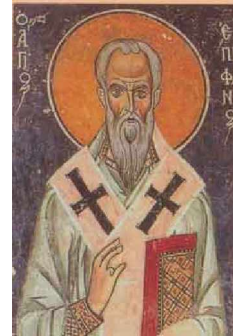


A journey of pain in our occupied land

It is madness to publicise the feelings of the heart, since you never know who the receiver might be, and since you don't know how he might construe the holiness of your confession. But *"he who lives without follies is not as prudent as he thinks"*. Now it is not the time of prudence but of pain, of the great pain of the heart; the pain which perceives the words *"my soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death"*, and tastes Gethsemane.

The twelfth of May is the memory of the great prelate of the Church of Cyprus St. Ephiphianos. It is a proper day for pilgrimage to the ruins of his church in Salamis, which is occupied by the Turks since 1974. We got along with two other priests and proceeded to the land of our fathers. We got along with the burden of our clerical frock which witnesses our Orthodox Church, its glory as well as its weaknesses.



Silence which testifies pain should accompany your journey to the occupied areas. It is not fair to speak; it is not time for idle talking. Pain needs recollection of strength in order to bear it. Just like when going for an open heart operation.

There, in our occupied land, Cyprus expands, grows and becomes more beautiful. It embraces its history, smiles in its laurels, and is crushed in its failures. If you are Greek Cypriot, you bear the burden of your motherland. You remain silent and humiliated. You accept the facts with the dignity and silence that make you bear tribulations with patience, with the endurance that brings hope.

Occupied land... Time has stopped. It seems to wait for the *"Arise oh, God"* to be transformed into eternity. Now, it smells death. Life, development, the people, all seems to be dead. There is no life, you don't taste heavens, freedom doesn't live. The Greek Cypriot compatriot that we met told us that *"nobody can realise how someone feels while visiting our occupied land unless he experiences it. Certainly the only thing he cannot taste is joy"*.



We entered Apostle Barnabas Monastery. Nobody prevented our entry. Even the Turkish Cypriots at the entrance considered it natural not to ask us pay the ticket. We entered the church feeling as if we entered our

home. The place was familiar even if it has become an exhibition site for ancient icons; a Byzantine Museum. The Old Monk, who had just returned to his Monastery after three decades of absence, had just begun the Holy Supplication Service surrounded by 4-5 priests. There were psalms, candles, incense and tears. Who can prevent them after all! We were all silently praying to “*the Founder and Protector of our Holy Church*” to free our land.



The Monastery is run as a museum and this is the reason for being preserved. Let it be... However, the other churches in the northern part of Cyprus do not have the same fate. They have been converted into stables, dancing schools, storerooms or even mosques. Desolation! What can one say? How can someone describe such profanity? The heart of every Christian and especially the heart of every priest is torn (to pieces).



They told us that they respect the clerical frock and we actually saw it. I personally cannot accept their respect, once they have not respected the Holy Altar, the temple of the Living God, the Holy place of my God. I do not know whether they rely on the Koran or not in order to justify their acts. I only know that this is unbearable. Every visit to a church was like a stab in the priests' heart. We couldn't resist passing by a village church or chapel without visiting them. But in the end we couldn't endure any more the stabbing, and we left.



What can one say? Where can one express his pain? There is no ear to hear the sighs of the silent bell towers, of the icons that disappeared, of the Holy Altars that were brutally profaned “*We have got used to the habit*”, the Greek author Antonis Samarakis writes.

There, in the occupied land, everything speaks and everything remains silent. It depends on those who visit it. “*He that hath ears to hear, let him hear*”, the

Greek poet George Seferis notes in one of his poems:



*“But what you have seen
whether in the mist
or in the light
surely they sought to speak.
You passed by and you didn’t hear
them.
And now only the buzzing,
the inarticulate voices
the terrible confusion
of emotional things.”*



Every Greek Orthodox Christian should visit our occupied land in order to have experience of the Cross of his motherland, the Cross of his Church, his own Cross. In order to feel the pain of his heart, expecting the joy that comes *“through the Cross”* and spreads *“in the entire world”*.



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