czech Republic and Slovakia

By the Grace of God, through the prayers of His Eminence, Metropolitan Cyprian, who is ailing, and with synodal approval, His Grace, Bishop Klemes of Gardikion made his second pastoral visit to the small communities of the Orthodox in Resistance in the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

Travelling along with Bishop Klemes were Chrestos Papadopoulos—a chanter and philologist, and his brother according to the flesh—and Subdeacon Kyprianos Koutsoliakos. They left Greece by air on Wednesday afternoon, June 17/30, 2010, and arrived in Prague, the capital of the Czech Republic, two and a half hours later.

They were met at the Prague airport by Hieromonk Dr. Gorazd (Vopatryny) and Father Jiří Ján, a Czech Priest who serves the pastoral needs of our Church in Greece, and who was already in the country with his family to visit his relatives and to help with preparations for the Bishop's visit. Sister Martha, representing the faithful in Prague, was also among the welcoming party.

Father Jiří then drove the visitors from Greece to the small village of Jezdovice, two hours southeast of Prague. Here, they were greeted by Father Jeremias Cvak and some of the faithful, who had gathered together at the newly-built Church of St. John the Wonderworker, Archbishop of Shanghai and San Francisco, where His Grace and the small flock conversed together in a spirit of Christian love.

On Thursday, June 18 (Old Style), following the morning service at the Church, Bishop Klemes discussed various spiritual and pastoral matters with Father Jeremias, offering him his assistance.

At 6 p.m., His Grace presided at the Festal Vespers service to St. John the Wonderworker, assisted by Father Gorazd and in the presence of faithful who had come from various surrounding regions. The service was chanted in Greek, Slavonic, and Czech.

On Friday, June 19 (Old Style), a Hierarchical Divine Liturgy was celebrated at the Church of St. John in Jezdovice, on the occasion of its Feast Day. Bishop Klemes liturgized, together with Fathers Gora-

zd, Jeremias, Jiří, and Chariton Mrazek, who was ordained a Priest in Greece two months ago. A few dozen faithful were in pious attendance, including a large number of young children! The majority of those present communed of the Immaculate Mysteries. Before the Dismissal, the Small Blessing of the Waters was performed, and the Church's new bell and Cross—which are to be placed on the front side of the roof, above the west door—were blessed with the reading of appropriate prayers.



Bishop Klemes then delivered a festal homily, simultaneously translated into Czech by Father Jiří, regarding vigilance as a path to sanctity, which St. John preached to us so eloquently in his writings, but primarily by his way of life. St. John would often relate the example of the wicked son of a certain king. This son, following the wise and formidable ordeals he endured at the hands of his father, acquired vigilance and cut off his sinful attachments to ephemeral goods. His Grace also stressed that we must, among other things, guard our mind and heart, if we are to preserve invulnerable and unadulterated the treasure of Faith and virtue. Finally, he expressed his wish for the progress of the mission's witness, through the prayers of St. John, this great contemporary missionary of Orthodoxy to the western world.



An *agape* meal followed, where the faithful were able to discuss current issues of spiritual interest. That afternoon, the Supplicatory Canon to St. John was read in the Church, after which His Grace met one last time with the gathered faithful, and then privately with the clergy.

On Saturday morning, June 20 (Old Style), Father Jiří drove Bishop



Klimes and his companions to our community in Michalany, Slovakia, which is situated at the edge of the Carpathian Mountains, near Ukraine. What proved to be the shortest route involved passing through Hungary.

They finally arrived in Michalany after a nine-hour-long trip. Here, they were met by Father Vladimir Mohorita, his Presbytera, and a few faithful, among whom was a family of converts to Orthodoxy from Roman Catholicism, from Kraków, Poland.

Late that afternoon, Great Vespers was served in Greek and Slavonic in the house Chapel of St. Xenia the Fool for Christ and St. John of Kronstadt, on the occasion of the commemoration of the Holy Royal Martyr Rostislav the Equal-to-the-Apostles, the Prince of Moravia (†870), who, as is well known, asked the Emperor in Constantinople to send a teacher of the True Faith to his people. This request served as the occasion for the glorious mission to the Slavs by Sts. Cyril and Methodios of Thessalonica in the ninth century, which produced such great spiritual, historical, national, and cultural results. For this reason, a *Lite* was served, along with the Blessing of the Five Loaves.



On Sunday morning, June 21 (Old Style), Resurrectional Matins and a Hierarchical Divine Liturgy were celebrated in Greek and Slavonic by Bishop Klimes and Fathers Vladimir and Jiří.

