LAPITHOS MUNICIPALITY

Lapithos news

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Old memories of Lapithos Easter Tradition

Easter, a bright day, Lambri as we called in Greek. Even after 50 plus one years. These were beautiful, pure, trouble-free times in Lapithos. Religious festivities were God's blessing on people's everyday life. While farming work continued, women looked after their homes too, upholding precious traditions.

Lazarus Saturday, Mr Phanis used to cut palm branches which he made into small flower arrangements called "Lazarus". After the morning mass he used to accompany Father Xenophon going round St. Theodoros parish households. Mr Phanis used to sing the Lazarus song describing how Jesus Christ raised his friend from the dead. Housewives used to offer them treats and those who could afford it, some change as well. Out of the six Lapithos parishes only St. Theodoros upheld this particular custom.

On Palm Sunday, each family received blessed olive branches. Some kept them in bags, others used to tie them together and carried them around at the procession. Once the procession was over, the branches were left at the church for forty days of blessing after which they were shared as incense.

On Good Thursday housewives used to prepare red-dyed eggs, hence the term "Red Thursday". Round about Easter, Lapithos fishermen used to collect a specific plant from the seaside rocks which would give eggs a bright red colour and a sea scent.

On the same day or on Good Saturday, women would bake **traditional flaounes pastries**, a cheese-filled delicacy bread. The smell of wood fired ovens and of the freshly baked pastries was all over the place.

On the morning of Good Friday, girls used to make their way to the church to help decorate the holy bier with flowers. The younger girls would be sent around the parish to collect fresh flowers which women used to offer generously. Citrus flowers garlands would be placed crosswise and would fill the church with the beautiful scent. Once the decoration of the holy bier was completed, it was carried inside the church for the service of the Royal Hours and the Vespers.

In the evening, each family used to place its own candle, appropriately marked, on the holy bier and the church warden used to light them up just ahead of the Good Friday evening procession. These candles would be returned to their owner who would keep them at home to light at difficult times or at prayers.

In the morning of Good Saturday, the First Resurrection service would fill believers' hearts with joy. The priest would throw bay leaves up in the air and the congregation would bang the church chairs. Some of these bay leaves we would take back with us to burn along with other dried flowers blessed during other key religious feasts, such as the Orthodox Sunday, the Holy Cross and Good Friday when the priest used to hand out the so-called "maiforoi".

Boys used to collect wood for the "lambratzia", the Easter bonfire, with or without owners' consent. They used to make big piles of wood and then some sort of makeshift human-like doll, Judas. Around midnight, just ahead of the Easter Mass they would light it up. They would then hang out around the bonfire, usually looking for a suitable match amongst the girls. That was the tradition. This was the same fire that kids would also throw their 1st of March charm, a red and white string bracelet that would protect them from the spring sun, as soon as the "Christ has risen" phrase was heard.

In the afternoon of Good Saturday we would prepare the Easter soup to enjoy after the Easter mass. Bell would ring at around 2 am; few would leave before the end of the mass. Kids would look forward to wearing their new clothes and new shoes since Easter would be the only luxury few of them could afford.

People would receive the holy communion: kids were told that the priest would give them "the golden bird". We would take our Easter candles back home with us and we would keep them going for three days. We would greet each other with "Christos Anesti" (Christ has risen) and have our soup before going to bed.

F**or Easter Sunday** we would prepare a big feast with oven lamb, koupepia (stuffed vine leaves)and baked pasta. More good wishes, smiles and hugs. "Christos Anesti!", "All the very best!". These were the days of joy, love and togetherness. The day would unfold with traditional games and shared memories.

And it is through these shared memories that we wish each and everyone of you Chrisyos Anesti - not just to us but to Cyprus, our homeland as well.