

THE SAINTS RAPHAEL, NICOLAOS AND IRENE

Back in 1463 in the island of Lesvos in Greece, above the village of Thermi on a hill martyrdom took place. The year before Moameth the Second with a powerful navy force sieges the capital of the island Mitilini. Lesvos falls like it happened to Constantinople (now known as Istanbul) in 1453 and the locals resist their personal dramas under the eyesight of a powerful ruler.

As in every comparison of this kind many tragedies begin. The beastly instincts of humans can grow gigantic and then the weak and unprotected are sacrificed like lambs in the fields. A billion dramas and a zillion tragedies can be unfolded during times of damnation. Do they end with death or after years pass and oblivion comes?

The events that happened on the hill of Karyes of Thermi have not kept silent the victims on the cold time of death. They have not been forgotten and they will never be because they have not died and they will never die again. They were put to death at dawn on Tuesday of Diakenisimos in Easter Week and buried in the morning. It happened on the 9th of April in 1463. They died just for one day but they still live.

Two men and one young girl are Saints and Saints are not dead but they “walk” among us. Can we see them? Can we contact them? The answer is yes but first let’s go back in time in the island of Lesvos in Thermi of Mitilini, on the hill of Karyes.

On the hill of karyes there was a monastery dedicated to Theotokos, the mother of Jesus Christ. When the Ottomans invaded Lesvos they haven’t set on fire the monastery at once. Their aim was to suppress the resistance of the inhabitants of Lesvos and a small monastery didn’t seem to be an obstacle of opposition. Many Christians have left on the mountains and fought the Turks but the resistance was finally suppressed and Lesvos was conquered. Lesvos would remain under Turkish rule since 1912 when it passes again to Greek hands.

The Turks were enraged seeing the inhabitants of Lesvos trying to fight and resist. Their tactic not to entangle the church in their attempt to establish domination had changed. It is true that Christianity and the Orthodox Church are strong binding forces inside the Greek society and faith has inspired generations to stand national conflicts and other hazards.

The Turks decided to attack the church and the monastery of Karyes had been set as their target while they accused the monks of the monastery that they assist the rebels that were hiding in the nearby mountains. A massacre would follow but God would be an observer. How God reacted? Does God have a plan?

The Saints know the plan. They were victims of the worse death man can imagine. They are also warriors and athletes that have won the golden wreath of God.

Who are these Godlike immortals that fooled death? Who is Saint Raphael? Who is Saint Nicolas? Who is Santa Irene?

Raphael was born in Ithaca and was given the name Georgios Laskarides. He was up brought with Christian values and good education. The grown up Raphael goes to famous Mystra a Byzantine state of Peloponnesus were he studies Medicine and philosophy. He was friendly bonded with the Byzantine emperor Constantine Paleologos too. The deep love for his country being endangered motivates him to join the army and

so he becomes an army officer, ciliarco (commander of a thousand). He was sent to fight at the great battle of Varna in 1444 where 30000 crusaders mainly Polish and Hungarians took part but he didn't make it to arrive on time. The battle leaves almost the half Christian army dead. The crash by the 120000 Ottomans would lead to the fall of the "city of the world's desire" Constantinople soon. The new of the defeat disappoints Raphael who dedicates himself to Jesus in Serres of Macedonia at the monastery of Saint John the Baptist. After three years he will go to Athens where he will serve as the parish priest at the parish of St Demetrios in Loumbadari and then he will become a bishop at the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople. His visit to Constantinople to congratulate his old friend Paleologos who was crowned emperor was a decisive point in his life. The emperor appreciates the qualifications and the education of his friend and keeps him by his side. Bishop Raphael will take part in a theological meeting in France. In France Raphael would meet his beloved deacon Nicolas. Nicolas was from Thessalonica and he was studying in France medicine. At the age of 27 young Nicolas was transformed by the Christian teachings and decided to leave his worldly life and follow Raphael.

The Gods will guide the steps of his children in Thrace. During the troubled times of the fall of Constantinople the events would resemble a falling domino. Constantine Paleologos dies and Constantinople is captured. The two Saints are chased along with many refugees who depart from the Alexandroupolis port. Their final destination would be the island Lesvos. They reach the village Thermi strangers but the village chief would lead them on the hill of Karyes to the small monastery of Virgin Mary where they find one monk named Rouvim. Saint Raphael becomes an abbot of the monastery and a small brotherhood is formed under his abbacy. They would leave peacefully for nine years and nothing foretold what would happen at the end. Lesvos was next. The Ottomans invaded Lesvos in 1462

The macabre events would take place one year after the invasion and the Saints would wait the wolves to tear their flesh in pieces. The chief of Thermi Vasilios, his wife their young daughter Irene and niece Eleni and the teacher Theodoros will find themselves trapped at the monastery of Karyes during the terrible days of April in 1463. Oh Santa Irene, a twelve year old girl what kind of animals would take your life without sorrow?

