

Parish Prayer List (Living)

Alexandra	Dennis	Paige	Reader Mark
Andrea	Amanda	Sherry	Joretta
Fr. Michael	Barry	Sean	Tina
James	Nicholas B.	Karin	Andrea & Kirby
Lawrence	Alexandra	Illisa	Rachael
Michael	Helen	Susan K	Bob Wedder
Anna	Erin and baby	Connie	Dcn. William

Parish Prayer List (Fallen Asleep)

Christine Henn (+4/21)

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Words from the Fathers

“Why do they put rubber tires with inner tubes on cars? So that they give in, collapsing a little with every little stone or pothole in the road, and in this way they pass obstacles. If the wheels were firm and unyielding, the car wouldn’t be able to move forward. It would fall apart after a short distance because of the vibration from the small inconsistencies of terrain. The same thing happens with yielding to others in the family. In this way many problems are surpassed and continuous spiritual progress is assured.”

Elder Epiphanius of Athens, +1989

"Happy is the Christian who studies and follows the teaching of Christ. He is happy in this temporary life and in the life after death. Yes, he will be happy after death, because the soul does not vanish after death, is not perishable like the body, but continues to live, to exist. Through death, it is simply separated from the perishable body."

St. Raphael of Lesvos

"...while we are still in this life we shall often waver in our self-determining, hesitating whether to fulfill the commandments or give way to our passions. Gradually, as we struggle, the mystery of Christ will be revealed to us if we devote ourselves totally to obeying His precepts. The moment

will come when heart and mind are so suffused by the vision of the infinite holiness and humility of the God-Christ that our whole being will rise in a surge of love for God."

Archimandrite Sophrony

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A Blessing: Pilgrimage to Greece

by Sister Vasiliki

Everything begins with a blessing! Mother Galina and I were blessed by our abbess to travel to Greece in October 2009. Mother Christophora gave us advice as we were planning the pilgrimage: visit some monasteries, learn about their monastic life, ask for spiritual counsel, see the country and visit my relatives. We were taking this trip in memory of my beloved parents, Akriev and Constantine, who made the trip possible through their generous bequest to me.

We spent about a month planning the trip using a wonderful book called *Evlogeite, A Pilgrim's Guide to Greece*, by the nun Mother Nectaria McLees. We found the book to be quite helpful and truly a blessing, which is what the Greek word *evlogeite* means. For further information we used the internet and also sought advice from friends who had traveled to Greece. We were very blessed to have had help in our planning from Nikos Karellos, a Greek resident and tour guide who has much knowledge about spiritual pilgrimages. He was our driver and guide for some of our visits.

We only had a few weeks to travel so we had to be quite selective in choosing where we would go and how long we could stay. It was hard to decide as we read about the many wonderful cities, islands and monasteries that were filled with so much history. As monastics we decided it was best to stay mostly in monasteries, and only in a hotel when necessary. We contacted some monasteries ahead of time to schedule a visit, ones that were recommended to us by our abbess who traveled to Greece in 1994, plus a few others we read about.

During our pilgrimage, we visited some of the sites and ancient ruins of Thessalonica and Athens and saw where St. Paul preached to the early Christians. We visited many churches where we could venerate the relics of their blessed saints. Some of those we venerated were: St. Demetrius, St. Gregory Palamas, St. Arsenios, St. David of Thessalonica, St. Basil the Great, St. Steven the First Martyr, St.

George, St. Silouan, St. David of Evia, St. John the Russian, St. Philothei, Patriarch Gregory V of Constantinople, St. Nicholas Planas, St. Athanasius the New, St. Galina and St. Nectarios of Aegina.

We also visited a few graves of contemporary monastic elders who have been wonderful shepherds to Orthodox Christians: Elders Paisios, Iakovos, Ieronymos and Porphyrios. They have not yet been glorified as saints, but have left us many inspiring writings, books and spiritual counsels. We were able to visit some of their cells where they prayed and labored for Christ our Lord. While we were in Elder Porphyrios' cell we experienced a real presence of peace as we asked him to pray for us and many others. As we placed our prayer ropes on their graves and relics, we could sense that all of these saints and elders were vessels of the Holy Spirit. We left many prayer lists at the various churches and monasteries we visited.

There are over 1,000 monasteries throughout Greece, varying in size. The men's monasteries we visited averaged 7 to 12 monks, and the women's had 30 to 40 nuns. We went to one which is well known in northern Greece, called Ormylia, where 100 nuns live. The monasteries were so beautiful, whether old or new. Seeing them in the mountains and hills as we approached by bus or car, sometimes getting a magnificent view of the deep blue Aegean Sea from their heights, was impressive. As we climbed up the winding rocky steps I often asked myself how they built these huge buildings so high up in the mountains.

At most monasteries, we were able to attend either a Matins or Vespers service, or Divine Liturgy. We had fellowship (koinonia), toured their workshops, learned about their monastic lives and obediences and received spiritual advice from some of the priests, monks and nuns (see article on page 5). We learned about their history, their struggles and how they maintained their monasteries during difficult times. We especially enjoyed being on the receiving end of hospitality, since offering it on a daily basis is one of the main works here at our monastery.

Toward the end of our pilgrimage, we had an opportunity to travel to southern Greece (Peloponnese) and visit two villages, Andritsena and Stemnitsa (near Tripoli) which were the birthplaces of my grandparents. It was such a blessing for me to be able to meet some of my cousins for the first time. Even though I had only seen photos of my relatives over the years, when I finally met them in person, I felt such a great bond of love. Despite our limited language skills, Mother Galina and I felt right at home as we ate dinner with them

and shared some family photos. Walking the streets in my grandparents' villages, seeing the houses where they were born, worshipping in their churches, and visiting a few monasteries near their villages deepened my spirit of gratitude towards God for the blessing of this pilgrimage.

My grandparents left their villages as young adults and were quite brave and courageous to come to an unknown country. They were part of the generation who built Orthodox churches in America and passed on the Orthodox faith of their homeland. One interesting encounter occurred while visiting a women's monastery: the gerontissa (abbess) asked me if I ever heard of her cousin who came to America in 1918. He was a priest-monk who had left his monastery to help build churches in America. Lo and behold, he was one of the priests who helped raise money and build the church in Ohio where I was baptized. Glory to God!

One never knows what blessings will be received when going on a pilgrimage. Just before we left Pennsylvania, our spiritual father told me that pilgrimages are opportunities to see what God will show us. I believe God showed us many kind, hospitable, and faithful Orthodox Christians. He showed us His holy churches that were built with a labor of love; His saints who loved Christ; and His monasteries that are filled with monastics who are fighting the good fight and praying for the whole world. Along with all of us, they are continuing on the pilgrimage to the heavenly Kingdom.

If you desire to go on a pilgrimage, begin it with a blessing. Ask God to guide you and show you what He wants you to learn.

(Sister Vasiliki is a nun at the Monastery of the Transfiguration, Ellwood City, PA. This article comes from the magazine published by the nuns at Monastery of the Transfiguration.)

