



**Saints Raphael, Nicholas, Irene, and the
Other Newly-revealed Martyrs of Lesbos
(according to the Greek usage)
Whom the Holy Church Commemorates
On April 9th and Bright Tuesday.**

On the island of Mytilene (Lesbos in ancient times), near the village of Therme, the villagers had a custom of ascending a certain hill on this day to celebrate the Divine Liturgy in the ruins of a small chapel, although no one knew whence this tradition sprang. In the year 1959, certain villagers began seeing persons who spoke to them, first in dreams, then awake, both by day and by night. Through these wondrous appearances, which were given to many people independently, the holy Martyrs Raphael, Archimandrite of the Ancient Monastery, and Nicholas, his deacon, together with the other saints martyred on the island, told the villagers the whole account of their martyrdom, which had taken place at the hands of the Moslem Turks ten years after the fall of Constantinople in 1463. The twelve-year-old Irene had been tortured, then burned alive in a large earthenware jar in the presence of her parents. On Tuesday of Renewal Week, Saint Raphael had been tied to a tree and his head sawn off through his jaws; Saint Nicholas had died at the sight of this. Although the feast is celebrated today because it is the day of their martyrdom, through the appearances of the Saints as living persons five hundred years after their martyrdom, it is also a singular testimony to the Resurrection of Christ.

Troparion of Pascha

Christ is risen from the dead by death hath He trampled down death, and upon those in the graves hath He bestowed life.

Dismissal Hymn of the Martyrs. Fourth Tone
Be quick to anticipate

ON Lesbos, ye strove in contest for the sake of Christ God;* ye also have hallowed her with the discovery of your relics, O blessed ones. O God-bearer Raphael, with thee, we all honor * Nicholas the deacon and Irene the chaste virgin, * as our divine protectors, who now intercede with the Lord.

Hypakoë of Pascha

WHEN they who were with Mary came, anticipating the dawn, and found the stone rolled away from the sepulcher, they heard from the Angel, Why seek ye among the dead, as though He were mortal man, Him Who abideth in everlasting light? Behold the grave-clothes. Go quickly and proclaim to the world that the Lord is risen, and hath put death to death. For He is the Son of God, Who saveth the race of man.

Kontakion of Pascha

THOUGH Thou didst descend into the grave, O Immortal One, yet didst Thou destroy the power of Hades, and didst arise as victor, O Christ God, calling to the myrrh-bearing women, Rejoice, and giving peace unto Thine Apostles, O thou Who dost grant resurrection to the fallen.

Kontakion of the Martyrs. Fourth Tone
On this day Thou hast appeared

YE shone on the world like stars * first as ascetics, * then as athletes slain for Christ, * and were translated to the heights, * through the great torments that ye endured; * and them that praise you, ye keep and protect, O Saints.



GLORY TO THY HOLY RESURRECTION O LORD.

The Lessons We Learn from the Miracles of Therme
by Photios Kontoglou who reposed in 1965.

Let us now see how many and what lessons God gives us through the revelation of the holy relics of the sainted new-martyrs Raphael and Nicholas, and the supernatural visions that occurred at the site of their martyrdom.

The first and most important lesson for the unbelievers is that the God we worship and serve is not the God of the dead, but of the living, according to the word of the Lord.

Another great lesson is that our Orthodox Faith is the *true* faith of Christ, for everything seen and heard in these wondrous visions and dreams has been sealed with a seal of truth, not only the dogmas of our pure faith and the services of our Church, but also every particular and detail of our holy Tradition, as well as every devout custom of our people; which things many persons—including even some clergymen—despise, thinking that they are incidental, unnecessary and manifestations of superstition.

The third thing made manifest by the miracles of Kayres is the grace possessed by the relics of the saints and the power of God that dwells in them.

Furthermore, the dogma of the Holy Trinity is also manifestly confirmed by the fact that St. Raphael, while blessing the ailing Basilike Ralles, says: “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

These appearances confirm the mystery of the incarnate dispensation of our Lord and Saviour, manifested by the power possessed by the most holy Theotokos, and the honour given her by Saints Raphael, Nicholas, Parasceve, George and others.

The angelic hosts also appear, chanting and glorifying the saints, and an angel clothed in gold stands guard at the grave of St. Nicholas.

