

A Pilgrimage to Greece:

In the Footsteps of the Apostles and the Saints



April 24th – May 9th, 2018

*Now some Greeks were among those who had gone up to Jerusalem
to worship at the Feast.*

*So these approached Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee,
and requested: "Sir, we would like to see Jesus."*

Philip went and told Andrew, and they both went and told Jesus.

– John 12:20-22

2018 Pilgrimage to Greece

Tuesday, April 24th – Day 1

Departure from LAX for Thessaloniki via Istanbul on Turkish Airlines

Wednesday, April 25th – Day 2

Arrival in Thessaloniki

Transfer to the hotel: The Electra Palace hotel. www.electrahotels.gr

Welcome Dinner and brief orientation.

Overnight in Thessaloniki.

Thessaloniki is today the capital of the Greek province of Macedonia and the second largest city in Greece, with a population of over a million people. Cassander of Macedon, a former general of Alexander the Great, established the

city of Thessaloniki more than 2,000 years ago, in 315BC, naming the city after his wife, who was also Alexander's half-sister. The Romans captured the city in 167BC and incorporated it into their Empire. Under Mark Anthony (83-30BC),



the famous lover of the Egyptian queen Cleopatra (69-30BC), Thessaloniki was declared a free city of the Roman republic in 41BC. In St. Paul's day, a century later, Thessaloniki was a city of perhaps 200,000 people, the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia, important for its location on both sea and land routes of travel and becoming an important trade hub along the *Via Ignatia*, the most famous of Rome's ancient roads connecting the western and eastern halves of the empire. An important metropolis in the Roman period it was the second largest city of the East Roman (Byzantine) Empire.

In the 9th century, it was two brothers from Thessaloniki, Cyril and Methodius, who were sent as missionaries to medieval Moravia (today, the Czech Republic,



Slovakia and part of Poland). Their invention of the Cyrillic alphabet that is still the basis of modern Russian, and their translations of the Scriptures and the Liturgy into the what is today called Old Church Slavonic, led many thousands into the Christian faith and changed Christian history. The fruit of their mission work can still be seen in the modern Russian Orthodox Church, the largest of all the Orthodox Churches today, with nearly 100 million members. Canonized as saints, called “the Apostles to the Slavs” and given the

title of being “Equal to the Apostles,” their memory is celebrated in the life of the Church on May 11th.

Thessaloniki was conquered by the Ottoman Turks in 1430. It was only a little more than a century ago, on November 8, 1912, that Thessaloniki would pass from the Ottoman Empire to the modern Greek state, following the surrender of the city’s Ottoman garrison during the First Balkan War (1912-1913), a war fought by the kingdoms of Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia and Montenegro against the collapsing Ottoman Empire. Thessaloniki was officially annexed to Greece by the Treaty of Bucharest (Romania) in 1913.

St. Paul the Apostle (Saul of Tarsus)

St. Paul’s significance for the history of Christianity can hardly be underestimated: an indefatigable missionary, the first interpreter of the Good News of Jesus Christ to the Gentile world, he is also the author of more New Testament books than any other writer.

St. Paul was educated at the rabbinical school conducted in Jerusalem by the great rabbi Gamaliel, a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin. Active in the earliest persecutions of Christianity, it was during a trip from Jerusalem to Damascus to undertake the persecution of Christians there that St. Paul’s life

would take a crucial turn when he encountered the risen Jesus in a searing vision that left him temporarily blind. As a result of this revelation, he converted to the faith he once hated and was baptized as a Christian in Damascus, the very community he had set out to destroy. From that moment on, Paul described himself as a “slave of Jesus Christ” (*Romans 1:1*) and in that slavery discovered “the glorious freedom of the children of God” (*Romans 8:21*). In *The Acts of the Apostles*, written by St. Luke the Evangelist – a friend and co-worker – St. Paul’s missionary activities are organized into three journeys that cover roughly 46-58 AD, the most active years of his life, as he evangelized Greece and Asia Minor. During these journeys St. Paul would travel throughout the ancient Mediterranean world, preaching and teaching, establishing new churches everywhere he went. He preached in Athens and was to die in Rome, the intellectual and political centers of the Roman Empire. It is through his missionary efforts that the Christian faith, originally a sect within Judaism, becomes a world religion. His letters are the oldest Christian documents that we have and provide deep and rich theological insights that have never been surpassed in Christian history. In modern Bibles, his letters to the various Christian communities he established and/or nurtured are placed in order of their length beginning with his longest letter, *The Letter to the Romans*, and then followed by his letters to individuals (Timothy, Titus and Philemon) last.



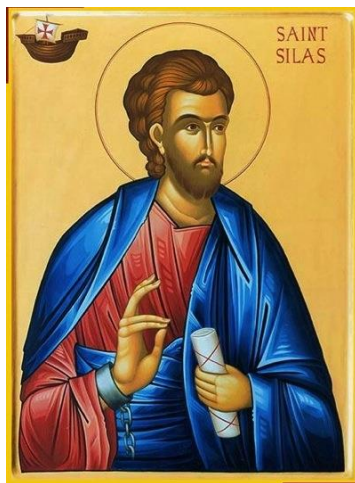
Persecuted for his faith in Christ throughout his ministry, *The Acts of the Apostles* closes with St. Paul under house arrest in Rome, still carrying out his ministry of teaching and preaching, faithful to the Lord Jesus until the end. The apostle Paul was executed in Rome by being beheaded – a death accorded to Roman citizens – during the persecution of Christians by the Roman emperor Nero, probably in 64

AD. His relics are buried beneath the altar of the Great Church of St. Paul's-outside-the-walls in Rome. The celebration of his memory in the life of the Church takes place on October 29th; and, together with St. Peter the Apostle who was also executed in Rome under Nero, on June 29th.

St. Paul in Thessaloniki

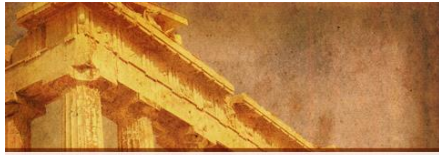
After leaving nearby Philippi, St. Paul preached in the synagogue in Thessaloniki in 49-50AD (*Acts 17:1-9*) during his second great missionary journey and would later write two letters to the Thessalonians, probably from Corinth. St. Paul's *First Letter to the Thessalonians* is considered by most modern scholars as the first book of the New Testament to be written, sometime in 50-51AD.

Reading the Scriptures: St. Paul in Thessaloniki (*Acts of the Apostles 17:1-12*)



Now when Paul and Silas had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. Paul went in, as was his custom, and for three weeks he argued with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ." And some of them were persuaded, and joined Paul and Silas; as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked fellows of the rabble, they gathered a crowd, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the people. And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brethren before the city authorities, crying, "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, and Jason has received them; and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus."

And the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard this. And when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go. The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea; and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue.



I & II THESSALONIANS



St. Paul's *First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians* were written in response to a report by St. Timothy, the Apostle Paul's spiritual son and close co-worker, that difficulties had arisen among members of the Christian community in Thessaloniki about how to understand the Second Coming of Christ and the promised resurrection of the dead. Over a quarter of 1 Thessalonians and nearly half of 2 Thessalonians deal with misunderstandings of the *Parousia*. In both letters, St. Paul urges a patient, steadfast faith in the Lord and love for one another in face of the persecution and trials that confronted the Thessalonian Christians. He affirms that the Lord will come "like a thief in the night" (1 Thessalonians 5:2) but in the meantime, Christians must "never tire of doing good" (2 Thessalonians 3:13) and must "hold fast to the traditions we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter" (2 Thessalonians 2:15). (This latter verse, with its reference about holding fast to "the traditions" taught by St. Paul, is one of the reasons Orthodox Christians do not accept the Protestant teaching of *sola Scriptura* – the Bible alone – but see the Scriptures in the larger context of Tradition.) The hope of Jesus' Second Coming should not only affect how one grieves the loss of a loved one but also permeate every aspect of a Christian's thinking and living on a day-to-day basis. Because of this hope in the return of the Risen Christ, St. Paul tells the Thessalonians that the qualities characterizing the life of a Christian are joy, prayer and gratitude (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). In the history of the Church, St. Paul's command to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17) will be one of the Scriptures often cited by the saints that will give rise to the use of the Jesus Prayer - "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner" – as a spiritual discipline. Concerning the resurrection from the dead, St. Paul teaches that just as the Lord Jesus truly rose from the dead, so will all "those who have fallen asleep" (1 Thessalonians 4:14). In fact, 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18 is the Epistle reading for the Funeral Service in the Orthodox Church; and both letters are read as part of our schedule of liturgical readings during the Church year, usually during the late Fall – October and November.

A faith to be practiced: verses from St. Paul's 1st Letter to the Thessalonians



May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else.

1 Thessalonians 3:12

For this is the will of God – your sanctification: abstain from sexual immorality.

1 Thessalonians 4:3

God did not call us to be impure, but to holiness.

1 Thessalonians 4:7

Aspire to live quietly, to mind your own business.

1 Thessalonians 4:11

About times and dates, we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the Day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.

1 Thessalonians 5:1-2

Live in peace with one another. 1 Thessalonians 5:13

See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always strive to do good to one another and to everyone. 1 Thessalonians 5:15

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Test everything. Hold fast to what is good. Abstain from every kind of evil.

1 Thessalonians 5:21-22

A faith to be practiced: verses from St. Paul's 2nd Letter to the Thessalonians

Let no one deceive you in any way. 2 Thessalonians 2:3

Stand firm and hold fast to the traditions you were taught by us, whether by word of mouth or by our letter. 2 Thessalonians 2:15

When we were with you, we gave you this command: anyone unwilling to work should not eat. For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work. 2 Thessalonians 3:10-11

Do not grow weary in doing what is right. 2 Thessalonians 3:13

Thursday, April 26th – Day 3



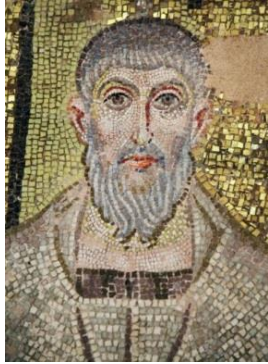
This morning, following breakfast, we began a day of visiting some of the oldest and most important churches in Thessaloniki, beginning with the *The Church of St. George (also called the Rotunda)*, together

with *the Arch of Galerius*, which was once part of a large imperial palace and complex in early 4th century Thessaloniki. The Arch of Galerius was originally built in 305-306AD to immortalize Roman victories over the Persians. The Rotunda was built as a temple dedicated to Zeus and may also have been intended to serve as a mausoleum for the Roman emperor Galerius (ruled 305-311) who had it built. The Rotunda was constructed as a massive brick circular structure and had an *oculus* (or opening in the ceiling) like the Pantheon in Rome. It was converted into a Christian Church in 326AD by the Christian Roman emperor Constantine the Great, who had made Christianity a legal religion of the Roman Empire with the signing of the Edict of Milan in 313. The conversion of the building into a Christian church provided the occasion to close the *oculus* in the dome in order to install mosaic icons in the 5th century, some of which still survive. Many of the saints

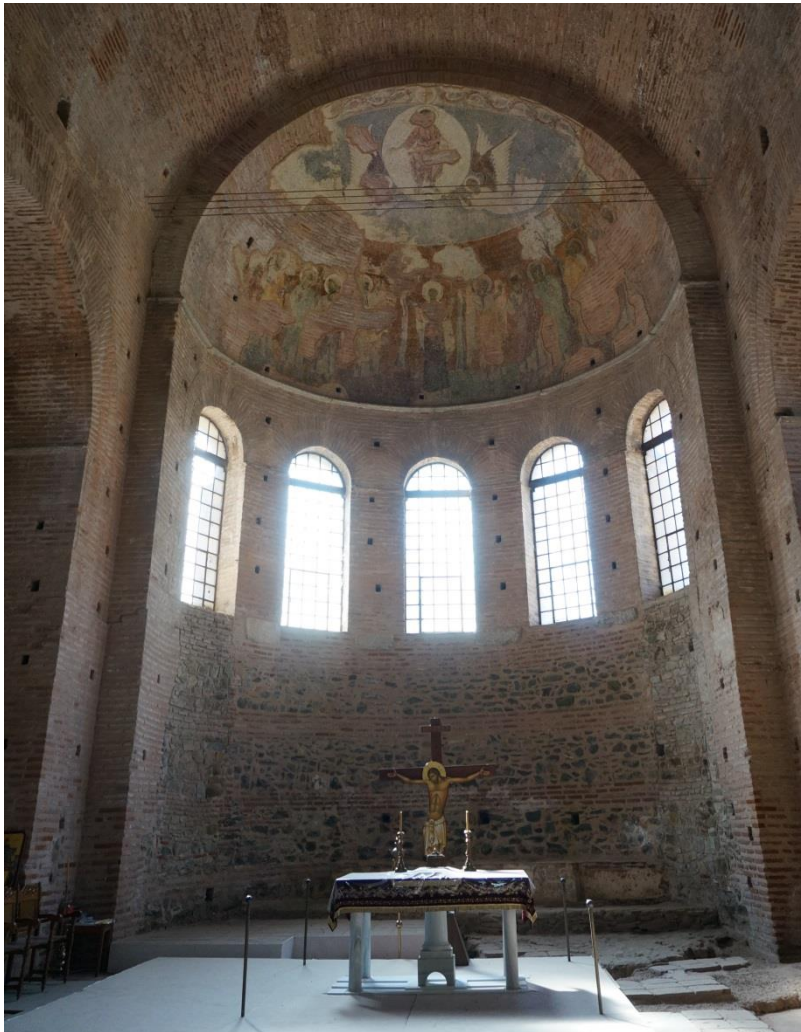


depicted in these mosaics are martyrs who were executed for their faith during the persecution of Christians under the Roman emperor Diocletian (244-311AD).

For most of the 16th century (1524-1590) the Rotunda served as the Metropolitan Cathedral of Thessaloniki – St. Demetrios having been converted into a mosque



the century before. Beginning in 1590, and during the remainder of the Turkish occupation, the church was used as a mosque. When Thessaloniki was freed from Turkish rule in 1912, the building was again re-consecrated as a church. In 1914, large scale archaeological excavations were begun first by the French, then the Danes, and finally by the Greeks. In 1917, it became a “Museum of Macedonia” by decree of Prime Minister Eleutherios Venizelos (1864-1936) and is today primarily a museum of early Christian art under the Greek Ministry of Culture – but is still sometimes used as a Church. The minaret near the church that was added during the period of the Ottoman conquest is the only one that has been left standing in Thessaloniki.



The Ascension of Christ, a 9th century fresco in the apse of St. George (the Rotunda)



We next visited the early 14th century *Church of the Holy Apostles*, today a neighborhood parish church but originally built to be the main church of a much larger monastery complex that was probably – although not certainly –

dedicated originally to the *Theotokos* and ever-virgin Mary, “quick to hear prayers”. The date of the church’s construction is associated with Nephon I, the Patriarch of Constantinople from 1310 to 1314AD. His work was continued by one of his disciples named Paul, who later became the abbot of the monastery. The interior decoration consists of mosaics on the upper levels of the building

with frescoes completing the iconography on the lower levels of the church, together with the two small side chapels. With the conquest of the city by the Ottomans, the church was eventually turned into a mosque *circa* 1520-1530 by Cesari-zade Koca Kasim Pasha, the Turkish military governor of the city, and the



Christian mosaics and frescoes were plastered over – after all of the gold *tesserae* were removed from the mosaics. Following the end of the Ottoman Empire and the liberation of Thessaloniki in 1912, restoration on the church began in 1926 and it is today a UNESCO World Heritage site. Its current name, the Church of the Holy Apostles, is very recent and was first given to this church in the 19th century.

From the Church of the Holy Apostles, we went to *the St. Demetrios Cathedral*, also a UNESCO World Heritage site and one of the largest churches in all of Greece, located in the heart of the old city, just north of the old Roman forum where the terrain of the city begins an upward slope, thus making



the Cathedral visible from most areas of the city in ancient times. There we had the opportunity to venerate the relics of the man considered to be the patron saint of Thessaloniki. The present church is situated on the site of several previous churches built over the ruins of the Roman bath where St. Demetrios was imprisoned, martyred and buried. It was in 312AD that a small house church was built over his tomb. Parts of this initial church may still be seen in



what is today called the Crypt or catacombs, located to the right of the present altar area. In the 5th century, when the first large church of St. Demetrios was built, the site of his martyrdom was incorporated into the structure of the church. During the Ottoman occupation (1430-1912), when the Cathedral was used as a mosque, this area was filled in with earth and was not rediscovered until after the great fire of 1917 that ravaged nearly two-thirds of Thessaloniki and caused extensive damage to the Cathedral. It has been restored by the Hellenic Archaeological Service and was converted into an exhibition space for Christian antiquities in 1988. The current Cathedral is a reconstruction of the 7th



century basilica that was for the most part destroyed in 1917 and was re-consecrated for Christian worship on October 26, 1949.

St. Demetrios was a well-educated Roman military commander and a Christian in secret who refused to follow the orders of the emperor Galerius (286-305AD) to begin

rounding up, arresting and executing the Christians of Thessaloniki. For his insubordination, St. Demetrios was arrested, tortured and eventually executed by the emperor's personal guards on October 26, 304AD. The Cathedral that bears his name is built over the site of his burial place and today houses his relics, which were returned to the Orthodox Church by the Roman Catholic Church as a gesture of goodwill in 1980. It was in 312AD that the first small house church was built over the tomb, parts of which can still be seen in the crypt. Through the centuries, a series of churches were built on this site and during the Ottoman occupation the Cathedral was used as a mosque (1430-1912). The current structure is a reconstruction of the 7th century basilica that was destroyed by fire in 1917.