In his short sermon, Bishop Klimes conveyed the blessing of our ailing Most Reverend Metropolitan and spoke about the importance of the historic initiative and work

of St. Rostislav, whose memory was being celebrated. This Saint accepted the Christian Faith and took pains, out of Christian love, that his subjects adopt it as well, since the true Faith heals man of the most onerous and unbearable weight of sin, and frees the soul from every kind of paralysis. The forgiveness of sins, through repentance and confession, is God's greatest, sweetest, and most invaluable gift to fallen man. God grants sanctification and salvation as a gift to all those who live with unfeigned love and are careful even about their words and inner dispositions. It does not suffice for us to refrain from sinful deeds; rather, we must bless and not curse each other, nor should we feel antipathy and enmity towards those who have wronged or mistreated us. Through forbearance, we receive remission of sins and become like unto the one Holy God, Who finds rest in His Saints.

An *agape* meal followed, during which a spiritual discussion took place in a congenial and fraternal spirit.



After Vespers that afternoon, Bishop Klemes responded to questions posed by the faithful and those interested in the Faith. He then worked out various pastoral and spiritual matters with Father Vladimir, in particular regarding the imminent construction of a more spacious, freestanding Church. The visitors were then given

a brief tour of a section of the village of Michalany.

On Monday, June 22 (Old Style), Bishop Klemes and his travelling companions left Michalany, following the road back through Hungary and passing through Budapest on the way. By noon, they reached Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia. In the historic Roman Catholic Church of St. Martin, they venerated the Holy Relics of St. John the Merciful, which are preserved there in a special side Chapel.

They then continued on to Devín, ten kilometers west of Bratislava, and visited an extraordinary fortified area, where the Danube and

Morava Rivers meet. Here, on the towering heights, lie the remnants of an ancient settlement, with an early Christian Church, fortified castle, and a Church built in the ninth century under the Holy Prince Rostislav,



who lived in this area until he was exiled to Germany by the Franks, in 870, where he was martyred. There are also the remains of fortified works from the following centuries. In this wondrous natural environment, which offers an indescribable view, the pilgrims from Greece had the blessing of feeling the historical grandeur and the spiritual tradition and importance of the place, which has been sanctified by worship of the True God and the presence and activity of St. Rostislav the Royal Martyr.



Late Monday night, the delegation arrived back in Prague and were offered hospitality at the home of a pious member of our ecclesiastical community, who maintains a Chapel dedicated to St. Clement (Klemes) of Rome.

On Tuesday, June 23 (Old Style), through the kind offices of Father Gorazd, the group visited the place of martyrdom of St. Wenceslaus,

King of the Czechs (†921 or 935) and grandson of St. Ludmila, in the historic city of Stará Boleslav, half an hour north of Prague. Here, there is a large Church dedicated to the Holy Royal Martyr Wenceslaus, in the



crypt of which is preserved the old Church of the Holy Unmercenaries Cosmas and Damian. Adjacent to this Church, on the south side of its Altar, there is a tall, though narrow, ninth-century Church dedicated to



St. Clement of Rome. Over the last few decades, frescos dating to the twelfth century have been restored, which depict scenes from the Life of St. Clement, along with others that are, as yet, indiscernible. Not far to the east, one can visit the most important place of pilgrimage to the Mother of God in the Czech Republic: a large Church was built on the spot where an Icon of the *Theotokos* was found. This Icon had been hidden there by one of St. Wenceslaus' faithful servants at the time of the former's mar-



tyrdom. Shortly thereafter, the servant attempted to avenge the wrongful death of his master, but was captured and hanged nearby. Since his body remained intact and incorrupt for a long period of time, however, he was buried on the spot, and a Divine Light appeared at his tomb. A Church, which exists to this day, was built here.



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All of the aforementioned monuments, which attest to the historical and spiritual roots of the Czech people, have long been in the possession of the Roman Catholic Church, since this country, following the initial missionary work of Sts. Cyril and Methodios, eventually accepted the imposition of errant Western Christianity and Latinization.

That afternoon, Bishop Klemes and his companions went on a brief sightseeing tour of Prague's Old Town, which is renowned for its picturesque-ness. They then headed for the airport, and took a night flight back to Athens, where they arrived in the early morning hours of Wednesday, June 24 (Old Style).

This was an arduous and laborious, though in many ways blessed, pastoral visit to Central Europe, where the roots of the Divine sowing of Sts. Cyril and Methodios and the struggles and martyric blood of the Holy Royal Martyrs Rostislav and Wenceslaus must be revealed and renewed, and must bear fruit in Faith and Truth, through the intercessions of the holy missionary St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco, and through the prayers of our Most Reverend Father, Metropolitan Cyprian, who also dedicated himself to the mission abroad. Amen!