All that the Holy Fathers and the Orthodox Tradition have taught us, as well as all that we read in the synaxaria and the lives of the saints, is clearly confirmed by the newly-revealed saints; and thus the faces of the unbelievers, who despise these things are smitten and covered with shame.

The saints teach us that God is simple, whereas the intricate is of the devil; in this way they deliver us from his snares. For Christian religion today has been complicated and confused by all kinds of theologians, who study in the schools of perverse knowledge as dark and intricate as the false knowledge called philosophy, where every philosopher invents his own system. And such a teaching of religion promotes skepticism and leads to irreligion, and those who do so, become teachers of ungodliness instead of piety.

Therefore, our Lord, through His saints, shows us His grace and truth, indicating them plainly, as if by a finger, to bring us out of the dark labyrinth into which we had been led astray by the dark, involved and stifling theories with which the unbelievers muddy the clear water that springs forth from the Holy Gospel, and from which our pious people have been drinking from ages past.

Concerning the teaching of these scholars who investigate religious things with craftiness and without fear of God, following the spirit of this age, one may repeat the following words of St. James the Brother of God: "This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish" (James 3:15). To such scholars, "Knowledge is greater than faith," –that is, "knowledge seems to them more important than faith, for with its help they wickedly examine and investigate the things of religion," as St. Isaac the Syrian says.

Thus, whatever we know from the teachings of our Orthodox Church, the same is told by the newly-appeared Saints Raphael and Nicholas to those who see them, whether in dreams or waking, and to those who ask for their help as intercessors before the Lord.

According to these same teachings of the Church, it is certain that the sign of the Cross is great and fearsome and venerable. The two saints, who have shone forth from the depths of the earth even as has the all-venerable Cross, often make the sign of the Cross, or it is formed by the smoke of incense, as it is told by those who have seen the miraculous dreams. May this silence the Protestants and other heretics, as well as the reverence that the Saints show to the

holy icons, which these iconoclasts do not venerate. The reader will note that what significance is attached, not only by the saints, but by the Theotokos herself, to her miraculous icon which was buried in the foundation of her church. He will also note how persistently the saints require that an icon and a service be prepared for them, especially when St. Raphael said to Myrsene Dourgkoumna: "Tell them to paint an icon of me so that I do not remain unknown. Take a look at my face, that you may tell how I look."

Being an iconographer, I made it a vow to paint an icon of the two newly-appeared martyrs to present it to their church, I, therefore, asked those who were accounted worthy of seeing them, to describe the distinctive features of their countenances, in order to guide me in the painting of the icon; they sent the description in writing, having the features of the holy ones on their minds. Every one of those fortunate ones, who had seen them, in dreams or awake, described them in the same way....

But besides the characteristics of the two newly-appeared saints, the witnesses of these miraculous revelations also relate to the appearance of the most holy Theotokos and of St. Parasceve. As for the most holy Theotokos, they say that she appears as a young and majestic woman, clad in blue, or sometimes black, garments. Of St. Parasceve, they say that she appears as a nun. Note that in old icons, the Theotokos is painted as dressed in a blue maphorion, and not a red or crimson one, as she is represented in modern times.

The holy angels appear in the guise of youths, as they have always appeared according to the Old Testament, and to the Holy Gospel, and as they have been thus represented by pious iconographers. They are dressed in shining attire. Here is what Myrsene Dourgkoumna writes: "Suddenly, I heard chanting and blood dripped from heaven. I turned and saw a coffin, carried by twelve youths in golden garments. They lowered it slowly to the court of the church and in it, I saw the relics of St. Raphael. And one of the youths said to me, "Do you see what glory we give him? We have glorified him for centuries."

In the other life, the saints honor the Theotokos and each other, the lesser honoring the greater, as deacon Nicholas honors Abbot Raphael, kissing his hand, making a prostration before him or bearing the train of his vestment.

The saints sometimes speak with great severity, as did Orthodox clergymen of old, and not as many modernist priests, who are in the habit of behaving with Christians today so as not to displease them, not out of a spirit of sympathy and condescension to weakness, but rather because they do not feel the weight of the responsibility they have for their spiritual children. Modernist priests also often joke with women, to whom they show a somewhat improper familiarity. The saints of Therme are severe; they threaten the unbelievers with

harsh punishments, and do punish them, as they punished Tsolakes, showing a great abhorrence for blasphemy.