Also in the Cathedral are the relics of St. Anyisia of Thessaloniki, who was executed in 304AD, during the persecution of the emperor Diocletian (ruled 284–305AD), who issued a general edict that ordered Christians to offer sacrifice to the gods of



Rome on pain of death. Raised in a wealthy Christian family, she used her wealth to aid the poor of Thessaloniki. St. Anyisia was arrested by a Roman soldier while on her way to church for Liturgy and when she refused to be taken to the temple of the sun god to offer sacrifice, she was executed by him on the spot. Her memory is celebrated on December 30th.



After stopping for lunch at a restaurant on the water near our hotel, we visited *The Monastery of St. Theodora of Thessaloniki* which is named for a 9th century nun (812-892AD) who was born on the island of Aegina – where the relics of St. Nektarios, who died in 1920, are kept today – the third child of the priest Anthony and his wife, Chrysanthi. Because at that time Aegina was continually harassed by raids of Saracen Muslim pirates, the family moved to Thessaloniki where she was married and gave birth to three children, only one of whom – her eldest daughter – survived. The loss of two of her children

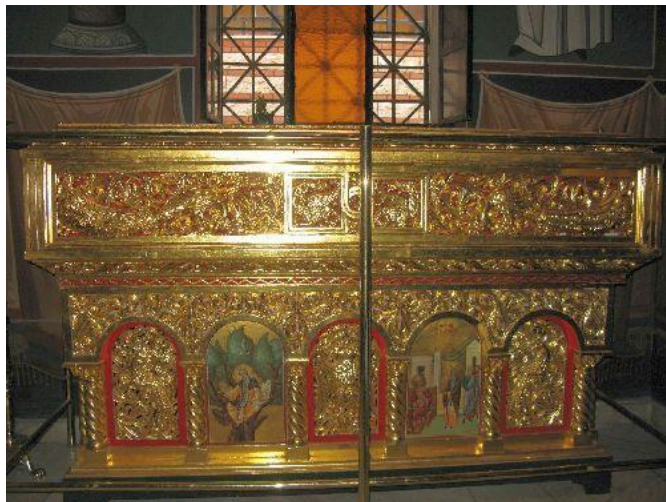
caused St. Theodora to fall into a deep depression; and when she became a widow at the age of 25, she decided to become a nun, gave all of her belongings to the poor, and entered the Monastery of St. Stephen in Thessaloniki, where she would remain for the next 55 years of her life. She was eventually joined by her daughter, who had also become a nun, taking the name Theopisti (which means “faith in God”). Her daughter ultimately became the abbess of the convent. When St. Theodora died at the age of 80, miracles of healing began occurring at her grave and the name of the convent was changed from St. Stephen to St. Theodora in 893AD. When Thessaloniki was captured by the Ottoman Turks in 1430, it remained one of only three monasteries allowed to remain open in the city, and at that time had 200 nuns. It became a parish church in the 18th century and in 1974, the convent became a monastery for men. The memories of St. Theodora and her daughter St. Theopisti are celebrated in the life of the Church on August 29th.



The relics of *Osios David* (the *venerable David*, a title indicating that this saint was a monk) are also kept here for veneration. St. David of Thessaloniki (c.450-540AD), was a monk originally from Mesopotamia (modern Iraq) who lived for three years in an almond tree outside the walls of ancient Thessaloniki before building a monastic cell nearby where he spent the next 20 years of his life. The earliest mention of St. David of Thessaloniki is from *The Spiritual Meadow* by St. John Moschus (c.550-619AD), a collection of stories about the saints written around 600AD. In that book the following story is told:



We went to the same Abba Palladios with this request: 'Of your charity, tell us, father, where you came from, and how it came about that you embraced the monastic life'. He was from Thessaloniki, he said, and then he told us this: 'In my home country, not far beyond the city walls, there was a recluse, a native of Mesopotamia whose name was David. He was a man of outstanding virtue, merciful and chaste. He spent about twenty years in his monastic cell. Now at this time, because of the barbarians, the walls of the city were patrolled at night by soldiers. One night those who were on guard-duty at that stretch of the city-walls nearest to where the elder's monastic cell was located, saw fire pouring from the windows of the recluse's cell. The soldiers thought the barbarians must have set the elder's cell on fire; but when they went out



in the morning, to their amazement, they found the elder unharmed and his cell unburned. Again the following night they saw fire, the same way as before, in the elder's cell—and this went on for a long time. The occurrence became known to throughout the city and the countryside. Many people would come and keep vigil at the wall all night long in order to see the fire, which continued to appear once or twice but was often seen. I said to myself: 'If God so glorifies his servants in

this world, how much more so in the world to come when He shines upon their face like the sun? This, my children, is why I embraced the monastic life.'

Upon his death, St. David of Thessaloniki was buried at the monastery which he had founded. In 1236 his relics were taken by marauding Crusaders to Pavia, Italy where they remained for more than 400 years, until 1967, when they were transferred by the Roman Catholic Church to Milan. Through the efforts of Metropolitan Panteleimon of Thessaloniki (1925-2003), who is buried outside the entrance to the Cathedral of St. Demetrios, the relics of St. David were returned to Thessaloniki in 1978 as an ecumenical gesture of goodwill by the Roman Catholic Church. The memory of St. David of Thessaloniki is celebrated in the life of the Church on June 26th. The return of his relics to Thessaloniki by the Vatican is commemorated on September 16th.

From there we walked to *The Church of Ayia Sophia or The Church of the Holy Wisdom of God* which is named for Christ, whom St. Paul called “the Wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 1:24). It is one of the oldest churches still standing in



Thessaloniki and is, like so many churches in Thessaloniki, a UNESCO World Heritage site. There has been a church at the current site since the late 3rd century but the present structure was built in the 8th century and was intentionally modeled on the Church of the same name in

Constantinople. From its construction in the 8th century until its conversion into a mosque in 1524, this was the “Great Church” of Thessaloniki – the Metropolitan Cathedral of the city. During the period of the occupation of the city by the Crusaders (1204-1224) it became a Roman Catholic Cathedral. With the liberation of Thessaloniki in 1912, after almost 400 years as a mosque, it was restored once more to Christian worship.

The great mosaic in the dome of *Ayia Sophia* is an icon of the Ascension of Christ (*Acts of the Apostles* 1:6-11) dating from the 9th century (completed sometime c. 886AD). Around the figure

of Christ, who occupies the center of the dome, are represented in a larger circle the *Theotokos* between two angels and the 12 Apostles; each of these 15 figures is separated by a tree. The *Theotokos* is represented with her hands outstretched in prayer, her prayer being addressed to Christ as He ascends to heaven. The writing around the dome is



taken from Acts 1:11 and reads, “Men of Galilee, why are you standing here staring into heaven. Jesus has been taken from you into heaven, but someday He

will return from heaven in the same way you’ve seen Him ascend!”

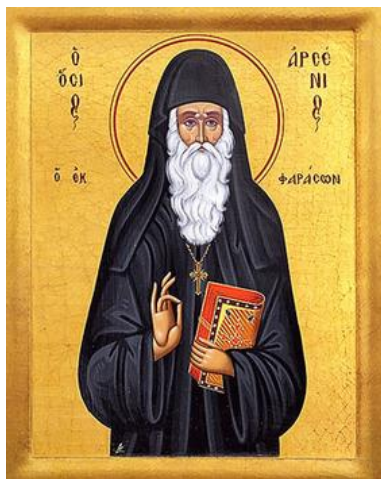


In the apse of *Ayia Sophia*, behind the modern day *iconostasis*, is another 1,200 year old mosaic icon of the *Theotokos* holding the Christ Child in her lap. At the base of this

mosaic is the following inscription: “Lord God of our Fathers, make this house

firm and unshakeable until the end of the ages, for Your glory and the glory of Your only-begotten Son and Your Holy Spirit.” In the barrel vault above the altar area, a cross from the early 8th century may be seen, together with the monograms of the Empress Irene of Athens (c.752-803AD) and Bishop Theophilos of Thessaloniki, both of who took part in the 7th Ecumenical Council held in Nicea (modern Turkey) in 787AD.

In the late afternoon, *we visited the Monastery of St. John the Theologian in Souroti*, about 20 miles from Thessaloniki. In addition to being dedicated to St. John the Evangelist and Theologian, the author of the fourth Gospel that bears his name, the convent is also dedicated to the memory of St. Arsenios the Cappadocian (1840-1924), the spiritual father of St. Paisios of Mt. Athos. St. Arsenios was the priest and spiritual father of the town of Farasa and the surrounding villages in Cappadocia, in what is today eastern Turkey. He was known



as a healer of the sick who were brought to him, both Christians and Muslims. St. Arsenios predicted the forced expulsion of Christians from Turkey and when the so-called population “exchange” between Greece and Turkey occurred in 1923 as a result of the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne, making more than a million Greek Orthodox Christians refugees virtually overnight, the elderly saint led his flock on a 400 mile journey across Turkey on foot, finally reaching the island of Kerkyra/Corfu, where St. Arsenios died on November 10, 1924 at the age of 83. St. Arsenios was the spiritual father of the family of St. Paisios, whose father was the mayor of Farasa and had baptized St. Paisios as an

infant. St. Arsenios was canonized as a saint of the Church by the Ecumenical Patriarchate in 1986 and his memory is celebrated in the life of the Church on November 10th.

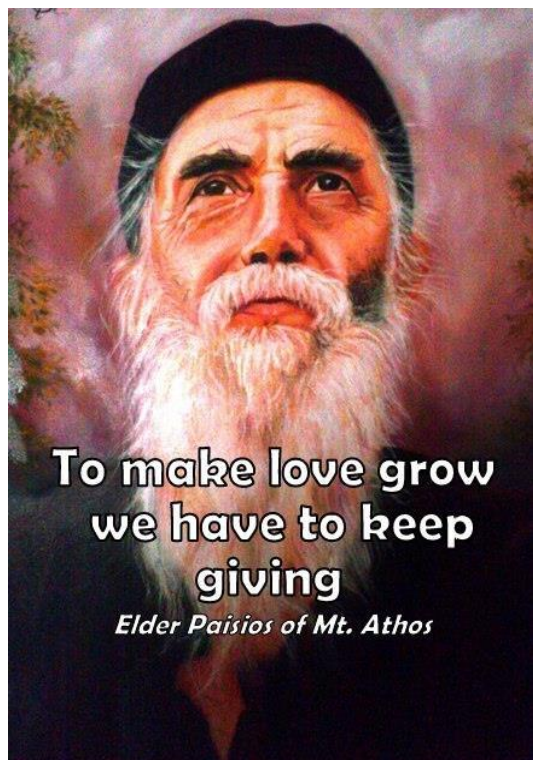
While there we will have the opportunity to see the grave of St. Paisios of Mt. Athos (1924-1994), whose dying wish was to be buried near the Church that



houses the relics of St. Arsenios at the convent. Arsenios Eznepidis, the future St. Paisios, was born in Farasa, Cappadocia on July 25, 1924 – shortly before the population exchange between Greece and Turkey. His family ultimately settled in Epirus (northwestern Greece), where Arsenios grew up and after attending intermediate public school learned carpentry. During the Greek Civil War (1946-1949), one of the

first conflicts against Communism during the Cold War, St. Paisios served as a radio operator. In 1950, having completed his military service, he went to Mt. Athos and there became a monk. Leaving Mt. Athos, from 1962-1964, he was a monk of the monastery of St. Catherine near Mt. Sinai in Egypt. Upon his return to Greece, it was in 1966 that his relationship as the spiritual father of the nuns at the convent in Souroti began. In 1979, he moved to the hermitage of Panagouda on Mt. Athos and it was while he lived there that his fame began to grow as a spiritual counselor and healer known for his ascetic life, practical wisdom and gentle manner. In 1993, St. Paisios left Mt. Athos for medical treatment in Thessaloniki, where he was diagnosed with cancer. After undergoing surgery, he spent some time recovering in the hospital and was then transferred to the convent at Souroti, where he died on July 12, 1994. St. Paisios was canonized as a saint of the Church by the Ecumenical Patriarchate in 2015 and his memory is celebrated in the life of the Church on July 12th.

Some of the sayings of St. Paisios of Mt. Athos



What I see around the world would drive me insane if I did not know that no matter what happens God will have the last word."

"The spiritual life requires a great deal of self-denial and love of virtue for virtue's sake."

"Whether we pray for ourselves or for others, the prayer must be from the heart. You have to prepare for prayer. Read a bit of the Scriptures or the Fathers and then pray."

"A Christian must not be a fanatic. He must love all people."

"The Church sees everything with tolerance and seeks to help each person, whatever he may have

done, however sinful he may be. The way of the Church is love; it differs from the way of the legalists."

"When your children are still small you have to help them understand what is good. That is the deepest meaning of life."

"The holy life of parents instructs their children."

"Live in constant praise and thanksgiving towards God, for the greatest sin is ingratitude and the worst sinner is the ungrateful person."

"Inner love is evident to people because it sweetens people externally and beautifies them with divine grace, which cannot be concealed because of its radiance."

"If you want to help the Church, it is better to try and correct yourself, rather than looking to correct others. If you manage to correct yourself, one small part of the Church is immediately corrected. Naturally, if everyone did the same, the Body of the Church would be in good health. But today, people concern themselves with anything but themselves. You see, judging others is easy, whereas working on yourself takes effort."

The last church we visited on the first day of our pilgrimage, only a few blocks



from our hotel, was *The Metropolitan Cathedral of St. Gregory Palamas* which was built between 1891 and 1914, replacing an earlier 13th century church. The current church was designed by Ernst Ziller (1837-1923), a German architect who was responsible for the

design of more than 500 royal and municipal buildings, churches, theatres, museums and hotels in Athens, Thessaloniki, Patras and other Greek cities. The Metropolitan Cathedral was the first domed church allowed to be built in Turkish-occupied Thessaloniki and houses the relics of St. Gregory Palamas (1292-1356), a monk of Mt. Athos and later the Archbishop of Thessaloniki. St. Gregory Palamas dedicated much of his life to theological argument, centered on one basic truth of the Christian faith: the one, true and living God is accessible to our personal experience because, in Christ, He shared His own divine life with humanity. Palamas was a prominent theologian and teacher of the Jesus Prayer – “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner” and the discipline of *hesychasm* or mystical stillness, the uninterrupted worship of the living God in the human mind and heart. For Palamas – and for all of the saints – true knowledge of God is the fruit not merely of an intellectual quest, but involves the purification of mind and heart (*Matthew 5:8*) and is the fruit of a deep and abiding love for God and others (*Matthew 12:30-31*) as the Lord Jesus commanded. Knowledge of God is the personal experience of participation in His life. Our *theosis* is in no sense merely symbolic or metaphorical: it is a pure gift of grace, a reality experienced even in this present life.

Canonized in 1368, less than a decade after his death, Orthodox Christians celebrate the memory of St. Gregory Palamas not only on the date of his death – November 14th – but also on the second Sunday of Great Lent each year for precisely his emphasis on the fact that we as human beings can truly know and experience God in Christ through the Holy Spirit and not merely know something “about” Him.

Excerpts from the writings of St. Gregory Palamas:



“Since God is Spirit, He is incorporeal. As incorporeal, God is nowhere; yet as God He is everywhere. God both sustains and embraces everything. He is both everywhere and beyond everything.”

“The life of the soul is union with God. Let us strive, therefore, to lay hold of this blessedness.”

“Let us acquire the fruits of repentance: a humble disposition, a gentle and merciful heart that loves righteousness and pursues purity, glad to endure persecution, slander and suffering for the sake of truth and righteousness.”

“It is pointless for someone to say that he has faith in God if he doesn’t have the works that go with faith. What benefit were their lamps to the foolish virgins who had no oil (Matthew 25:1-13) – namely, deeds of love and compassion?”

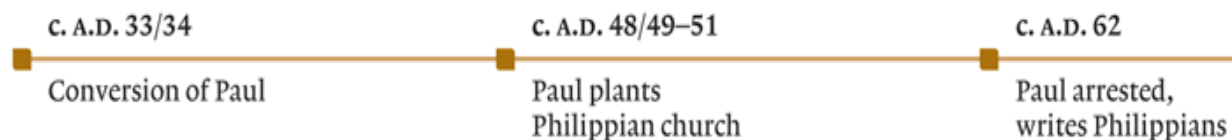
“Where can we learn anything certain and true about God, about the world as a whole and about ourselves? Is it not from the teaching of the Holy Spirit? God sustains and embraces everything. He is, in Himself, both everywhere and beyond everything, and is worshipped by His true worshippers who experience the tender and sacred solace of the Comforter’s blessing in His Spirit and in His Truth. For when the saints contemplate the divine light within themselves, seeing it by the divinizing light of the Spirit, their minds are filled by the grace of the Word and the fire of love for God burns in them.”

“We are not without hope for our salvation; nor is it right for us to despair. All of our life is a time for repentance for God “does not desire the death of a sinner, but that the wicked turn from his way and live” (Ezekiel 33:11). For where there is hope of repentance, there is no room for despair.”

“Hypocrisy is born of self-conceit and self-conceit is contrary to being poor in spirit.”