"George was my first name. I have martyred by the Turks. Firstly they hit me with their clubs and thrown me down paralyzed. They punctured me with spears, drawn my beard and drugged my body on the ground. Then they hanged me on a tree and after they slaughtered me. Nicolaos came with me as refugee and we martyred together, he didn't withstand the martyrdom and died with syncope."

These are the words of Saint Raphael that Vasiliki Ralli dreamed saying to the abbot Iakovos. Vasiliki Ralli is not a person that lived in 1463. She is a woman that still lives in Lesvos. Abbot Iakovos was also abbot of Mitilini in our century. Vasiliki Ralli was the first that dreamed the indications of the Saint in many occasions. That was the way that the Saints revealed their story to her and many other people. The real miracle of Thermi is a true revelation of our century. Its apocalyptic nature led in many other miracles experienced by individuals in many countries, mainly Greece and Cyprus where the martyr's fame is so ringing.

In a terrible dream Maria Dourgouna an inhabitant of Mitilini describes:

It was like I was in Karyes and I see Saint Raphael with his pants (the one worn in old times) and naked above his waist. His hands were tied up behind with a rope. He was kneeling and above him were five savage men with eyes red by anger. The two of them hold a saw and they were slaughtering him through his mouth. When I saw them I was terrified and started crying. Then I heard a voice saying “You see the martyrdom they did to me? I martyred in the Easter. In Easter you can glorify me. The ones that tortured me were caught, killed and thrown in a pit”.

Another devout woman reports the following dream:

“The place resembled Karyes. A tall and fat lady told me. You know who I am? I am the mother of Irene. My name is Maria. I was so glad that they made paraklisis at the place they burned my child! We suffered so much up here we came to hide. First they have started torturing Rinoula (Irene). They took another infant that was in my arms thrown it down and kicked to death in front of my eyes. Because I screamed and rushed to take the baby, they rubbed me. While they were torturing my Rinoula, I couldn’t bear and had syncope. So I didn’t martyr but my husband suffered a lot” Rinoula was burned inside a large jar.

Virginia Adam reports:

“Lately at nights I hear talks outside my home. I was stepping outside but I was seeing nobody. One night I heard the talks again and looked out of the window. I saw two monks beside a neighbor’s wall having a conversation but I couldn’t hear what they were saying. Staying for much time at this position I felt tired and went to bed. A priest presented himself coming out of the wall. He was young around twenty five years old, thin face and average height and his clothes were shining. He said. “I am Saint Nicolas, why you doubt? Come to show you where we sit”. He took me by the hand and showed me the way to Karyes. In a while I saw them both walking on the hill”.

The apparitions of the Saints and the other martyrs are shocking. Martyr Eleni and the teacher Theodoros appeared in people’s dreams too and described their end.

There were believers and unbelievers but the evidences of the investigation that took place were uncontradictable. The inhabitants in their narrations describe that Saint Raphael insisted for his existence.

The start of this revelation started in 1959. Angelos Rallis wanted to build a chapel on the ruins of an old church on Karyes hill. Vasiliki Ralli was seeing her uncle in her dreams rushing her to build a chapel there. The ruins of the monastery were forgotten inside the estate with olive trees of Angelos Rallis. After the killings and the destruction of the monastery only the skeletons of the martyrs and the apparitions of the Saints would explain the sanctity of the place. A cycle of dreams between the inhabitants started and the tombs of the martyrs were found with the indications of the Saints.

With the help of an archeologist and the authorities, Saint Raphael was found inside the ruins of the monastery. The jaw of the Saint was found away the skull. It martyred the awful death of Saint Raphael. The others were found in the yard. Saint Raphael prophesized that the grave of Saint Nicolas would be found on a Monday, in the rain and so it happened. A lead seal was found near Saint Nicolas. On one side is Virgin Mary and on the other the Archangel Michael.

The old monastery was built on the ruins of another monastery that was destroyed by pirates in 1235. The grave of the superior mother of the nunnery (Igoumeni) Olimbia who suffered martyrdom was also found. On her skull were found three large nails. The

inhabitants of Thermi had preserved throughout centuries a religious anniversary at this place, without knowing its meaning. Now everything was revealed. The monastery was rebuilt and now is again a female monastery. Investigations took place in 1917, by Turks who owned the estate. Many times a monk was seen walking having a censer in his hands. The locals were hearing bells or hymns wondering for the source. The investigations stopped because with their own eyes verified the supernatural origin.

The apparitions of the Saints have not stopped. The three Saints appear to people in need and heal cancer and other incurable diseases. They heal the pain of body and soul. People glorify them turning them around (their icons) with banners and bells. Mirsini Dougouna remember her dream: Twelve young men hold up Saint Raphael and one of them tells her: "For centuries we glorify him. The same glory you will make for him too. You will turn him around with banners and bells.

At the end we must try to answer the question. Does God have a plan? God had a plan for Saint Raphael, Nicolas and Irene. There must be a secret plan for everyone in life. Just the eyes must be opened not to lose the sight of the passerby meanings. Attention and discernment.