In addition to these things, we see the saints' humility before God, Whose will they obey. St. Raphael, standing near his grave, said to Angelike Maragkou: "I wish to come forth freely, but I do not have the right, if the Master does not give it to me." Likewise, St. Nicholas has said to Basilike Ralles: "I have orders from the Lord to come down and cense the marble slabs from our church. For years all have been thinking I am a ghost. But the hour has come for the Lord to glorify me."

The saints tell many details and particulars of their life, and often repeat them, telling in what manner they were martyred, how many and who were the executioners who tortured them, how the Christians buried them secretly, where they were born and who their parents were, what their names were, in what year and on what day they were martyred, what was the feast day of their monastery, that it would be raining at the time of the discovery of their relics, and other details. And this was in order to confound the unbelieving views of the atheists, well aware of their hard-heartedness and lack of faith.

The saints grant healing to those who pray earnestly, and they themselves say that they will perform miracles and will heal many sick. They told young Nicholas Fykias that they would save his father from death, as it came to pass. But of the neighbor Helen Kailaris who suffered from cancer, they said that she would die, but her pains would lessen, even as occurred. From this, it is apparent that the saints receive limited power from the Lord.

They always recommend that the faithful who see them go to the Metropoly, to the chancellor or to the priest, to tell what they saw, regardless of whether these clergymen are worthy or not.

It is notable that they appear mostly to poor and humble people, according to the word which says, "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, the things which are not, to bring to naught the things that are" (I Cor. 1:27-28). Calling the humble and the afflicted blessed [ed.], the Lord said in the Beatitudes: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted." And, knowing how the unbelievers and the shrewd ones of this world would deride such people, He afterwards said: "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in heaven."

For this reason, the saints appear to small children openly, not in dreams, showing them great affection and confidence because of the innocence and trust that their tender souls have. And the little ones are not afraid, but they rejoice to see the saints and they tell their parents; but often these do not see the saints and do not believe their children's words, and they scold them. But the saints appear to the parents in dreams and reprove them, saying that the children told the truth, and they really appeared to them.

The thoughtful Christian feels amazement and astonishment, receiving confirmation in these wondrous visions and dreams seen by those whom God, in His good pleasure, has deemed worthy; that in the other life, all the religious things take place as in the Orthodox Church; they have the same significance there, as in the worship we conduct in our churches in this material world. Even the smallest details which some innovators find unimportant, transient and unnecessary, considering them superstitions of the simple people—we see that even these are the same in the other life: they are sacred and sanctified and sealed with the seal of eternity. All this must silence the rationalists.

Thus, the Saints appear dressed in vestments, or wearing clerical robes and the monastic cowl; that is, in the sacred vesture and clerical habit that some impious people, who judge all things with their carnal mind, wish to abolish. The saints appear this way to us, who are yet living on earth, because we are yet wearing our body as a heavy garment and because we comprehend even immaterial things through our senses. But everything related to our Orthodox Faith—be it antidoron or consecrated bread, or incense, or candles, or memorial services, or kollyva, or holy water, or fasting, or vigil, or vestments, or the chant, or votive lamps, or icons, or bells—all these are sealed with the seal of life eternal.

Thus, St. Raphael has given antidoron to Myrsene Dourgkouna. Also, our Lady and the Saints ask for votive lamps, and even for an “unsleeping” lamp. St. Raphael told Maria Tsolakes that he wishes to be commemorated by the priest. The saints burn incense when they liturgize or pray. They cense the marble slabs of their church, which Arif Agha took to build his seraglio in Therme. Deacon Nicholas censes the vestments and the church clothes that Maria Tsolakes had taken home to wash. The saints chant the very same sanctified, Byzantine church-music that we chant in our churches. Basilike Ralles heard St. Raphael chanting, “Glory to Thee Who hast showed us the light”, as have other eye-witnesses. The saints also chanted hymns to the all-holy Mother of God, and they chanted “All those that in faith run unto thee...” as we chant it in the supplicatory canons. Likewise, Myrsene Dourgkouna heard them chanting in her sleep on the evening before St. Nicholas' relics were found. But Myrsene Dourgkouna was even deemed worthy of hearing the angels chant above the