Friday, April 27th – Day 4

After breakfast, we drove about two hours to visit *the ancient city of Philippi*, named after the father of Alexander the Great, King Philip II of Macedon, where St. Paul preached the Gospel – on his second missionary journey around the Mediterranean world, but his first mission on the continent of Europe – and where Lydia and her household converted to Christianity. *The river where Lydia was baptized still exists and runs through a plain about a mile north of the archaeological site.* Lydia, a “seller of purple cloth,” was from Thyatira in Asia Minor (modern Turkey), one of the seven cities mentioned in the Book of Revelation (2:18-28). She was the first Christian of Europe and the house church she presided over with her family and servants was the first Christian Church on European soil. Given the title “equal to the Apostles” her memory is celebrated in the life of the Church on May 20th. *St. Paul also wrote a Letter to the Philippians towards the end of his life, while he was in prison in Rome.*



Reading the Scriptures: St. Paul in Philippi (Acts of the Apostles 16:11-40)

Setting sail therefore from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is the leading city of the district of Macedonia, and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days; and on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. One



who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to give heed to what was said by Paul.

And when she was baptized with her household, she begged us saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us. As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by soothsaying. She followed Paul and us, crying, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation." And this she did for many days. But Paul was annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit, "I charge you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour. But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place before the rulers; and when they had brought them to the magistrates they said, "These men are Jews and they are disturbing our city. They advocate customs which it is not lawful for us Romans to



accept or practice." The crowd joined in attacking them; and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, charging the jailer to keep them safely. Having received this charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, and suddenly there was a great

earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and every one's fetters were unfastened.

When the jailer woke up and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out and said, "Men, what must I do to be saved?" And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their wounds, and he was baptized at once, with all his family. Then he brought them up into his house, and set food before them; and he rejoiced with all of his household that he had believed in God.



But when it was day, the magistrates sent the police, saying, "Let those men go." And the jailer reported the words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have sent to let you go;

now therefore come out and go in peace.” But Paul said to them, “They have beaten us publicly, men who have not been condemned and are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and do they now cast us out secretly? No! Let them come themselves and take us out.” The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens; so they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city. So they went out of the prison, and visited Lydia; and when they had seen the brethren, they exhorted them and departed.

Also a UNESCO World Heritage site, we explored the archeological ruins of Philippi: excavations by the French School of Archaeology in Athens began in 1914 and were continued after WWII by the Greek Archaeological Service and the Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki.

In 42BC, Philippi was the site of a battle that determined much of subsequent Roman history: Brutus and Cassius, who advocated a Republican form of government and who had previously taken part in the assassination of Julius Caesar, fought and lost their battle with Marc Anthony (famous for being the lover of Cleopatra) and Octavian (famous for becoming the first Roman emperor and thus ending the Roman Republic), who advocated an imperial form of government for the Roman Empire. In 31BC, Philippi became a Roman colony (*Acts 16:12*) and military town, an honor that extended the important privileges of Roman citizenship to its inhabitants.

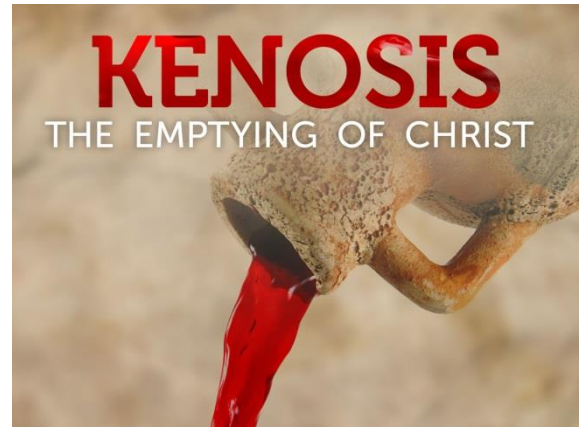


St. Paul's *Letter to the Philippians* was written while he was in prison in Rome, in gratitude for the continued support that the Church in Philippi had given him over the years, knowing that the end of his life would come soon. It is a very personal and intimate

letter, written to a community he clearly loved and whom he felt had been his faithful partners in the Gospel “from the first day until now” (*Philippians 1:5*). He praises the Philippian Church as a model Christian community and calls them “his joy and crown” (*Philippians 4:1*). In fact, *Philippians* has been called “the letter of joy” – the word “joy” in its various forms occurs 16 times. Of special

significance in this letter, besides the mention of “bishops and deacons” (*Philippians 1:1*) indicating the developing structure of the Church in a soon to be post-apostolic era, is St. Paul’s passage about the humble, self-emptying love of Christ (*kenosis*) that is read as the epistle reading for the Church’s liturgical celebrations of the Birth (September 8th) and the Falling Asleep of the *Theotokos* (August 15th):

“In your relationships with one another, have the same mind as Christ Jesus Who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God as something to be grasped, but rather emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant and being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by being obedient unto death – even death on a cross. Therefore God gave Him the Name that is above every other name, that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven, on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.”
Philippians 2:5-11



The Letter to the Philippians is also part of the daily Scripture readings in the yearly lectionary of the Church and is usually read over a week in October.

A faith to be practiced: some verses from St. Paul’s Letter to the Philippians

Live your life in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ. Philippians 1:27

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit. Philippians 2:3

In humility, regard others as better than yourselves. Philippians 2:3

Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.
Philippians 2:4

Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say it: rejoice! Philippians 4:4

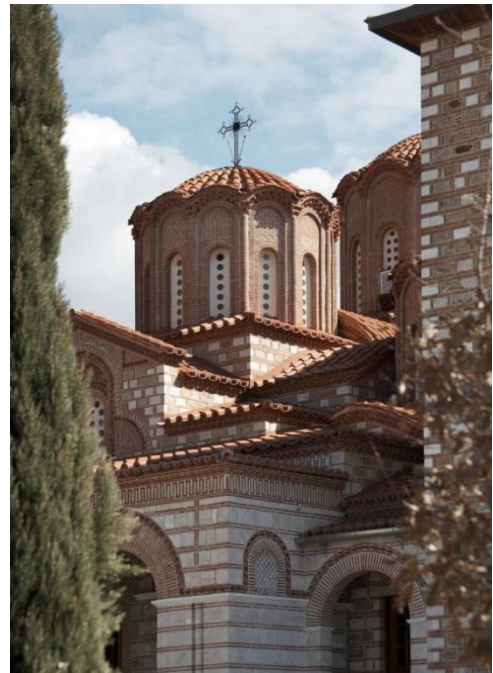
Let your gentleness be known to everyone. Philippians 4:5

Do not worry about anything, but in everything – by prayer and supplication with gratitude – make your requests known to God. And the peace of God, which is beyond all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:6-7

We had a wonderful lunch and from Philippi, we traveled to Kavala, the ancient port city of Neapolis (literally, “the New City”) where St. Paul first set foot on European soil, for a brief sightseeing tour – but the church we were going to visit was closed – and then returned to Thessaloniki to the hotel for dinner.

Saturday, April 28th – Day 5

After breakfast, we drove about an hour and a half to visit *the Convent /Monastery of the Annunciation at Ormylia*, the largest women’s monastery in Greece, with over 125 nuns, many from various countries around the world, a number of whom are doctors responsible for running a free hospital and medical center called the *Panayia Philanthropini Center* (The Virgin Mary Philanthropic Center) on the grounds of the monastery that specializes in breast cancer diagnosis. The Annunciation is a new type of “international convent” famous not only for the prayerful work of the nuns but also for their



engagement in modern projects that include medical, educational and scientific research as well as ecological projects such as the introduction of organic farming principles to their agricultural properties,

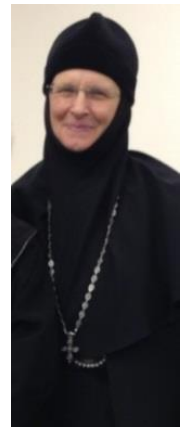
becoming models for farmers all over Greece. In 1991, the convent was granted what is called *stavropegial* status by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, placing

the convent directly under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The current abbess is Mother Nikodeme.



The convent is a dependency of the Monastery of Simonopetra on Mt. Athos and was established by Elder Aimilianos of Mt. Athos in 1974. Father Aimilianos Vafeides (1934 – present) is one of the great teachers and spiritual fathers of modern Greece, responsible for the revival of monasticism on Mt. Athos, beginning in the 1970's. His life and work has been to transmit the living experience of the Light of Christ, illuminating the mystery of the human encounter with God and his influence has stretched far beyond the borders of Mt. Athos. He retired in 2000 because of an increasingly debilitating illness and today resides at the Convent of the Annunciation where he is cared for by the nuns.

For those of you who know Mother Aemiliane (Hanson) from her past visits to St. Paul's, the abbess of the Monastery of St. Nina in Maryland, it is Father Aimilianos whom she says was the man who rescued her during one of the worst engineering disasters in American history, when on July 17, 1981 the 4th floor walkway of the Kansas City Hyatt Regency Hotel collapsed into the 2nd floor walkway and then crashed into the crowded lobby below. 114 people were killed that evening. Mother Aemiliane has written of that terrible moment: "I was crushed. My face was now between my knees; my legs were straight out in front of me on the floor and I was crushed into them, bent double. The pain was terrible. I became aware of breathing and all the breaths were heavy, gasping moans when I exhaled. I couldn't move. I knew that I was trapped and crushed."



But then, "I felt my right hand clasped firmly, as if in a firm handshake, but no movement and then I was out. I was just out. It was as if I simply popped out backwards but I experienced no movement or pain. And then I was lying on my back, face up, in someone's arms, and my body and legs were on the floor. He

was crouching, an older man crouching there, with his arm holding me up, repeating to me that I would be all right. And I couldn't remember afterwards any whole image of this person's face who was holding me." It was only much later, after months in recovery, when she happened to be presented with a photo of Elder Aimilianos that she realized it was he who had pulled her from the rubble.

An excerpt from the writings of Elder Aimilianos on marriage:

Nobody would dispute that the most important day in a person's life, after his birth and baptism, is that of his marriage. It is no surprise, then, that the aim of so many



contemporary worldly and institutional upheavals is precisely to crush this most honorable and sacred mystery of marriage. For many people, marriage is only an opportunity for pleasures and amusements. Life, however, is a serious affair. It is a spiritual struggle, a progression toward a goal: heaven. The most crucial juncture, and the most important means, of this progression is marriage. It is not permissible for anyone to avoid the bonds of marriage, whether he concludes a mystical marriage by devoting himself to God as a monk, or whether he concludes a sacramental one with a spouse.

What then is the purpose of marriage? Let us speak of three of its aims.

***First**, marriage is a path: the companionship of husband and wife is called a "yoking together" (syzygia), that is, the two of them labor under a shared burden. Marriage is a journeying together, a shared portion of pain, and, of course, a source of some of the greatest joys of life. But usually it's six chords of our life which sound a sorrowful note, and only one which is joyous. Husband and wife will drink from the same cup of life's upheaval, sadness, and tragedy. God said that "it is not good for the man to be alone" (Genesis 2:18), and so He placed a companion at his side, someone to help him*

throughout his life, especially in his struggles. When two people get married, it's as if they're saying: Together we will go forward, hand in hand, through good times and bad. We will have dark hours, hours of sorrow filled with burdens. But in the depths of the night, we continue to believe in the sun and the light. Oh, my dear friends, who can say that their lives have not been marked by difficult moments? But it is no small thing to know that, in your difficult moments, in your worries, in your temptations, you will be holding in your hand the hand of your beloved. The joy of marriage is for husband and wife to put their shoulders to the wheel and together go forward on the uphill road of life. Just as steel is fashioned in a furnace, just so is a person proved in marriage, in the fire of life's difficulties.

Second, marriage is a journey of love. It is the creation of a new human being, a new person, for, as the Gospel says, "the two will be as one flesh" (Matthew 19:5; Mark 10:7). God unites two people, and makes them one. From this union of two people, who agree to synchronize their footsteps and harmonize the beating of their hearts, a new human being emerges.



Third, marriage is a journey to heaven, a call from God, a vocation. It is, as Holy Scripture says, a "great mystery" (Ephesians 5:32). It is Christ who is at the heart of the mystery of marriage and at the center of their life together. In marriage, it seems that two people come together. However, in reality, it's not two but three. The man marries the woman, and the woman marries the man, but the two together also marry Christ. So three take part in the mystery, and three remain together in life. Christ has seized us, rescued us, redeemed us, and made us his. And this is the "great mystery" of marriage (cf. Galatians 3:13). In Latin, the word "mystery" was rendered by the word *sacramentum*, which means an oath, a pledge of loyalty unto death. And marriage is an oath, a pact, a joining together, a bond, as we have said. It is a permanent bond with Christ. "I am married", then, means that I enslave my heart to Christ. If you marry, this is the meaning that marriage has in the Orthodox Church. "I am married" means "I am the slave of Christ."

Sailing along the western shores of Mt. Athos

After leaving the Convent of the Annunciation we drove to the harbor at *Panagia* Bay and boarded our boat for a cruise along the west coast of Mt. Athos, the thousand year old male monastic republic, stopping briefly at Ouranopolis (literally, “the city of heaven”), a fishing village that is the doorway to Mt. Athos from mainland Greece. Known as the Holy Mountain among



Orthodox Christians, the mountain of Athos is, at 6,660 feet, the tallest point of Chalkidiki’s most easterly peninsula, which juts southward some 31 miles into the Aegean Sea, about 130 square miles of land. The ancient Greek writer Homer (8th century BC) mentions Athos the mountain in his epic poem, *The Iliad*. The ancient Greek historian Herodotus (C. 484-425BC) – often referred to as “the Father of History” – also mentions Mt. Athos. Today a UNESCO World Heritage



site, Mt. Athos is an autonomous monastic republic within the modern Greek state ruled by the more than 2000 monks from Greece and many other countries – Australia, Germany, Romania, Russia, Serbia, the United States, Bulgaria and Sweden, to name only a few – who currently live in its 20 monasteries and their

dependencies, all under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople (as are we at St. Paul’s in Irvine). Of the 20 monasteries on Mt. Athos today, the overwhelming majority (17) are Greek. The three remaining monasteries are: St. Panteleimon (Russian); Chilandar (Serbian) and Zographou (Bulgarian). In the past, it has been even more international, as it was monks

from Georgia who first established the monastery of Iveron in the 10th century; there were many Armenians resident at the monastery of Zoographou; and there



was even a Latin Benedictine monastery established in the 10th century by Italians. It is a truly unique place in all of Christianity.

Settled by Christian hermits seeking solitude as early as the 7th century AD, it is the Great Lavra founded by St. Athanasios the Athonite in 963AD that is the earliest and largest of the monastic communities of Athos.

The high walls and fortress-like appearance of many of the monasteries is a reminder of the troubled times of the 14th and 15th centuries when pirates often raided the monasteries.

Mt. Athos is a different world, a world where life is oriented towards Christ, prayer, spiritual development and mystical experience. For centuries Mt. Athos has been one of the great spiritual centers of the Orthodox Church and many of its monks have been canonized as saints. The ascetic life of the monks of Mt. Athos stands as a reminder, in a culture like ours dominated by media driven selfish consumerism, that human beings are far more than what we have.

It is a common misconception that monks (and nuns) do nothing but pray all day. While that is their primary concern, and Church services can often take up to six hours, the fact remains that most monks spend a great deal of time each day working on tasks assigned to them by their abbot. These tasks can include

everything from cleaning the guest houses for visitors, working in the gardens, making wine, painting icons, writing books, working in the kitchen, and doing construction work to maintain and renovate the monastery. Many of the younger monks on Mt. Athos today possess a university education and advanced skills in technology, enabling them to work on the cataloging and restoration of the Holy Mountain's vast treasury of ancient manuscripts, icons, liturgical objects and other works of art, a project partially funded by UNESCO, the European Union and a host of universities that will take decades to complete. As we sailed along the western shores of Mt. Athos from Ouranopolis, we saw, in order, the Monasteries of Dochariou, founded in the 10th century; Xenophontos, also established in the 10th century; St. Panteleimon, the Russian monastery founded in the 11th century; Simonopetra, founded in the 13th century; Gregoriou, founded in the 14th century; and Dionysiou, also established in the 14th century.

Sunday, April 29th – Day 6

This morning we attended Liturgy at *the Church of the Icon of the Virgin Theotokos made-without-hands (Acheiropoietos)* which was built in the middle of the 5th century (450-470AD) on top of a Roman bath complex and is one of the four oldest churches in all of Greece. Today a UNESCO World Heritage site, it is a three-aisled timber-roofed basilica with galleries and was originally called the Great Church of the Virgin *Theotokos Hodegitria* or Mother of God, "she who shows the way." The early Christian mosaics of the *Acheiropoietos*, like the church itself, are also probably to be dated to sometime between 450 to 500AD; the surviving frescoes or wall paintings are from the 13th century. A beautiful section of the original mosaic floor has been uncovered underneath the north aisle's current pavement. Like so many other churches in Thessaloniki,

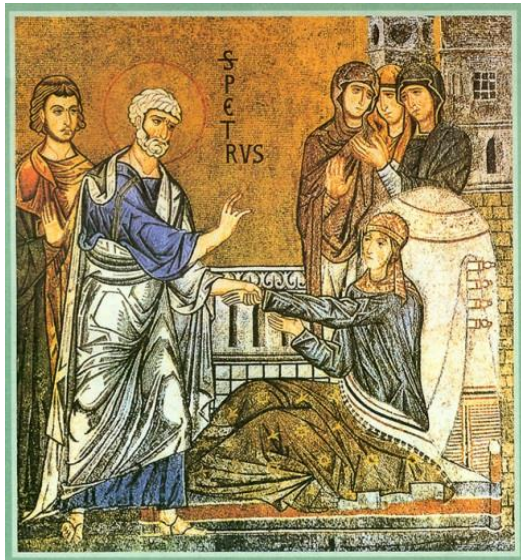


Acheiropoietos was turned into a mosque during the Ottoman occupation and ultimately became the city's principal mosque for much of the period. When the Sultan Murad II captured Thessaloniki, he had inscribed on a column in the north aisle of this church, "The Sultan Murad captured Thessaloniki in 1430" which can still be seen today. Unfortunately, the icon of the Virgin *Theotokos Hodegetria* "made-without-hands" has long since disappeared in the chaos of the Ottoman period.

