

Bishop Andrew's Trip to Greece Nov. 21-Dec. 9, 2011

On Monday, November 21st, His Grace Bishop Andrew departed New York to make a pastoral visit to our faithful in Greece. Besides serving at the Divine Liturgy, meeting with the faithful and answering their questions, His Grace also made pilgrimages and visited several holy places throughout Greece. On November 23rd, he and Fathers Philaretos and Simeon of the Monastery of St. John of the Ladder, visited the monastery of St. Seraphim of Dombo, a local Saint in the area where our monastery is situated. St. Seraphim lived in the 16th century. This monastery belongs to the New Calendar church of Greece. There are presently 3 monks and one novice there. Bishop Andrew and the fathers were greeted by the abbot of St. Seraphim's monastery, Fr. Pachomios, who has been at this monastery for 46 years. After venerating the skull of St. Seraphim, Bishop Andrew and the fathers were offered the usual hospitality (a cup of coffee, a glass of water and something sweet) in the refectory of the monastery.



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The following day, the fathers took Bishop Andrew to visit the Holy Trinity Orphanage outside of Athens. This orphanage was founded 46 years ago by Fr. Dionysios, who even at the advanced age of 90, is still in charge of the orphanage. There are 30 girls presently at this orphanage. This orphanage is the largest orphanage in Greece that is in the hands of the Old Calendarists.

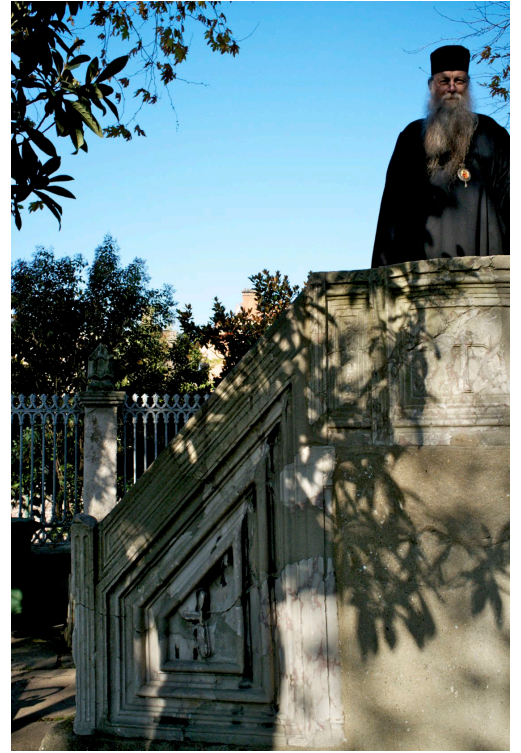


On November 30th, Bishop Andrew and the fathers of St. John's Monastery departed by car for northern Greece. In Xanthi, they boarded a bus for Constantinople. It took seven hours by car to reach Xanthi, and another 7 hours for the bus to arrive in Constantinople. The bus ride was comfortable (double decker with drink and snack service) and interesting, since it is possible to view the countryside of northern Greece and northeastern Turkey along the way. Since the Orient Express no longer operates to Constantinople, the bus is the only way to get to there by land.

They stayed in a hotel in the center of the old district, within walking distance of Hagia Sophia. In fact, shortly after arriving, and settling into their hotel rooms, they went for a walk to see Hagia Sophia by night, even though the museum was closed.

The next day, they returned to Hagia Sophia and went through the church. Then they visited the site of the ancient hippodrome of Constantinople, which is nearby. After this, they visited a few shops, where the fathers bought some supplies for their vestment sewing business. After lunch, and a rest, they visited the port where the ferries dock on the European side of the city.

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The following day, Bishop Andrew and the fathers took a taxi, and traveled to the Phanar (lighthouse), where the Patriarchate of Constantinople has its center. Bishop Andrew and the fathers venerated the relics of the Saints that are kept inside the church, and admired the artwork which survived the Turkish invasion. Inside the Patriarchal cathedral are the relics of St. Euphemia the all praised, in whose casket the Orthodox confession of the Faith was placed, along with the confession of faith of the Monophysites, at the 4th Ecumenical Council in 481 A.D. When the Fathers at that council opened the casket after

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three days of praying for direction, the Orthodox confession was in the hands of St. Euphemia, while the confession of the Monophysites was found to be under her feet.

Alongside the relics of St. Euphemia, there are also the relics of St. Theophano, the Empress, who was married to Emperor Leo the Wise. She was of such a holy life that the Emperor considered her to be a living saint, and wanted her even to repose. She heard of it. So she instituted the Feast of All Saints, and church he to them, sure that St. Theophano was in the number of the Saints.



considered living saint, to erect a dedicated to before he would not Leo the Wise feast of All dedicated the was building since he was Theophano number of

Also lying together with the caskets of these two Saints is the casket containing the relics of St. Solomonia, the mother of the 7 Maccabee brothers.



On the opposite side of the church are two small marble reliquaries containing the relics of St. Gregory the Theologian, and St. John Chrysostom, who were both Archbishops of Constantinople. These relics were returned only a few years ago by the Vatican, in their efforts to improve relations with the Greek Orthodox Church.

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After visiting the Phanar, we took a taxi and went to see the monastery called Chora. This monastery dates from about the 14th century, and has some of the most spectacular mosaics and frescos that are left from Christian Constantinople. It is a miracle that any of them have survived at all. Even so, it is possible to see how they were defaced by the Moslems.



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After a rest, Bishop Andrew and the fathers took a taxi to the Asian side of Constantinople, and visited the part of town where most of the Greeks and Western Europeans lived. Most have moved away since the unrest of the 1950s during which even the graves of the Christians were opened and the bones of the dead were desecrated and strewn about. They took a little walk along the old sea wall of the city, had a little loukoumi (a local confection) and coffee, and went back to their hotel in order to prepare for an early departure for Greece the following day.

On Sunday, after the Divine Liturgy, Bishop Andrew sat with the parishioners again and answered their questions.



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On Monday, Dec. 5th, Bishop Andrew and the fathers visited an Athonite hermit, who lives in the Monastery of St. Demetrios, which he founded close to the monastery of St. John of the Ladder. Fr. Ignatios is an excellent iconographer, and supports himself by painting icons.

In every place that Bishop Andrew visited, he noticed a great amount of interest on the part of the Greek people in the history and present development of the Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church, and answered a large number of questions concerning our Metropolitan Valentine, our Synod of Bishops, and the life of our clergy and parishioners.