

An Unlikely Pilgrimage to Placer County
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On July 20th, our Roseville community received a most unlikely visitor, Archimandrite Cheroubim Apostolou. Our guest calls home a humble house situated some 500 meters up on the cliffs of the Aegean Sea in the monastic community of the Skete of Saint Anna, the oldest and the largest Skete of Mount Athos, Greece. He is an elder of this community, having lived at this 17th century monastery for some 23 years. The Skete is accessible by boat, approximately an hour trip from the port city of Daphne, and then up 2000 steps to the main courtyard. The Skete is also accessible by foot, a six and a half hour hike from the Monastery of the Great Lavra. Although isolated from much of the world, his days are spent addressing the needs of his fellow monastics, painting icons, praying, and welcoming pilgrims to the Skete.

This past February, I had the opportunity to return to Mount Athos, the most eastern peninsula of the Halkidiki prefecture in Northern Greece. This site is considered to be the "Garden of Mary, the Mother of God", home to some twenty monasteries and their Sketes, cloisters or small settlements with a central Church. Monasticism, in a hermit form, appeared on this peninsula around the fifth century while a communal form of monasticism was established by the tenth century.

The main Church of the Skete was built in the middle of the seventeenth century. In the eighteenth century, the Church was expanded and ornamented with frescoes. Similar to many of the other monastic communities, which are likewise experiencing a resurgence in membership, the Church is being renovated and the icons restored. Although containing some 100 manuscript codices, the holy relics of various saints, icons of exceptional artistic value and other liturgical items, the greatest treasure of the Skete is a particular myrrh-bearing Holy Relic, the left foot of Saint Anna, their matron. Venerating this artifact of the mother of Mary, who was the mother of Jesus, was spiritually, intellectually, and emotionally overwhelming.

The purpose of my journey to the Skete was to receive a myrrh-flowing piece from the skull of Saint Anna and to bring it to Roseville, a gift for the only Greek Orthodox parish in America that bears her name. Being entrusted with and gifted this relic was simply beyond belief, and most humbling.

Now, the Elder Cheroubim has traveled thousands of miles to be present at the formal gifting service of the Holy Relic, which will take place on Sunday, July 24th at 6PM at 1001 Stone Canyon Drive, the site of future Church. During his stay, he will celebrate services at our parish, even serving the Supplication Service to Saint Anna, which will be prayed in English for the first time anywhere in the world. Throughout his visit, he will also offer a few thoughts, true spiritual gems, to those in attendance.

Whether we are Orthodox, Catholic, or Protestant, the chance to interact with someone like Fr. Cheroubim, who has so perfectly dedicated his life to the Lord in such an authentic manner in an ancient and holy land, is a blessing beyond measure. Come July 30th, our pilgrim will return to Mount Athos, where in addition to his responsibilities, he will labor to complete his doctoral studies at the University of Thessalonica. Although remaining in our Placer County community for merely a matter of days, I am most confident that this unlikely visitor who has already offered us so much, will leave a lasting impression on our entire Placer County community!