relics of St. Raphael, who was clothed in gold. Truly the saints desire that we celebrate their memory on earth with psalms and hymns. Myrsene Dourgkouna writes the following: "Suddenly I heard chanting and blood dripping from heaven. I turned and saw a coffin, carried by twelve youths in golden garments. They lowered it slowly to the floor of the church, and I saw in it the relics of St. Raphael. And one of the youths said to me, "Do you see what glory we give him? We have glorified him for centuries. You should also give him glory in like manner. You shall carry him back in procession with banners and bells. He shall heal many of the sick and demonized."

St. Raphael has said to Basilike Ralles, "Tell the priest and the church trustees that on that day [that is on Bright Tuesday, when they were martyred], we want a liturgy and kollyva."

As we have said before, the saints know that unbelief is rooted in our souls, and they continually reprove us for our lack of faith. When Basilike Ralles fell down at his feet and kissed them, beseeching him to tell her if there was an icon of the all-holy Mother of God, St. Raphael said to her: "Yes, there is a miraculous icon of the All-holy one buried here, but you are all subject to temptation and that is why the All-holy one has not yet revealed it to you. She wants great faith, effort, and prayer." They also want us to decorate their icons with flowers, as is customary.

The saints seal the houses of the faithful with the sign of the Cross, and those of the unbelievers with a seal, as they have told Costas Kanellos and Helen Karademetrakis. They advise the faithful to tell of the miracles they have seen. They perform vespers and liturgy, especially on holy days and weekends.

Every Bright Tuesday, the all-holy Mother of God weeps over the martyrs of the Faith slain on that day. Here is what Myrsene Dourgkouna writes: "It appeared to me as though I were going up to Kayres, and I saw the All-holy one in the church court and she was weeping; and next to her was a little girl about twelve years old, also crying. I asked: 'My Lady why are you weeping?' and she said to me; "Always, every year on this day, I weep over the monk's sacrifice. He was first called George, and when he was ordained, he took the name Raphael'."

Bells are rung on holy days; on memorial days they ring the death toll, as we usually ring it at funerals, mournfully.

The saints earnestly desire that we dedicate an icon of them, and besides the icon, they ask for a Paraclesis. They often appear carrying icons, especially that of the Theotokos.

Certain innovators ridicule some of the religious customs and votive offerings observed by our people, considering them superstitions. But behold, we are shown that the simple Christians do well to preserve them, as is clear from what is told by the formerly unbelieving Doukas Tsolakis: "Near me, I

continually saw two women, who were our Lady and St. Parasceve; and they told me that I must stay there [in church] alone all night; that I would remain paralyzed for three days; that I must wear a black shirt; that I must fast, receive communion, and for forty days go up to light the icon lamps, morning and evening.”

Epilogue

Now, brethren, bring to mind vividly the awesome miracles narrated by the people who saw them.

You will say, “Have we, perhaps, been in different world?” and you will wonder, for things that other people consider impossible and incredible have clearly appeared to us.

And what manner of people were counted worthy to see and hear these awesome mysteries? Some notable, famous and important people? No. Most of them are people of humble origin, semi-literate or quite illiterate; not rich, and some of them in the direst poverty. Yes! God’s grace has always been made manifest to such people, for they have few ties with the pleasures of this world.

Wondrous is God in His saints! God has made His saints wondrous on earth. For as the Father raiseth up the dead and quickeneth them, even so the Son quickeneth whom He will. “Every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for My name’s sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life” (Mt. 19:29), says the Lord. And again He says: “Amen, amen, I say unto you, he that heareth My word and believeth on Him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come unto judgment; but hath passed from death unto life” (Jn. 5:24). “I am the living bread which cometh down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever” (Jn. 6:51).

Encircle Therme, O ye people, and encompass her and give glory with her to Him Who hath arisen from the dead and raiseth His saints and maketh His mercy to shine resplendently upon them that fear Him.

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**SAINT PHILARET METROPOLITAN OF NEW YORK,
THE NEW CONFESSOR
AND
ARCHBISHOP AUXENTIUS OF ATHENS
OF THRICE-BLESSED MEMORY.**