This morning, the third Sunday after *Pascha*, we celebrate The Sunday of the healing of the Paralytic. The Scripture readings for today are taken from the *Acts of the Apostles* 9:32-42 and the *Gospel of John* 5:1-15 – the healing of Aeneas in Lydda and the raising of Tabitha from the dead in Joppa by the Apostle Peter; and the healing of a paralyzed man in Jerusalem by the Lord Jesus.

The Reading is from the Act of the Apostles 9:32-42

"As Peter traveled about the country, he went to visit the Lord's people who lived in Lydda. There he found a man named Aeneas, who was paralyzed and had been bedridden for eight years. "Aeneas," Peter said to him, "Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and roll up



your mat." Immediately Aeneas got up. All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.

In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas); she was always doing good and helping the poor. About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, "Please come at once!"

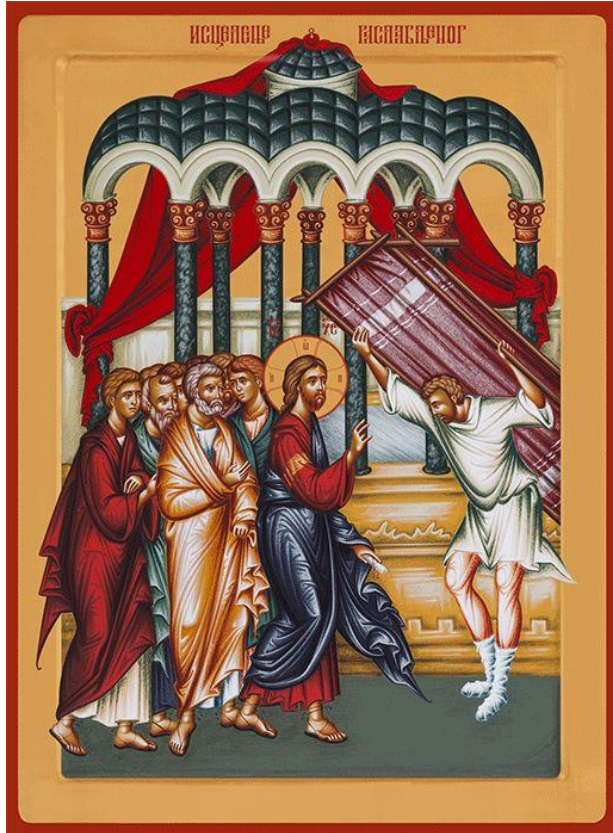
Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them.

Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter

she sat up. He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called for the believers, especially the widows, and presented her to them alive. This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord."

The Reading is from the Gospel of John 5:1-15

"At that time, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals. Now there is in



Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed and they waited for the moving of the waters. From time to time an angel of the Lord would come down and stir up the waters. The first one into the pool after the disturbing of the waters would be cured of whatever disease they had, One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to be healed?"

"Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me."

Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.

The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, and so the Jewish leaders said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat." But he replied, "The man who made me well said to me, 'Pick up your mat and walk.' "

So they asked him, "Who is this fellow who told you to pick up your mat and walk?"

The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there.

Later Jesus found him at the Temple and said to him, "See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you." The man went away and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had made him well."

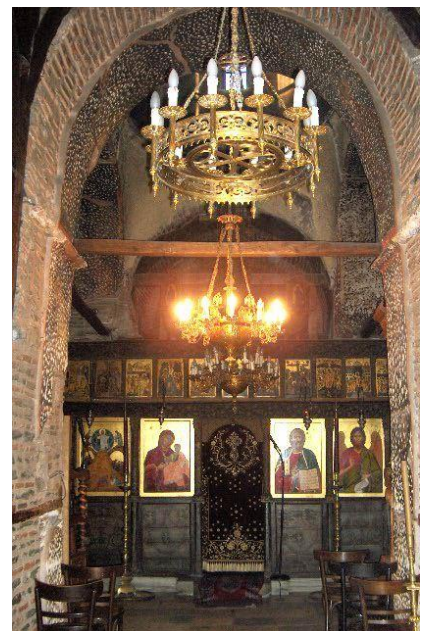
After Liturgy this morning at *Acheiropoietos*, we had lunch at a small restaurant in the Upper City and continued exploring the churches and museums of Thessaloniki, beginning with the Patriarchal Monastery of Vlatadon, where a baptism was just ending as we arrived.

The Monastery of Vlatadon, located in the *Ano Poli* (Upper City) or acropolis of Thessaloniki, was established in 1351 by two brothers, Dorotheos and Mark



Vlatis, who were priest-monks and disciples of St. Gregory Palamas. Dorotheos Vlatis would subsequently be one of the successors of St. Gregory Palamas as the Archbishop of Thessaloniki from 1371 until 1379. The

Monastery was originally dedicated to Christ the *Pantokrator* and Tradition places the grounds of the monastery as one of the sites – Jason’s house (*Acts 17:7*) – where the Apostle Paul stayed while preaching to the Thessalonians during his second missionary journey circa 51AD. The Church contains frescoes from the mid to late 14th century. Often caught between prosperity and decline over the past six centuries, the monastery has survived the Ottoman occupation of Thessaloniki, the Greek Revolution of 1821, the Balkan Wars that led to the incorporation of Thessaloniki into the Greek state in 1912, two world wars including occupation by the Nazis, earthquakes and fires. A UNESCO World Heritage site, today it houses the



Institute for Patristic Studies of the Ecumenical Patriarchate (established in 1965) and offers a beautiful view of the city and the Thermaic Gulf.

Continuing down the slopes of the Upper City we walked to *the tiny 5th century*



Church of St. David of Thessaloniki is another UNESCO World Heritage site high up in the acropolis of the city near Vlatadon, today surrounded by houses in a residential neighborhood. This

chapel, which was built over a Roman bath house, is all that remains of the 5th century monastery of Christ the Savior. The name “Latomou” often given today means “of the quarry” and is probably a reference to ancient stone quarries that once existed nearby. In the apse of this small church is a wonderful 6th century mosaic of the vision of God that Ezekiel had (*Ezekiel 1:10-11, 26-28*), with a beardless image of Christ in the center flanked by the Old Testament prophets Ezekiel and Habbakuk, and surrounded by an angel, an eagle, a lion and a calf,



the symbols of the four evangelists: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. For whatever reason, it was not destroyed but concealed by calf-skin and plaster during the Turkish occupation, when the building was used as a mosque. It was only rediscovered in 1921 when the

building was restored as a church and named for St. David of Thessaloniki. There are also some frescoes from the 12th century of the Birth (Christmas) and Baptism (Epiphany) of Christ. In the courtyard of this small chapel is a beautiful view of the city of Thessaloniki.

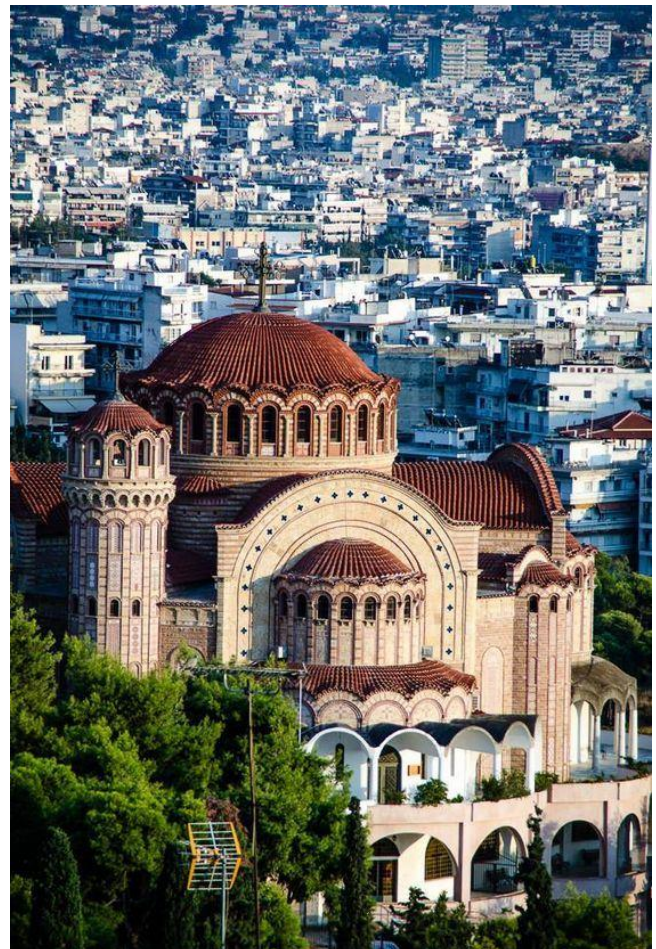
From there we took the bus and walked to the medieval *Church of St. Nicholas*



Orphanos in the Upper City was built sometime between 1310-1320AD and originally formed the central church of a small monastery. A UNESCO World Heritage site, this tiny church is most notable for its 14th century frescoes that cover almost the

entire surface of the interior and were uncovered during restoration work that took place from 1957-1960. During the Ottoman occupation of Thessaloniki, the tiny church remained open and was a dependency of the Monastery of Vlatadon. The name St. Nicholas Orphanos - St. Nicholas, the protector of orphans - is first attested in the 17th century.

We took the bus to the municipal district of the city actually named for St. Paul, where two churches are dedicated to the Apostle. According to ancient traditions it was in this area just east of the Monastery of Vlatadon that the ancient Jewish synagogue of Thessaloniki where St. Paul preached the Gospel (*Acts 17:1*) was once located. St. Paul stopped to drink from a spring located here and for many centuries this spring has been a place of pilgrimage for Christians. In 1875, while under Turkish occupation, the Men's Philoptochos Society of Thessaloniki was granted the



property and following the liberation of Thessaloniki, in 1922, a small church/chapel was built dedicated to St. Paul. That church still stands today. However, *the much larger church dedicated to St. Paul that we visited was built and consecrated in 1997 and today houses some of the relics of St. Paul also given to the Church in Thessaloniki by the Vatican – and which we were blessed to be able to venerate.*



Our final stop for the day was: *The Museum of Byzantine Culture* in Thessaloniki which opened in 1994 and currently has 11 permanent exhibitions ranging from “Early Christian Churches” focused on the design and decoration of Churches in the early centuries of Christianity (4th – 7th centuries) to “The Twilight of Byzantium”



focused on the years following



the fall of Constantinople first to the Crusaders in 1204 and finally the fall of the city to the Ottoman Turks in 1453 and “The Byzantine Legacy” (15th – 19th centuries) focused on icons, Gospel books, censers, reconstructed iconostases, processional crosses and vestments from the period of Venetian and Ottoman rule. The museum

has more than 1,000 icons on display, ranging from the 12th to the early 20th centuries and coming from such diverse places as Constantinople, Crete and the Ionian Islands. Also on display here are some 5th century mosaics from the Church of the Icon of the Virgin *Theotokos* made-without-hands (*Acheiropoietos*) where we had previously been for the celebration of the Liturgy earlier in the morning.

We also enjoyed a very late lunch – or early dinner – at the restaurant attached to the museum before returning to the hotel.

Monday, April 30th – Day 7

After breakfast, we drove to *the Museum of Aigai or Vergina*, one of the most famous archaeological sites in all of Greece and a UNESCO World Heritage site,



where in 1977 a team of archaeologists led by Professor Manolis Andronikos discovered the tomb of the father of Alexander the Great (356-323BC), King Philip II of Macedon (382-336BC), whose bones were found in a stunningly beautiful

gold funerary box – made of more than 17 pounds of pure hammered gold – emblazoned with the symbol of the Macedonian Sun. King Philip was from a long line of Macedonian kings that began about 640BC. He was assassinated in 336BC at the wedding of his daughter Cleopatra. One can still find the Macedonian Sun as a symbol adorning modern flags in this region of Greece. The name “Macedon” is from the Greek adjective “*makres*” meaning “long” and originally was a reference to the “tall ones” or “highlanders.” According to the ancient Greek historian Herodotus (*circa* 485-425BC), the Macedonians were of the same tribe as the Dorians, who originally lived in the Pindos mountain range of northern Greece.



From Vergina we drove to the largest town in this region of Greece with a population today of about 45,000 people: *Veroia (often translated as Berea in English versions of the Bible)*, first mentioned in the writings of the ancient Greek historian Thucydides in 432BC. Veroia surrendered to the Roman Empire

in 168BC. By 1430, the Ottomans occupied Veroia and, like nearby Thessaloniki, it did not become part of Greece until 1913, following the First Balkan War.

In New Testament times, the Apostle Paul preached the Gospel here after he was driven out of Thessaloniki by an angry



mob (*Acts 17:5-9*) and found fertile soil for the Gospel of Christ to take root. St. Onesimus, the former slave of St. Philemon to whom the Apostle Paul wrote his *Letter to Philemon*, was the first bishop of Veroia. There is an outdoor mosaic shrine – the *Bema* of the Apostle Paul – memorializing St. Paul’s visit to Veroia with a beautiful mosaic of St. Paul directly over four ancient marble steps from which it is believed he preached. In a town of only a little over 40,000 people there are today more than 40 churches. In fact, some locals call the town a “Little Jerusalem.”

Reading the Scriptures: St. Paul in Berea (*Acts of the Apostles 17: 10-15*)

As soon as night came, the believers sent Paul and Silas to Berea. When they arrived, they went to the synagogue. The people there were more open-minded than the people in Thessalonica. They listened to the message with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were true. Many of them believed; and many Greek women of high social standing and many Greek men also believed. But when the Jews in Thessalonica heard that Paul had preached the word of God in Berea also, they came there and started exciting and stirring up the mobs. At once the believers sent Paul away to the coast; but both Silas and Timothy stayed in Berea. The men who were taking Paul went with him as far as Athens and then returned to Berea with instructions from Paul that Silas and Timothy should join him as soon as possible.





While in Veroia we also visited *the Old Metropolis Cathedral*, an 11th century church that follows the basic design of St. Demetrios Cathedral in Thessaloniki and was once the cathedral of the bishop of Veroia. Built sometime between 1070 and 1080 by Niketas, the bishop of Veroia at that time, archaeologists believe the church was originally dedicated either to the Apostles Peter and Paul or to the *Theotokos* and ever-virgin Mary. When Veroia fell to the Ottomans in 1430 the cathedral was converted into a mosque; its 13th and early 14th century iconography was covered over with plaster and a minaret was added to the

building. Following the capture of Veroia by the Greek army in October, 1912 during the First Balkan War, the building was re-consecrated as a church; however, during the Nazi occupation of Greece the church was used as a stable and fell into disuse afterwards. From 2007 until 2013 the church underwent an extensive restoration funded by the EU and was again re-consecrated for use as a church in 2016 and dedicated to the Apostles Peter and Paul. Led by Metropolitan Panteleimon of Veroia, a bishop from our Archdiocese in the United States – Metropolitan Alexios of Atlanta – participated in the re-consecration services.



We also visited the tiny, early 14th century *Church of the Resurrection of Christ* which was once the central church of a monastery that was associated with the circle of St. Gregory Palamas (whose relics we venerated earlier in Thessaloniki) and the hesychast spirituality of Mt.



Athos focused on the use of the Jesus Prayer. Dedicated in 1315 as a *stavropegial* monastery, it was directly under the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and not the local bishop of Veroia. Much of the iconography in the church was



done by a 14th century iconographer named George Kallergis, but there are also frescoes on the outside of the building that date from 1727. Today, it is no longer used as a church but remains as an archeological site.

After visiting Veroia we began our two and a half hour drive south and west to the town of Kalambaka (population 24,000) and the nearby monasteries of Meteora.

We checked into our hotel www.grandmeteora.gr located just outside of town and had dinner, with beautiful views of the surrounding mountains.

Tuesday, May 1st – Day 8

After breakfast, we visited *the 700 year old monasteries of Meteora*, perched high atop some of the most unusual and striking rock formations in the world. How these monasteries could possibly have been built on top of these virtually inaccessible peaks is a subject of awe and fascination for pilgrims and visitors alike. Today, these smooth, vertical stalagmites of sandstone – some 60 million years old – have become a destination for rock climbers, who are, perhaps,



among the few who can truly appreciate the feat of the early 9th century hermits who first climbed these massive pinnacles to live in caves and fissures in the rocks. Some

may also remember that the monasteries of Meteora, particularly that of the Holy Trinity, which in 1981 served as the backdrop for the 12th “James Bond” film, starring Roger Moore, *For Your Eyes Only*. The Eyrie in the TV show *Game of Thrones* was inspired by Meteora, although the show was not allowed to film at Meteora.

The name “Meteora” literally means “suspended between heaven and earth” and, of course, evokes the English word “meteor.” Meteora is the name first given to these pillars of stone by St. Athanasios of Meteora (1302-1383), a monk from Mt. Athos who settled here with 14 other monks in 1340. The highest rock, crowned by the Monastery of the Great Meteora, rises over 1,300 feet above Kalambaka. For many centuries the monasteries perched on these rocky pinnacles were accessible only by a series of ropes and wooden ladders.

However, the ladders produced such intense vertigo that the monks began to use the large nets they had devised to haul up supplies for people as well. In the 1920's stairs were cut into the rock in order to make the monasteries more accessible. The Monastery of the Great Meteora was founded by St. Athanasios in 1382 with the financial assistance of the Serbian emperor ruling Thessaly at that time, Symeon Uros (c. 1326-1370). Its *katholicon* or main church is named for the Transfiguration of Christ.

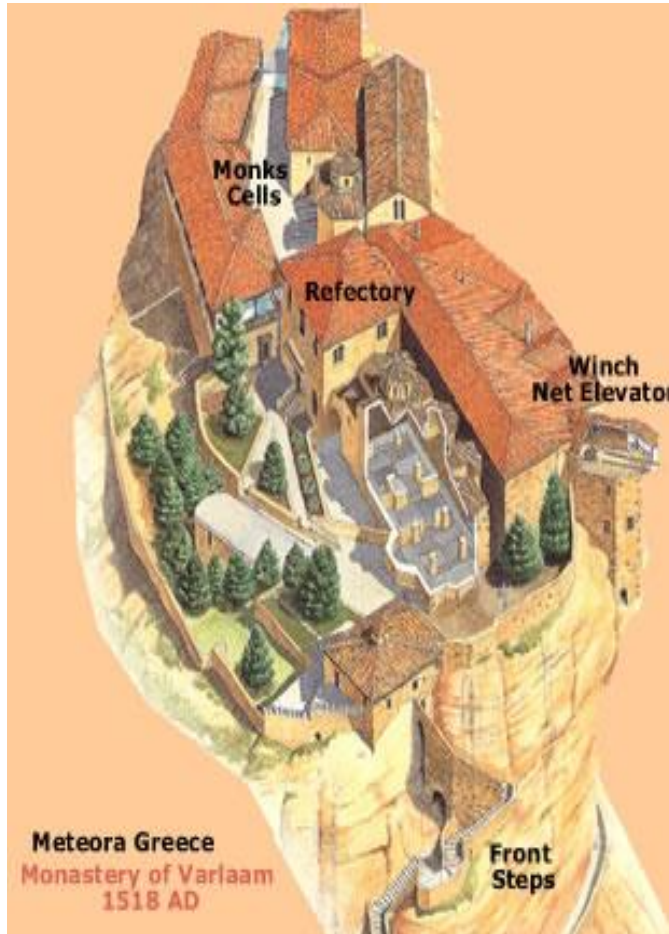
The 22 monasteries of Meteora (of which only six are active communities today; the remaining sixteen now lying pretty much in ruins) contain exquisite Byzantine iconography, some of it by the famous 16th century iconographer, Theophanes the Cretan (d.1559).



The Monastery of St. Stephen the First Martyr is one of two convents on Meteora today and the most easily accessible of all the monasteries. Originally built as a monastery for men, St. Stephen's has, for

centuries, been the caretaker of some of the relics of St. Haralambos, the martyred bishop of Magnesia in Asia Minor, who was tortured and then beheaded for his faith in Christ in 202AD during the reign of the Roman emperor, Septimus Severus (145-211). St. Haralmbos is said to have been more than a hundred years old at the time of his martyrdom. The memory of St. Haralambos is celebrated in the life of the Church on February 10th. During the Ottoman occupation of Greece the monasteries of Meteora generally did not fare well and were almost taxed out of existence when there was no outright persecution. In 1943, the Monastery of St. Stephen was shelled by the Nazis who occupied Greece at that time; German and Italian soldiers later occupied St.

Stephen's and looted it. Following WWII, St. Stephen's was occupied by the Communists during the bitter Greek Civil War (1946-1949) and then abandoned until 1961 when it was handed over to a group of nuns. Today it has about 40



nuns and a beautiful, unimpeded view of the plain towards Kalambaka. The abbess of the monastery is Agathi (Antoniou). The refectory of the monastery, built in 1587, has been transformed into a museum with a collection of illuminated manuscripts, post-Byzantine icons and elaborate wood carving and silver work. The other convent at Meteora, Rousanou, was built in the 16th century and renovated in the 1980's by the Greek Archeological Service. Originally a monastery for men it is now a convent dedicated to St. Barbara with 15 nuns. The abbess is Philothei (Kosvira).

Unfortunately, Rousano was closed for the May 1st holiday and we were unable to visit. But the people of the towns of Trikala, Kastraki and Kalambaka still reverence Rousano as a place where refuge was freely given during the Turkish persecutions of 1757 and the Greco-Turkish War of 1897.

The second of the monasteries we visited was the 14th century Monastery of Varlaam that bears the name of its founder, a contemporary of St. Athanasius of Meteora. However, it wasn't until 1517 that two priest-monks who were also brothers – Theophanes and Nektarios Apsaredes from the city of Ioannina – ascended the rock and re-established the monastery which had been abandoned following the death of Varlaam. Using ropes, pulleys and baskets, it took 22 years for the two brothers and their work crews to hoist all of the building

materials to the top of the rock. The main church of the monastery is dedicated to the celebration of All Saints – a festival of holiness dedicated to the witness of all the saints in the history of the Church – that is celebrated on the Sunday after Pentecost each year.



We also visited the thousand year old *Church of the Falling Asleep of the Theotokos in Kalambaka*, older by half a millennium than the monasteries of Meteora. Another uphill hike, the frescoes in this Church date from the 12th through the 16th centuries and its current wooden iconostasis was carved in the 17th century. The large and very tall marble *ambon* or pulpit placed in the middle of the Church is the only surviving example of this from ancient times in a Church that is still used for worship.



Wednesday, May 2nd – Day 9

Today after breakfast we continued our trek across Greece, driving from Kalambaka to the port of Igoumenitsa (a three and a half hour drive) where we boarded a ferry for an hour and a half ferry ride that took us to the island of Corfu. That evening we checked into our hotel www.corfupalace.com after a long day's journey and had dinner, spending the night on Corfu.



Corfu (or Kerkyra) is the second largest of the Ionian Islands off the west coast of mainland Greece. The principal city of the island is also called Corfu and its Old Town is a UNESCO World Heritage site. The island is bound up with the history of Greece both in classical mythology and from ancient times: according to the ancient Greek historian Thucydides, Kerkyra was one of the three great Greek city naval powers of the 5th century BC, together with Athens and Corinth. Medieval castles on the island are a legacy of the struggles against pirates and invasions by the Ottomans. From medieval times

until the 17th century the island was considered a bulwark against Ottoman invasion by various European states and became one of the most fortified places in Europe. Ruled by the Venetians from 1401 to 1797, when the island was occupied by the French, Corfu eventually came under British rule following the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815). Corfu was ceded by the British Empire to the Greek state in 1864 with the signing of the Treaty of London. Corfu is one of the few parts of Greece that never fell to the Ottoman Turks.



After disembarking from our ferry, the “Elene,” we visited the Church of our Lady of Antivounitissa which today serves primarily as a museum – although it is still used as a church twice a year on December 26th and August 23rd, both days dedicated

to the *Theotokos*. Originally built as a private chapel, in 1979 the owners – the Mylonopoulos, Rizikaris and Skarpa families – donated the building together with its icons and heirlooms to Corfu on the condition that it also function as a museum. After some restoration the museum/church was inaugurated in 1984 by the actress Melina Mercouri (1920-1994) who was, at that time, the Greek Minister of Culture. One can see the Venetian (Renaissance and Baroque) influence in the architecture and interior design of the church as well as Roman Catholic influence in some of its iconography: for example, among the icons on display for the exhibit were icons of the Falling Asleep of the *Theotokos* that included her bodily ascension into heaven – today a dogma of the Roman Catholic Church.



On our way to and from the Antivounitissa Museum, we passed the home of Dionysios Solomos (1798-1857), the poet who wrote the Greek national anthem. His poem, the *Hymn to Liberty*, which was completed in 1823 and inspired by the Greek Revolution of 1821 – the first two stanzas of which were set to music by the Italian-Greek composer Nicholas Mantzaros (1795-1872), a native of Corfu – became the Greek national anthem in 1865. Since 1966, it has also become the

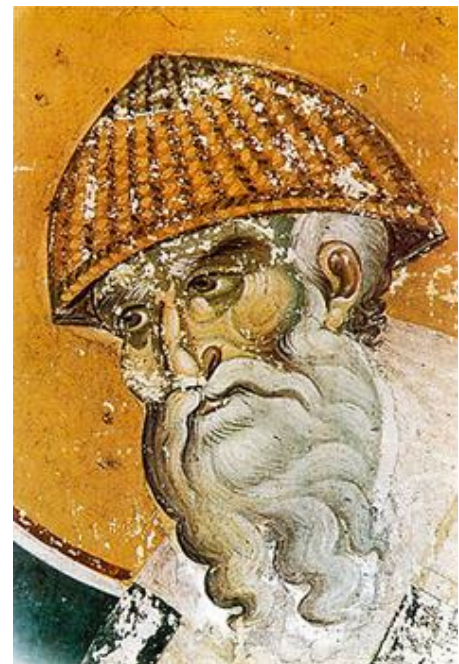


national anthem of Cyprus. Because it was originally written as an epic poem that recounts the misery of the Greek people during the centuries of Ottoman oppression, as well as different events like the execution of the sainted Patriarch Gregory V of Constantinople (whose relics we had the opportunity to venerate in Athens at the Cathedral), the siege of Tripoli and the Christian nature of the Greek struggle

for freedom from their Turkish Muslim overlords, it is the longest national anthem in the world with 158 verses. Solomos is often, even today, referred to as Greece's "national poet" for his important legacy to Greek national identity. Although Solomos lived on Corfu for many years and died in the house we saw, he was originally from the nearby island of Zakynthos and is buried there.

The island of Corfu is home to the relics of *St. Spyridon (c. 270-348AD)* who was the bishop of Tremythous (today called Tremetousia) on the island of Cyprus.

One of the most popular saints in the Greek Orthodox Church (the Greek Orthodox Church in San Diego bears his name), he was a peasant farmer and a shepherd known for the depth of his faith as well as his humility, modesty, gentleness and love for others. A married man with one daughter, whose name was Irene, Spyridon became a monk following the death of his wife. Eventually becoming a bishop, St. Spyridon continued to go about with a shepherd's crook and wear a simple peasant's hat made of willow twigs that, in icons, often serves to differentiate his figure from that of other bishops wearing more



formal attire. He attended the 1st Ecumenical Council that was held in Nicea (modern Turkey) in 325AD and took part in formulating the first part of what we today often call, somewhat incorrectly, the Nicene Creed. The many miracles of

healing attributed to him both during his lifetime and following his death have earned him the epithet, “the Miracle-worker.”

Originally buried on the island of Cyprus, his relics were brought to Constantinople in the 7th century because of Arab incursions. This led to the spread of his story throughout the entire East Roman (Byzantine) world. After the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks in 1453, St. Spyridon’s relics were brought to the island of Corfu in 1489 by George Kalochairetis, a priest from a wealthy family. When Kalochairetis’ daughter Asimia was married into the prominent Voulgaris family of Corfu, she brought the relics with her as part of her dowry. Until 1577 the relics of St. Spyridon were housed in a church



owned privately by the Voulgaris family. When this small church was demolished in the building of new fortifications for Corfu Town, his relics became the property of the Church and were transferred to their present site, in the

Church of St. Spyridon, which was begun in 1589 and completed in 1596. The church is typical of Venetian architecture and its bell tower is the tallest structure in town. The people of Corfu speak of St. Spyridon as the “protector” of their island and tell stories of his protection of Corfu from plague, famine and Ottoman domination. There are four processions with the relics of St. Spyridon that take place on Corfu each year: Palm Sunday, commemorating the deliverance of the island from a plague in 1630; Easter Saturday, commemorating the relief of the island from famine; August 11th, commemorating the deliverance of the island from the Turkish siege of 1716; and the first Sunday of

November, commemorating deliverance from famine in 1673. We were blessed



to be able to venerate the open relics of St. Spyridon.

Ending our day, we also visited *the Metropolitan Cathedral of Kerkyra* dedicated to the Falling Asleep of the *Theotokos* and ever-virgin Mary celebrated on August 15th; St. Vlasios, the martyred bishop of Sevastea in Armenia; and St. Theodora the Empress (c.815-867) who ended the Iconoclast Controversy once and for all in 843AD. The memories of these last two saints are both celebrated on February 11th. Outside the Cathedral there is a bust of Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras (1886-1972) who was the

Metropolitan of Corfu (1922-1930) before becoming Archbishop of America (1931-1948) and then Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople (1948-1972).

The Empress Theodora was of Armenian background and was brought to a bride-show in Constantinople given for the young emperor Theophilos, who was only 16 years-old when he ascended the throne in 829AD. This was the same bride-show that St. Kassiane the Hymnwriter (c.805-865) also took part in. Ultimately, the young Theophilos, who ruled the eastern Roman Empire from 829 until his death in 842, chose Theodora to be his bride. Constantly at war with Muslim Arabs, Theophilos was the last of the Byzantine emperors to enforce iconoclasm (“the smashing of icons”) and issued an edict in 832 forbidding them altogether. Although her husband was an iconoclast, Theodora was not and in her private quarters continued using icons in her devotions. One story still told is that a servant saw Theodora with her icons and told her husband. When Theophilos confronted her, she told him that she had merely been “playing with

dolls.” Two of her icons are kept at the Monastery of Vatopedi on Mt. Athos to this day and are referred to as “St. Theodora’s Dolls.” They are brought out each year on the Sunday of Orthodoxy (the first Sunday of Great Lent) for veneration.

Following the death of her husband in January, 842 Theodora served as the regent for her son Michael who was only three years old at the time. Theodora



effectively ruled the Empire for the next 13 years and one of her first actions was to reverse the iconoclast policy of her late husband. With St. Methodius, the Patriarch of Constantinople (who had spent seven years in prison under Theophilos for his defense of the use of icons), she convened a council in 843 that confirmed the teaching of the 7th Ecumenical Council (that had been held in 787AD) on the use and proper veneration of icons. Part of the official restoration of icons involved the Empress

Theodora and Patriarch Methodius in a long procession of icons from the Church of the Virgin *Theotokos* in Blachernae to the great Cathedral of *Hagia Sophia* in Constantinople on March 11, 843 – a procession that we still imitate liturgically on the Sunday of Orthodoxy each year. St. Theodora and her son Michael are depicted in this 14th century icon (*above*) of that procession which is today kept in the British Museum in London. The Empress Theodora’s relics are carried in procession around Corfu each year on the Sunday of Orthodoxy.

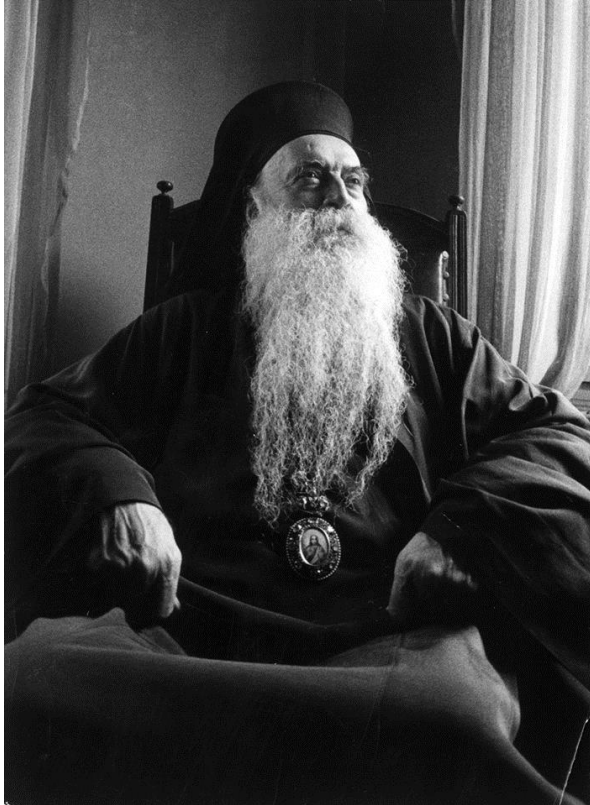


Who was Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras? Patriarch Athenagoras was born in Epirus, northwestern Greece, in 1886 – which at that time still a part of the Ottoman Empire. The son of the village doctor, his mother died when he was only 13. In 1903, he entered the Halki Theological School near Istanbul (which we visited while on pilgrimage in Turkey in 2013). In 1910, he graduated with his degree in theology, was tonsured as a monk and ordained a deacon. In December, 1922, while still a deacon to the Archbishop of Athens, he was elected the Metropolitan of the island of

Corfu. In 1930, he was elected the Greek Orthodox Archbishop of North and South America by the Ecumenical Patriarchate and served as our Archbishop until 1948, becoming an American citizen. During his 18-year tenure, he established the women's *Philoptochos*, the philanthropic arm of the Church; he established an orphanage, St. Basil's Academy; the seminary, Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology; and began publishing *The Orthodox Observer*. Elected the 268th Patriarch of Constantinople in 1948, Athenagoras was active in the ecumenical movement, seeking to establish better relationships among Christians. His meeting with Pope Paul VI in Jerusalem in 1964 – the first meeting between a Pope and an Ecumenical Patriarch in almost 500 years – resulted in the mutual lifting of the anathemas that had separated Orthodox and Roman Catholic Christians since 1054AD. This symbolic gesture opened the possibility of authentic dialogue between the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches for the first time in centuries. Patriarch Athenagoras died in 1972.

The excerpt below is taken from a book, *Conversations with Patriarch Athenagoras* written by the French Orthodox theologian and writer, Olivier Clement in 1969:

"I do not deny that there are differences between the Churches, but I say that we must change our way of approaching them. And the question of method is in the first place a psychological, or rather a spiritual problem. For centuries there have been conversations between theologians, and they have done nothing except to harden their positions. I have a whole library about it. And why? Because they spoke in fear and distrust of one another, with the desire to defend themselves and to defeat the others. Theology was no



longer a pure celebration of the mystery of God. It became a weapon. God himself became a weapon! I repeat: I do not ignore these difficulties. But I am trying to change the spiritual atmosphere. The restoration of mutual love will enable us to see the questions in a totally different light. We must express the truth which is dear to us – because it protects and celebrates the immensity of the life which is in Christ – we must express it, not so as to repulse the other, so as to force him to admit that he is beaten, but so as to share it with him; and also for its own sake, for its beauty, as a celebration of truth to which we invite our brothers. At the same time we must be ready to listen. For Christians, truth is not opposed to life or love; it expresses their

fullness. First of all, we must free these words, these words which tend to collide, from the evil past, from all political, national and cultural hatreds which have nothing to do with Christ. Then we must root them in the deep life of the Church, in the experience of the Resurrection which it is their mission to serve. We must always weigh our words in the balance of life and death and Resurrection.

Orthodoxy, if it goes back to the sources of its great tradition, will be the humble and faithful witness to the undivided Church. The Orthodox Churches, in coming together themselves in mutual respect and love, will set a movement of brotherhood going throughout the Christian world, giving the example of a free communion of sister Churches, united by the same sacraments and the same faith. As to the Orthodox faith, centered as it is on liturgical praise and worship, and on holiness, it will bring the criterion of spiritual experience to ecumenical dialogue, a criterion which will allow us to disentangle partial truths from their limitations so that they may be reconciled in a higher plenitude of truth.

But we Orthodox: are we worthy of Orthodoxy? Up till the efforts we have made in recent years, what kind of example have our Churches given? We are united in faith and united in the chalice, but we have become strangers to one another, sometimes rivals. And our great tradition, the Fathers, Palamas, the Philokalia: is it living and creative in

us? If we are satisfied to repeat our formulas, hardening them against our fellow Christians, then our inheritance will become something dead. It is sharing, humility, reconciliation which makes us truly Orthodox, holding the faith not for ourselves but for the union of all, as the selfless witnesses of the undivided Church."

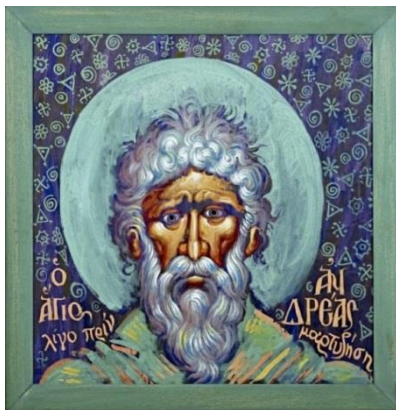
Thursday, May 3rd – Day 10

After breakfast at the hotel we continued our journey across Greece heading south, ultimately towards Athens. Taking the ferry back to Igoumenitsa (an hour and a half ferry ride) we drove to Patras (a three and a half hour drive) to venerate the relics of St. Andrew the Apostle.

The Cathedral of St. Andrew the Apostle in Patras is a place of pilgrimage for Christians from all over the world. Construction of the Cathedral began in 1908 and it wasn't completed until 66 years later, in 1974. It is the largest Church in Greece. It can hold over 5,000 people and is the third largest Orthodox Church in the Balkans, after the Cathedral of St. Sava in Belgrade, Serbia and the St. Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Sofia, Bulgaria.



Who was St. Andrew the Apostle? A Galilean fisherman from Bethsaida in Israel, Andrew was the first-called of the followers of Christ, to whom he brought his brother, Peter (*John 1:35-42*). Initially a disciple of John the Baptist, Andrew began to follow the Lord Jesus after John pointed Him out in a crowd by the Jordan River and said: "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." Always named among the first four in the lists of the Twelve Apostles in the Gospels, it was Andrew, the



Gospel of John tells us, who brought the first Greeks to see Jesus in Jerusalem (*John 12:20-22*) shortly before His crucifixion and resurrection. Like the other Apostles, Andrew suffered persecution and imprisonment during his ministry of preaching and teaching the Gospel. The founder of the Church in Constantinople, he was executed for being a Christian in Patras, Greece in 60 AD by being crucified on an X-shaped cross. To prolong his suffering, the Roman governor Aegeates ordered that he was to be bound, not nailed to the cross. It took him two days to die. His relics were taken to Constantinople and enshrined there in 357 AD, but were removed and taken to Italy during the Latin conquest of the city by the Crusaders in 1204 AD. The relics of St. Andrew the Apostle were returned to Patras from St. Peter's Basilica by the



Roman Catholic Church in 1964 as an ecumenical



gesture of good will by Pope Paul VI; and in 1980, pieces of the cross on which St. Andrew was crucified were also returned to Patras by the Roman Catholic Church. St. Andrew is the patron saint of a number of countries: Romania, Russia, Scotland and the Ukraine. The memory of St. Andrew the Apostle is celebrated in the life of the Church on November 30th.

We also visited the old cathedral of St. Andrew – next door to the new one – that was built over a 5th century church that was destroyed several times, most recently in 1770 during the Turkish occupation. Construction began on the current old

cathedral in 1836 and it was completed in 1843. We also visited a nearby spring of holy water associated with the site of St. Andrew's martyrdom.

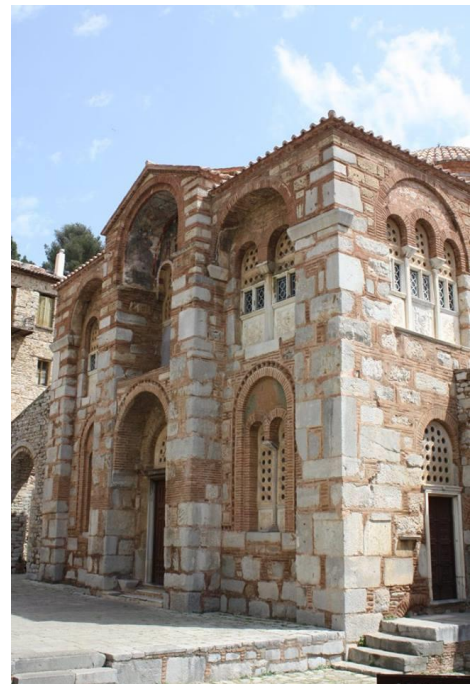
From Patras we drove to our hotel in Nafpaktos www.nafshotel.com (a 30-minute drive from Patras), had dinner and spent the night.

Friday, May 4th – Day 11

Today we continued our drive across Greece and visited the Monastery of *Osios Loukas* or St. Luke of Steiris (circa 897-953AD). A monk known during his lifetime as a healer and a prophet, there are two characteristics of this saint that are repeated over and over in accounts of his life: his strict personal asceticism and his benevolence and generosity towards others. Following his death, miracles of healing continued to occur that were associated with his relics and the monastery he founded became a pilgrimage destination. This monastery is the largest and best preserved of Greece's



examples of Byzantine monastic architecture and is famous for its magnificent thousand



year old Byzantine mosaics. It is a UNESCO World Heritage site. In its present form the monastery complex consists of two churches – one dedicated to the *Theotokos* and ever-Virgin Mary built around 950AD and the other, built around 1022AD and dedicated to the monastery's founder, St. Luke – flanked by monastic cells and ancillary buildings and

protected by an enclosure wall with towers at the corners. This latter church dedicated to the monastery's founder was built by the Emperor Romanos II (938-

963AD) in honor of St. Luke's prophecy in 941AD that the island of Crete would be freed from Arab Muslim rule by an emperor named Romanos. During the Ottoman occupation of Greece, *Osios Loukas* witnessed a great deal of fighting as the cannons in the courtyard testify. Today, the monastery is home to only five monks but the relics of St. Luke of Steiris, which had been taken in 1204 when the area was occupied by Frankish invaders connected to the Fourth Crusade, were returned by the Vatican to the monastery in 1986. St. Luke's memory is celebrated in our Church on February 7th; and the return of his relics from the Vatican to Greece is celebrated on May 3rd.

Athens

We arrived in Athens after a two and a half hour drive from *Osios Loukas*, unloaded our bags, checked into our hotel <http://www.royalolympic.com> and had dinner with an amazing view of the Acropolis and the Temple of the Olympian Zeus from our hotel.

Athens has been a city for at least 3,500 years: it is the oldest city in Europe, and is known to every schoolchild as the birthplace of western



civilization. Athens is named for the ancient Greek goddess Athena, the daughter of Zeus and the protector of the city. Its greatest glory was during the 5th century BC when Pericles oversaw the building of the Acropolis. Within a scant 70 years, the city was presented with the literary masterpieces of Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and Aristophanes; the works of Hippocrates, the father of medicine; and the histories of Herodotus and Thucydides. The city was also home to three of the most influential philosophers in human history: Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. The Apostle Paul preached the Gospel on the Areopagus (the "hill of Ares" – the classical Greek god of war) circa 51AD, during his second missionary

journey around the Mediterranean. From the 4th through the 6th centuries AD, Athens maintained its place as the academic center of the Roman Empire centered in the Academy of Athens. Among the city's most famous Christian students were St. Basil the Great (329-379AD) and St. Gregory the Theologian (329-390AD) who laid the theological foundations for the 2nd Ecumenical Council in 381AD and the writing of the Creed – a short summary of the Christian faith – that is still a part of the Liturgy to this day. During the 15th through the 18th centuries, the period of Ottoman occupation, Athens was reduced to a town of less than 10,000 people. But in 1834, it became the capital of modern Greece and today is the political, financial and commercial center of the country, having a population of some four million people.

Saturday, May 5th – Day 12

This morning after breakfast we traveled by ferry to the island of Aegina, visiting the Church of St. Nektarios (1846-1920) and we venerated his relics at the Monastery/Convent of the Holy Trinity he established there over the years 1904-1910.

In 1961 the Ecumenical Patriarchate issued an encyclical proclaiming Nektarios Kephalas, the metropolitan of Pentapolis and founder of the Holy Trinity Convent on the island



of Aegina, to be a saint. Shortly after this official proclamation, St. Nektarios became widely known throughout Greece and the entire world for the depth and quality of his Christian witness and the many miraculous healings that took place as a result of his prayers both during his lifetime and, especially, after his death. St. Nektarios was born in 1846 in Thrace, Greece and given the name Anastasios by his parents. He was tonsured a monk at the New Monastery on the

island of Chios in 1875. When he was ordained as a deacon two years later, he was given the name Nektarios by Metropolitan Gregory of Chios. In 1889,



Nektarios was made Metropolitan of Pentapolis by the Patriarch of Jerusalem, Sophronios. Falsely accused of impropriety by other clergy jealous of Nektarios' obvious holiness of life, Sophronios had him removed from office in 1890. In 1894 he was appointed the director of the Rizarios Ecclesiastical School in Athens, a post he held until 1908. He then established the Holy Trinity Convent on the island of Aegina, only a short boat ride from Athens. Following a brief illness, St. Nektarios died in a hospital in Athens on November 8, 1920. Healings began to occur almost immediately as people began asking for his intercession. His relics are

today housed on the island of Aegina, a popular site of pilgrimage for Orthodox Christians from all over the world.

St. Nektarios was, among many other things, a seminary professor in Athens and a prolific author who wrote many books. Among the books written by him is his *Study on the Mystery of the Divine Eucharist*, published in 1904. In this book, St. Nektarios encourages preparation for and the frequent reception of the body and blood of our Savior in communion. Like St. Makarios of Corinth (1731-1805) and St. Nikodemos of Mt. Athos (1749-1809) a generation before him, St. Nektarios deplors those who do not receive communion regularly because of sheer indifference to the grace that is offered in the celebration of the Eucharist. In this book he remarks that "*whether we receive Holy Communion unworthily or we avoid it out of laziness or indifference, we have no Life in us.*" What follows is a brief excerpt taken from his book on the importance of receiving Communion: "*The mystery of the holy Eucharist that*

has been handed down by the Lord is the greatest of all the sacraments! It is the most precious of gifts which God has granted to the human race and may be justly called the miracle of miracles and the sacrament of sacraments. To those who receive communion in a worthy manner is offered not only salvation, but a great number of other gifts as well. Through reception of Communion, we are united with God and enter into contact and relationship with Him. Through this mystical union, we receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, meekness, self-control, faith and so many other virtues. The eyes of our souls are opened, our minds are illumined and our hearts are purified. How happy and blessed are those who receive the mystery of communion worthily! Such people come out of the Church wholly renewed because the Fire of the divine Spirit, having entered the soul through reception of Holy Communion, burns up our sins, fills us with grace, strengthens and illumines our minds, rendering our hearts a tabernacle of the Holy Spirit. Do you want to become a partaker of the many blessings conferred by receiving communion? Do you want to be saved? Become a true Christian, have fear of God, faith in the mystery of Holy Communion and love for God and your neighbor."



The memory of St. Nektarios is celebrated in the life of the Church on November 9th.

Sunday, May 6th – Day 13

This morning, the fourth Sunday after *Pascha*, we celebrate The Sunday of the Samaritan Woman. The Scripture readings for today are taken from the *Acts of the Apostles* 11:19-30 and the *Gospel of John* 4:1-42 – the early persecution of Christians in Jerusalem following the martyrdom of St. Stephen, one of the first

deacons and the first person to be executed for their faith in Christ, the Apostles Paul and Barnabas in Antioch, where believers were called “Christians” for the first time; and the story of the Samaritan woman who encountered the Lord Jesus at Jacob’s Well, a site we visited during our 2011 Pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

The reading is from Acts of the Apostles 11:19-30

In those days, those apostles who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to none except Jews. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number that believed turned to the Lord. News of this came to the



ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad; and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose; for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a large company was added to the Lord. So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul; and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church, and taught a large company of people; and in Antioch the disciples were for the first time called Christians. Now in these days prophets came down

from Jerusalem to Antioch. And one of them named Agabos stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world; and this took place in the days of Claudius. And the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brethren who lived in Judea, and they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

The reading is from The Gospel of John 4:1-42

At that time, Jesus came to a city of Samaria, called Sychar, near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob’s well was there, and so Jesus, wearied as he was with his journey, sat down beside the well. It was about the sixth hour. There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” For his disciples had gone

away into the city to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep; where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, and his sons, and his cattle?" Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw." Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to



her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and he whom you now have is not your husband; this you said truly." The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain; and you say that Jerusalem is the place where men

ought to worship." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." The woman said to him, "I know that the Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ); when he comes, he will show us all things." Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he." Just then his disciples came. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but none said, "What do you wish?" or, "Why are you talking with her?" So the woman left her water jar, and went away into the city and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?"

They went out of the city and were coming to him. Meanwhile the disciples besought him, saying "Rabbi, eat." But he said to them, "I have food to eat of which you do not know." So the disciples said to one another, "Has anyone brought him food?" Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work. Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'? I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see how the fields are already white for harvest. He who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor; others have labored, and you have entered into their labor." Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony. "He told me all that I ever did." So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard ourselves, and we know that this is indeed Christ the Savior of the world."



We were blessed this morning to participate in the Liturgy at the Chapel of Sts. Kosmas and Damianos in Piraeus where we were greeted with absolutely amazing warmth and hospitality. In addition, we had the special blessing to venerate a relic from the right hand of St. John the Baptist while there:





After Liturgy this morning we visited the 19th century *Metropolitan Cathedral, the Cathedral of the Archbishop of Athens* – currently Ieronymos II – and an important spiritual center for the Church of Greece. The Cathedral is dedicated to the feast of The Annunciation to the *Theotokos* celebrated on March 25th. The initial architectural plans for the Cathedral were drafted by the Danish neoclassicist architect Theophil Hansen (1813-1891), who was also responsible for the Academy of Athens and the National Library. The continued supervision of construction was taken over by Demetrios Zazos and after his death in 1857 the Cathedral was completed by Francois Boulanger. It is a three aisled basilica that combines the neoclassical and Greek/Byzantine styles – a result of the three different architects and the many changes in its plans during construction. The

cornerstone was laid by King Otto of Greece in December, 1842 and the construction of the Cathedral was completed in May, 1862. Workers used marble from 72 demolished churches to build the Cathedral. Following a major earthquake in Greece in 1999, scaffolding remained in the church for restoration work until 2016.

The Cathedral houses the relics of two martyrs of the Ottoman occupation of Greece (1453-1821): *St. Philothei of Athens (1522-1588)* and *St. Gregory V (1746-1821), Patriarch of Constantinople*. St. Philothei was a nun renowned for her charitable work among the city's disenfranchised and poor. St. Philothei, whose name in the world was Revoula Venizelos, was the daughter of wealthy Christian parents descended from old Byzantine families. Against her will she was married at the age of 14 to Andrea Chila, an Athenian nobleman, who mistreated her. When her husband died in 1539, she was only 17 and in spite of her parents continued insistence, refused to be married again. When her parents died ten years later, in 1549, she found herself wealthy and the owner of extensive properties. Her wealth gave her the opportunity for charitable work and in 1551 she became a monastic, establishing a women's monastery under the patronage of St. Andrew the Apostle. She is especially revered in Greece for buying the freedom of Greek women taken as slaves, especially those taken to harems. But she also established hospices, orphanages, homes for the elderly and schools. She literally gave everything away. In 1588, four Christian women enslaved by the Ottoman Turks and destined for harems found refuge with her. The women were traced by the Ottoman authorities and Philothei was arrested, beaten and imprisoned. Friends intervened and bribed the district governor, securing her release. On October 3, 1588 four Ottoman mercenaries broke into her convent, tied her to a pillar and beat her so severely that she remained bedridden and died of her wounds on February 19, 1589.



St. Gregory V (1746-1821), the patriarch of Constantinople, was executed by the Turkish government at the beginning of the Greek Revolution in 1821 by being hung from the doors of the entrance to the Phanar in Constantinople on Easter Sunday. An Anglican minister, the Rev. Walsh, who was in Constantinople at the time, described Patriarch Gregory V's death in his memoirs, published in London in 1826: "The old man (he was close to eighty years old), was dragged under the gateway where the rope was passed through the staple that fastened the folding doors and was left to struggle in his robes in the agonies of death. His body, attenuated by abstinence and emaciated by age, had not sufficient weight



to cause immediate death. He continued for a long time in pain which no friendly hand dared abridge and the darkness of night came on before his final convulsions were over." He hung there for three days and then his body was dragged

through the streets of the city and thrown into the sea. His body was recovered by Greek fishermen and then taken to the city of Odessa for burial; from there, in 1871, it was ultimately returned to Athens. The brutal execution of the patriarch and four other bishops was followed by a massacre of the Greek population of Constantinople. The door from which Patriarch Gregory V was hung, once the main gate to the compound of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, was welded shut and has remained shut ever since *in memoriam*. (We had the opportunity to see those doors at the Phanar – the headquarters of the Ecumenical Patriarchate – while on pilgrimage in Turkey in 2013.) His memory is celebrated in the life of the Church on the day of his execution: April 10th.

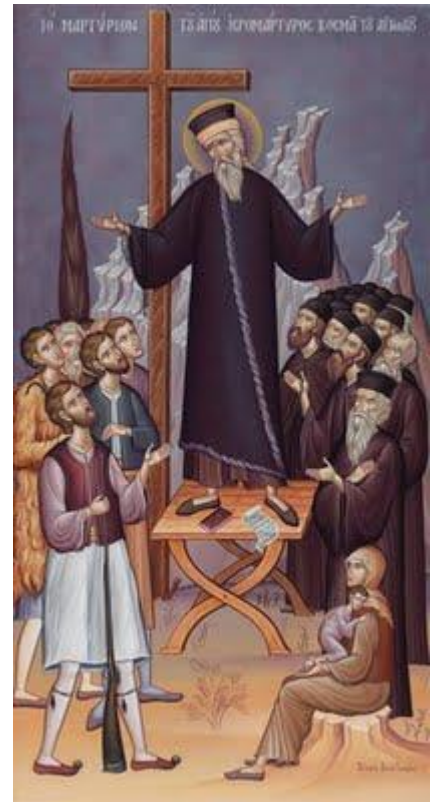
While in the Cathedral we were also given the extraordinary blessing to venerate yet another amazing testimony to the witness of the Apostle Paul. On December 15, 2006 Archbishop Christodoulos of Athens (1939-1998) was presented with *two links from the chains that had bound St. Paul while he had been imprisoned in Rome* by Pope Benedict XVI during a visit to the Vatican as an ecumenical gesture of goodwill. The chains of St. Paul are kept in Rome at the Basilica of St. Paul's Outside-the-Walls, the second largest church in Rome – after St. Peter's Basilica – built on the site of St. Paul's execution. (We visited this site and the Basilica of St. Paul's Outside-the-Walls while on pilgrimage in Rome in 2005.) St. Paul mentions wearing chains while imprisoned in Rome several times in his letters: Philippians 1:12-14; Ephesians 6:20; and 2 Timothy 2:9 as well as in the Acts of the Apostles 28:20. St. John Chrysostom mentions the chains of St. Paul being preserved in Rome and offered to the faithful for veneration in the 4th century; and two popes – St. Leo the Great in the 5th century and St. Gregory the Great in the 6th century – also mention them. The chain links are enshrined near the relics of Ecumenical Patriarch Gregory V.



Also enshrined in the Cathedral are the relics of *St. Kosmas the Aetolian (1714-1779) known as the "Apostle to the Poor"* – but unfortunately they were not available for veneration as they are kept in the altar and only brought out on August 24th for the celebration of his feast day, much as we do at St. Paul's in Irvine. St. Kosmas was one of the most important figures to appear among the Greek people during the Ottoman occupation. A monk of the Monastery of Philotheou on Mt. Athos, his love,

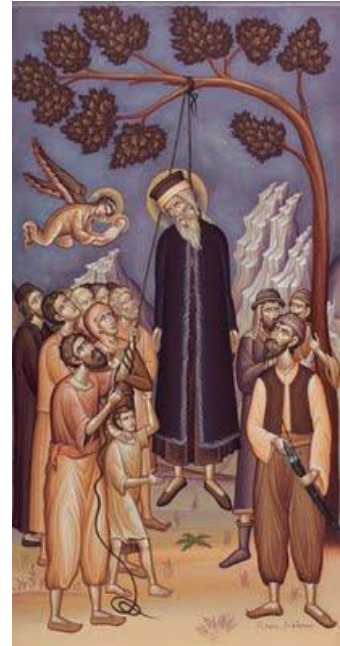
concern and tireless labor among ordinary people, his honest and forthright preaching of the Gospel of Christ in a hostile Muslim environment and his unassuming character earned him another title: “equal to the Apostles.” For 19 years, beginning in 1760, Father Kosmas became an itinerant preacher and teacher, spending most of his time among the poorest and most unfortunate of his fellow Orthodox Christians in the Ottoman Empire. Traveling on foot, by donkey and by ship, often followed by hundreds and even thousands of people, Father Kosmas – like the Apostle Paul – undertook three apostolic journeys throughout the Ottoman-controlled Mediterranean world.

Father Kosmas spoke out against social injustices, against the abuse of the poor and uneducated and against the inequities that existed between men and women. He was an ardent enemy of illiteracy and was instrumental in establishing and maintaining over 200 schools in villages where none had existed before. Village elders, landowners and merchants felt their interests threatened when Father Kosmas called for just taxation, fair prices and equitable rents. Standing on a low pulpit – a gift from one of the local Turkish officials – in front of a large wooden cross in the center of each village he would enter, Father Kosmas challenged people to love and to translate this love into effective and meaningful assistance to those in need. Agreeing that love was important was meaningless for Father Kosmas unless one was willing to prove it with deeds. In sermons which were sometimes written down by his followers, Father Kosmas would directly challenge his listeners to prove their faith with works. In one such sermon, he challenged one of his listeners: "How can I determine, my son, whether or not you love your brethren as the Gospel commands? Do you love that poor boy standing next to you? The reply was:



"Yes, I do." Father Kosmas then answered: "If you loved him you would buy him a shirt because he is naked. Will you do this?" The man's response: "Yes!"

On August 24, 1779 Father Kosmas was arrested in the city of Berat, Albania by the local Ottoman governor, Kurt Pasha. After a mock trial in secret – for fear of his followers – Father Kosmas was taken to the nearby village of Kalinkotasi, where he was hung. His body was thrown into a nearby river from which it was retrieved by one Mark, the priest of the village. Father Kosmas was buried out of the church of the village in which he was hanged.



The people whom Father Kosmas loved and served did not wait for any official proclamation of his sanctity – this was proclaimed by the Ecumenical Patriarchate in April, 1961 – but built their first church in his honor in the city of Berat in 1814. Father Kosmas was to become over the next two centuries one of the most popular saints among the Greek and Albanian peoples.

Excerpts from the sermons of St. Kosmas the Aetolian:

The most gracious and merciful God, my brethren, has many and various names. He is called Light, Life and Resurrection. But God's principal name is Love. If we wish to live well here and also to go to paradise and call God our loving Father, we should have two loves: love for God and love for our neighbor. It is natural for us to have these two loves and unnatural for us not to have them. And just as a swallow needs two wings to fly in the air, so we need these two loves, for without them it is impossible for us to be saved.

Perfect love is to sell all your possessions and to give alms, and even to sell yourself as a slave, and whatever you get, to give away in alms. In the east there was a bishop from whose province a hundred slaves were taken captive. He sold all of his possessions and ransomed them. Only the child of a widow remained enslaved. What did the bishop do? He shaved off his beard and went and begged the master who held the child to set him free and to keep him in the child's place. And so it happened. The bishop lived a life of great hardship, but because of his patience and endurance, God found him worthy of performing miracles. Later, his master set him free and he returned to his episcopal duties. It is this kind of love that God wants us to have. Is there anyone here who has this



kind of love? No! Don't sell yourself, sell only your possessions and give alms. You can't do this? Give half, a third a fourth. You can't even do this? Then don't take your neighbor's bread, don't persecute him, don't slander him! How then do we expect to be saved, my brethren? If we want to be saved, we must have love for God and love for our neighbor. If we wish to be saved, we must seek no other thing here in this world as much as love.

God has not given us wealth in order that we might eat and drink to excess and buy costly clothes and build stately houses while the poor die of starvation.

Alms, love and fasting sanctify a person, they enrich him physically and spiritually and he'll have a good end. We shall all die—as we see happens every day—and whatever we possess, my brothers and sisters, we leave behind. It is only what we give away, the alms we give, that will help our souls.

When God made man, He took a rib from Adam and made woman and he gave her to him as a companion. God created her equal with man and not inferior. There are many women who are better than men. If perhaps you men wish to be better than women, you must do better works than they do. If women do better works they go to paradise and we men who do evil works go to hell. What does it profit us then if we are men?

Blessed Christians, a large number of churches neither preserve nor strengthen our faith as much as they should if those who believe in God aren't enlightened by both the Old and New Testaments. Our faith wasn't established by ignorant saints, but by wise and educated saints who interpreted the Holy Scriptures accurately and who enlightened us sufficiently by inspired teachings.

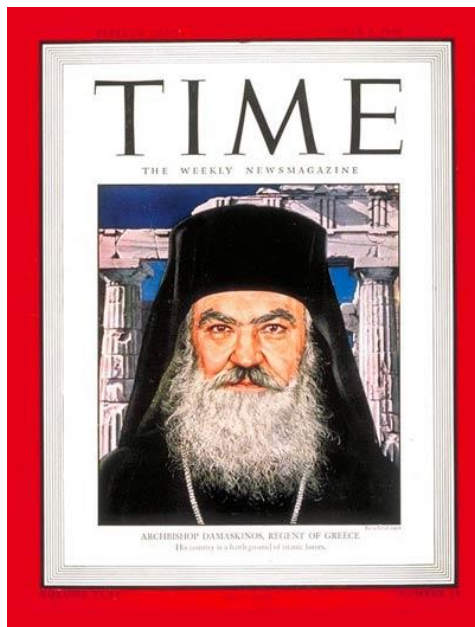
Who can tell me, my brethren, is the sun bright or dark? I believe all of you know that it's bright and that it illuminates everything. There are, however, some animals like bats and owls who when the sun comes out are blinded, made dizzy and can't see. It's the same with those who partake of the holy sacraments. The sacraments enlighten the good person and make him like an angel. But they confuse the sinner who is blinded by the light of Christ in them and he becomes a child of the devil instead of a child of God.

Outside the Church, in Cathedral Square, is a statue of *Archbishop Damaskinos Papandreou of Athens (1891-1949)*, the regent/prime minister of Greece between the pull out of the German occupation forces in 1944 and the return of King George II to Greece in 1946. His tenure as the prime



minister of Greece took place between the liberation of Greece from the Nazis at the end of WWII and the beginning of the Greek Civil War between pro-Royalists and the Communist partisans, the first such conflict at the beginning of the Cold War. Ordained a priest in 1917, he was made the Archbishop of Corinth in 1922. In the 1930's he helped the Ecumenical Patriarchate organize the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America of which we are a part and in 1938 was elected the Archbishop of Athens.

During the German occupation of Greece he frequently clashed with the German authorities and the collaborationist government of Prime Minister Logothetopoulos then in place. In 1943, with the arrival of Dieter Wisliceny, a



deputy of Adolph Eichmann, the administrator of the Nazi Final Solution for the Jews, the Germans began the persecution of Jews in Greece and their deportation to Nazi concentration camps. The Church of Greece, under Archbishop Damaskinos' leadership, denounced Hitler's persecution and deportation of the Jews and instructed priests to announce the Church's position during sermons. The churches under his jurisdiction were also ordered to quietly issue Christian baptismal certificates to Jews fleeing the Nazis; he ordered

monasteries and convents in Athens to shelter Jews and urged his priests to ask their congregations to hide Jews in their homes. For this reason, when the

Germans started rounding up the Jewish population of Athens and the surrounding area, over 600 Greek Orthodox priests were also deported for their actions in helping the Jewish community. A letter was presented to the German authorities protesting the deportation of the Jewish community by Damaskinos which read in part: "Our holy religion does not recognize superior or inferior qualities based on race or religion as it is stated "There is neither Jew nor Greek..." (*Galatians* 3:28). All of this so angered S.S. General Jurgen Stroop that he threatened Damaskinos with death by firing squad. His response is carved into the base of the statue in his honor: "Greek religious leaders are not shot; they are hanged. I request that you respect this custom" – an obvious reference to Ecumenical Patriarch Gregory V and his execution by the Ottomans in 1821 at the beginning of the Greek Revolution. Stroop was so stunned by his response that he let Damaskinos live. For his actions in saving Greek Jews during the Holocaust, Archbishop Damaskinos was named as one of the "Righteous among the Nations" by Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Museum in Israel.

Another statue in Cathedral Square is of the last Byzantine (East Roman) emperor, *Constantine XI Paleologos (1405-1453)*, whose brief rule lasted only four years (1449-1453) before the fall of Constantinople to Ottoman invaders. The great empire of the past that had once spanned the Mediterranean had been devastated over the previous centuries, first by the Crusaders and then by the Ottoman Turks. By 1453, the Empire consisted of no more than Constantinople and its suburbs and a number of towns in the Peloponnesos, most of its lands - constituting what we today think of as the modern state of Turkey - having been previously conquered by the Ottomans. To defend Constantinople and its 14 miles of walls against the onslaught of Sultan Mehmet's army of 100,000+ Constantine could muster only 7,000 men, including monks, clergy and some 2,000 foreigners - most of whom were from the Italian cities of Venice and Genoa. Constantine and his court had accepted the decrees of the Council of Florence (1439) in December, 1452 -

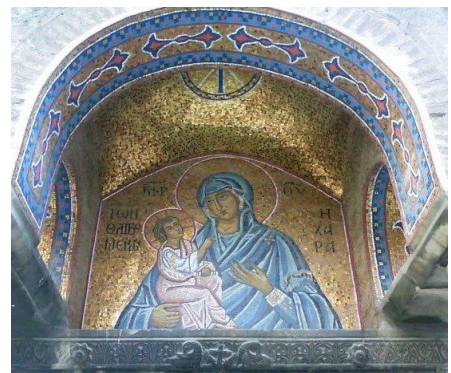


concerning the union of what we today think of as the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches - in hopes of receiving military aid from the Pope and Western Europe. But no help came. The days of the Crusades were over. At the last Christian service held in the Great Church of the Holy Wisdom of God in Constantinople, Constantine asked forgiveness of every bishop present, both Roman Catholic and Orthodox alike and then received Communion for the final time. When the assault began Constantine could be seen fighting alongside his men and when the walls of the city were finally breached, he threw off his imperial regalia and plunged into where the fighting was thickest. He was never seen again. His body was never identified. His death marked the true end of the Roman Empire which had continued in the East for almost 1,000 years after the fall of the Roman Empire in the West in 476AD.



We visited a couple of other Byzantine churches like *the "Little Cathedral,"* a 12th century church that sits just behind and to the side of the much larger 19th century Metropolitan Cathedral of Athens. Called the "Little Cathedral" because it is only 40 feet long and 25 feet wide, this cruciform, domed church was built by Michael Choniates, who served as the bishop of Athens from 1180 to 1204. It is dedicated both to the *Theotokos* and St. Eleutherios the martyr.

We also visited the nearby Church of the *Theotokos Kapnikarea* but unfortunately were unable to go inside. Built in the middle of the 11th century (around 1050AD) and dedicated to the feast of the Presentation of the Virgin Mary to the Temple celebrated on November 21st, it was probably the main church of a larger monastery complex. It has an ancient mosaic of the Virgin Mary holding the Christ Child above its entryway. In 1834, the Bavarian architect hired to redraw the city of Athens



wanted to have the church demolished but it was saved because of the interventions of Neofytos Metaxas, the Archbishop of Athens at that time; and Ludwig, the King of Bavaria (1786-1868) who was a philhellene and father of Othon (or Otto), the first King of Greece (1815-1867). Much of the interior iconography was recently done by the famous modern iconographer, Photius Kontoglou (1895-1965), who led a revival of the traditional art of icon-painting in Greece during the 20th century.

We visited the Byzantine Museum near *Syntagma* (Constitution) Square in Athens to view hundreds of ancient icons spanning the 4th through the 19th centuries. Originally called the Villa Illissia, this elegant Florentine-style mansion was built between 1840 and 1848 by Stamatis Kleanthis for the Duchesse de Plaisance (1785-1854), an eccentric woman, the wife of one of Napoleon's generals and a key figure in Athenian society in the mid-19th century. Art collector



George Sotiriou converted the house into a museum in the 1930's. Three rooms have been created from fragments of now lost Byzantine churches: a 5th century three aisled basilica; an 11th century domed cruciform structure; and a post-Byzantine church. Elsewhere on the ground floor, the exhibits range from early Christian 4th century basilica fragments from the Acropolis to 15th century sculptures from the Frankish occupation of Greece.

Mt. Lykabbetos is, at nearly 1,000 feet above sea level, the highest point in Athens and offers magnificent views of the entire city. Popular stories suggest that it was once a refuge for wolves, which may explain the derivation of its name - *lykos* being Greek for wolf - Lykabbetos meaning "Wolf Hill." At the top of this limestone hill are an open air amphitheater, a restaurant and a 19th century chapel dedicated to St. George. Today the base of the hill is covered with

pine trees planted in 1882. The chapel of St. George is built on the site of an earlier medieval church dedicated to the Old Testament Prophet Elijah. The amphitheater has hosted many concerts over the years and everyone from Ray Charles and Joan Baez to Bob Dylan and James Brown have all given concerts there. Unfortunately, because of the very bad weather that afternoon and evening (rain and lightning) we were unable to enjoy the view of the city or visit the Chapel of St. George, but did have dinner at the main restaurant atop the hill.



Monday, May 7th – Day 14

Today, after breakfast, we briefly visited the *Panatheniac Stadium* first built in 330BC, but refurbished over the centuries and used in the opening and closing

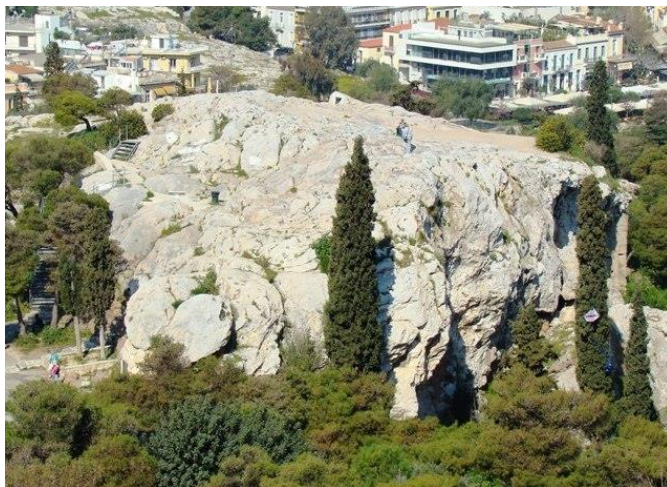


ceremonies of the first modern Olympics in 1896; and then used again as an Olympic venue in 2004. It is the only stadium in the world built entirely out of marble. We then visited the *Acropolis* (literally, “the upper city”) and saw *the Parthenon* and the new Acropolis museum. The Acropolis

has been used almost continually since 1300BC, first as a military fortress and later as a site for worship. In 490BC the Athenians began construction on the building that was the precursor of the Parthenon as we know it today. It was still incomplete a decade later when invading Persians destroyed Athens and leveled it to the ground. The Parthenon was begun again under the patronage of the

famous Athenian statesman Pericles (495-429BC) and was dedicated to Athena in 438BC during the 85th Olympiad. One of the world's most famous buildings, 230 feet long and 100 feet wide, it was designed by the architects Kallikrates and Iktinos to house a 40 foot statue of Athena covered with gold plate. Today, when we think of the Parthenon our image is of a large white building. But in fact, all of the sculptures created for the Parthenon were brightly colored and gilded.

Did you know that the Parthenon was a Christian Church dedicated to the Virgin Mary for over a thousand years, longer than it was a temple to the ancient goddess Athena? The Parthenon served as a temple dedicated to Athena until 392AD when the Christian Roman emperor Theodosius declared Christianity to be the only legal religion of the Empire. By the 5th century the Parthenon had been re-consecrated as a Christian Church and in 662AD was dedicated in honor of the Virgin Mary. In 1204-1205AD, following the conquest of Athens during the Fourth Crusade by the Latins and the Franks, the Parthenon became a Roman Catholic Church known as *Santa Maria di Athene* and later *Notre Dame d'Athene*. Following the conquest of Athens by the Ottoman Turks in 1460, the Parthenon was turned into a mosque. During the Venetian siege of Athens in 1687 led by General Francesco Morosini, a shell hit the Turkish supply of gunpowder stored in the Parthenon and the resulting explosion did extensive damage to the building. Parts of the Parthenon, today known as the Elgin Marbles, are named for Lord Elgin, the Englishman who acquired them in 1801-1803 from the



occupying Turkish authorities. He sold them to the British government in 1816 and today they can be seen in the British Museum in London.

Nearby, just below the Acropolis, is *the Areopagus*, a prominent rock outcropping, where St. Paul delivered his first sermon to the

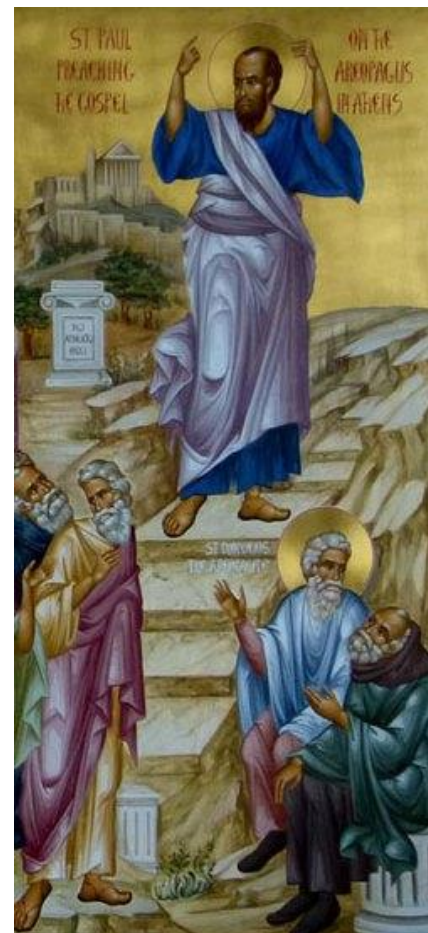
Athenians (*Acts 17:16-23*) as you will read below and the original Greek text of

which is inscribed on a commemorative tablet at the foot of the stairway leading up to top of the Areopagus. The Areopagus, meaning “the Hill of Ares,” takes its name from a mythological trial that took place here when Ares, the ancient god of war was acquitted of murdering the son of Poseidon, god of the sea. In pre-classical times (before the 5th century BC) the Areopagus was the council of elders for the city of Athens, much like the Roman senate. By the time St. Paul arrived in Athens in 51AD, the Areopagus had become little more than a gathering place for philosophical discussion and debate as the city had begun its decline from its more ancient splendor, which was as far distant from St. Paul’s time as the Elizabethan England of Shakespeare is from ours.

Reading the Scriptures: St. Paul in Athens (Acts of the Apostles 17: 16-34)

While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to debate with him. Some of them asked, “What is this babbler trying to say?” Others remarked, “He seems to be advocating foreign gods.” They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we would like to know what they mean.” (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)

Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: “People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—



and this is what I am going to proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.' Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead."

When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject." At that, Paul left the Council. Some of the people became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.



From the Areopagus and the Acropolis, we visited ***the nearby Acropolis Museum***. The modern Acropolis Museum was first conceived by Constantine Karamanlis (1907-1998) in 1976 and it was he who chose the site on which it would be built decades later. Karamanlis was a four-time prime minister of

Greece and two term president of the Third Hellenic Republic following the fall of the military dictatorship of the Junta in 1974. In the 1980's Melina Mercouri, during her term of office as the Greek Minister of Culture, also pursued the construction of a new Acropolis Museum in preparation for



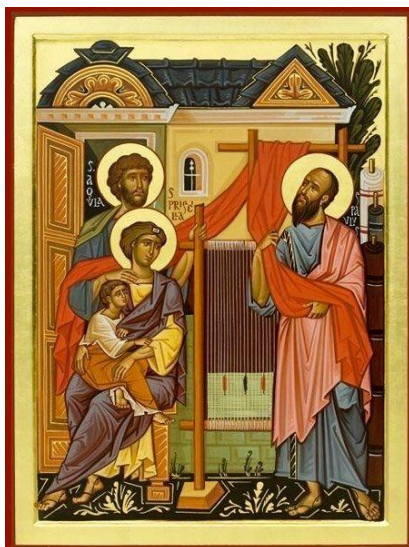
what she pursued as a very public policy issue: the return of the Elgin Marbles from the British Museum – but without success. Following years of delays and further architectural competitions the museum, which is built over an archeological site, was completed and opened in 2009 with more than 4,000 objects on display from the Greek Bronze Age to Roman and Byzantine Greece. The design is that of Bernard Tschumi, a New York/Paris based architect. Today the Acropolis Museum hosts more than a million visitors every year.

Tuesday, May 8th – Day 15



After breakfast we drove to *the Monastery of Daphni*, an 11th century Byzantine monastery and UNESCO World Heritage site some seven miles northwest of Athens. The monastery was first established in the 6th century AD on the site of an earlier, 4th century BC temple dedicated to Apollo, the ancient Greek god of the sun. This earlier temple

had been destroyed by invading Goths, an East Germanic tribe then invading the Roman Empire, in 395AD. The present structures of the monastery and its mosaics date from end of the 11th century, sometime around 1080AD. In 1205, the monastery was sacked by Frankish Crusaders and given to the Cistercians, a Roman Catholic monastic order. It remained a Cistercian monastery for nearly 250 years and the Cistercians built western style cloisters on the monastery grounds. In 1458, with the conquest of the region by the Ottoman Turks, the monastery was returned to the Orthodox Church but not allowed to function as a monastery. During the Greek Revolution and War of Independence (1821-1832), it was used as a barracks for troops, a police station and for several years in the early 1880's it was even used as a lunatic asylum. Heavily damaged following an earthquake in 1999, the monastery was closed for restoration and has only recently opened again.



After leaving the Monastery of Daphni we traveled to *the ancient city of Corinth*, where St. Paul lodged with a Roman Jewish couple, Saints Priscilla and Aquila (whose memory is celebrated in the life of the Church on February 13th), fellow tent and sail makers, and made a momentous decision for the history of Christianity: it was in Corinth that Paul stopped preaching solely in synagogues and decided to begin his missionary work among the Gentiles (*Acts 18:6*). Although Corinth had been an ancient

Greek city that had fought against Athens in the Peloponnesian War, the Corinth of St. Paul's day was a Roman port city that had recently been rebuilt by Julius Caesar in 44BC. It was a larger city than Athens at the time, having a population of approximately 100,000 people (not quite half the size of Irvine). It was the seat of the governor of the Roman province of Achaia and its patron deity was the goddess Aphrodite or Venus, as the Romans called her. The ancient Roman geographer and historian Strabo (64BC-21AD) reported that there were 1,000 "sacred" prostitutes associated with Aphrodite's temple. Corinth had a widespread reputation for sexual immorality of all kinds. In fact, in the Greek of St. Paul's day, the verb *corinthiazein*, "to live like a Corinthian" meant to live a life of debauchery and sexual promiscuity; and the phrase *kore corinthe*, "daughter of Corinth" was a euphemism for a prostitute. Apollo the god of the sun and Aesklepios, the Greek god of healing, were also worshipped there and some of the columns of Apollo's temple from the 6th century BC still remain standing, although much of the ancient city has been destroyed by invasions and earthquakes in subsequent centuries.

On our way to Corinth from Athens, we will pass by *the Corinthian Canal*. There were a number of attempts to dig a canal here in ancient times, most notably by the Apostle Paul's executioner, the Roman emperor Nero. In 66AD, 14 years after St. Paul's stay in Corinth, Nero used 6,000 Jewish captives taken prisoner by Vespasian from the lakeside villages of Galilee where the Jewish War had begun – men whose fathers and grandfathers may well have heard the Lord Jesus Himself teach – to begin work on digging a canal. They failed, and the canal was finally dug by a French company that commenced their work in 1881 at the spot where Nero had given up. The canal was completed in 1893.





While in Corinth, we saw the ruins of the ancient temple of Apollo, the agora, the Roman Odeon and the place of Gallio's seat, the chair from which the Roman governor Junius Gallio (3BC-65AD), considering the debate between the Apostle Paul and the leaders of the local synagogue to be a matter of Jewish law and not

relevant to Roman law, dismissed the charges that had been brought against St. Paul (*Acts 18:12-17*). Junius Gallio was not your average Roman governor, but the brother of Seneca (4BC-65AD), the famous Stoic philosopher and tutor of the emperor Nero – who would later have him executed. Corinth has been an archaeological dig since 1895, and we also spent some time in the small archeological museum in Corinth. We did not have time to visit the barely visible remains of Cenchreae, the eastern port of Corinth, where St. Paul shaved his head “because of a vow he had taken” (*Acts 18:18*) and the old harbor from which he sailed on to Ephesus before we had to begin our return to Athens. However, we did stop to see the St. Paul's Church in the modern town of Corinth near the archeological site. Unfortunately, it was late in the afternoon and the church was closed so we were unable to see the interior, but saw an outdoor mosaic detailing some of St. Paul's ministry in Corinth.



St. Paul would write two letters to the troubled “Church of God which is in Corinth” (*1 Corinthians 1:2*) and it is in the first of these letters that he would define what love means for a Christian: *“Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous, conceited or arrogant. Love is not rude, selfish or irritable. Love keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not rejoice in evil but rejoices in the truth. Love is eternal. Make love*

your aim” (1 Corinthians 13:4-6, 8; 14:1). It is precisely this passage that adorns the choir loft at our St. Paul’s in Irvine.

Reading the Scriptures: St. Paul in Corinth (Acts of the Apostles 18:1-18)



After this he left Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, lately come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them; and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them, and they worked, for by trade they were tentmakers. And he argued in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks. When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, “Your blood be upon your heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.” And he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God; his house was next door to the synagogue. Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with all of his household; and many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized. And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, “Do not be afraid, but speak and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man shall attack you to harm you; for I have many people in this city.” And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack upon Paul and brought him before the tribunal, saying, “This man is persuading men to worship God contrary to the Law.” But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, “If it were a matter of wrongdoing or vicious crime, I should have reason to bear with you, O Jews; but since it is a matter of questions about words and names and your own Law, see to it yourselves; I refuse to be a judge of these things.” And he drove them from the tribunal. And they all seized Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat

him in front of the tribunal. But Gallio paid no attention to this. After this Paul stayed many days longer, and then took leave of the brethren and sailed for Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila.

St. Paul's First and Second Letters to the Corinthians

The first Christian community in Corinth was noted neither for its inner peace and harmony, nor for the exemplary moral behavior of its members. The two letters of St. Paul to the Corinthians were written in the mid-fifties of the first century from Ephesus and Philippi respectively and are filled with theological



and ethical teachings, as well as answers to concrete pastoral questions and problems concerning, for example, marriage and celibacy, taking fellow Christians to court, and the uniquely Corinthian practice of “speaking in tongues”; they also contain no little scolding and chastisement of the Corinthian community by St. Paul, who must even defend his apostolic authority to this church that he had established only a few years before. St. Paul's Corinthian correspondence is intensely personal powerful and moments of spiritual strength, the deepest tenderness of affection, wounded feeling, sternness,

irony, rebuke, humility, concern for the welfare of those who are weak and suffering, as well as zeal for the progress of the church and for the spiritual advancement of its members, are all displayed in these letters. These two letters also clearly demonstrate the fact that the apostolic Church experienced no fewer difficulties than the Church does today or at any time in its history over the last 2,000 years. What do ancient manuscripts of the New Testament in Greek look like? *Above is a fragment of one of the oldest surviving manuscripts that we*

have, containing St. Paul's 2nd Letter to the Corinthians 11:33-12:9 from circa 175AD, and today kept at the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin, Ireland. This library is one of the premier sources for scholarship in Biblical studies in the world.

**A faith to be practiced: some verses from
St. Paul's 1st and 2nd Letters to the Corinthians**



Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? 1 Corinthians 3:16

When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we speak kindly. 1 Corinthians 4:12

Bragging is not a good thing. 1 Corinthians 5:6

Shun sexual immorality. 1 Corinthians 6:18

Do not be deceived: bad company ruins good morals. 1 Corinthians 15:33

Keep alert, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong. 1 Corinthians 16:13

Let everything you do be done in love. 1 Corinthians 16:14

Let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of flesh and spirit, making holiness complete in the fear of God. 2 Corinthians 7:1

Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you? 2 Corinthians 13:5

After returning to Athens from Corinth that evening, our last night in Greece, we had a wonderful farewell dinner at a restaurant near our hotel with the Parthenon, brightly lit, in the background.

Wednesday, May 9th – Day 16

Departure from Athens for LAX via Istanbul on Turkish Airlines.

As our pilgrimage to Greece drew to a close, perhaps these words of Metropolitan Kallistos Ware from his book, *The Orthodox Way*, can help describe our own experience of the Church in Greece: "Describing a visit to a country church in Greece, John Betjeman (1906-1984), the late poet laureate of England, wrote a poem that speaks of his experience:

The domed interior swallows up the day.
Here, where to light a candle is to pray,
The candle flame shows up the almond eyes
Of local saints who view with no surprise
Their martyrdoms depicted upon walls
On which the filtered daylight faintly falls.
The flame shows up the cracked paint sea-green blue
And red and gold, with grained wood showing through
Of much kissed ikons, dating from, perhaps,
The fourteenth century.
Thus vigorously does the old tree grow,
By persecution pruned, watered with blood,
Its living roots deep in pre-Christian mud.
It needs no bureaucratic protection.
It is its own perpetual resurrection ...

Betjeman draws attention here to much that an Orthodox Christian holds precious: the value of symbolic gestures such as the lighting of a candle; the role of ikons in conveying a sense of the local church as heaven on earth; the prominence of martyrdom in the Orthodox experience - under the Turks since 1453, under the Communists since 1917. Orthodoxy in the modern world is indeed an "old tree." But besides age there is also vitality, a "perpetual resurrection"; and it is this that matters, and not mere antiquity. Christ did not say, "I am custom"; He said, "I am Life."

And it is *that* Life, that *eternal* Life, which we have sought on our pilgrimage!







The Monastery of Osios Lukas – St. Luke of Steiris