

I SPY IN MY LITTLE ICON



By Kh. Jocelyn Abyad

St. Sophia and her three daughters



From the Unworthy Hand of Igumen Vladimir Lysak

The saints in today's icon tell a tragic story, but set a beautiful example for us of unconditional love and devotion- to each other and to God. Saint Sophia was a devout Christian who lived about 120 years after Christ was born. She had three daughters that she named Faith, Hope, and Love. Every time she called one of her daughter's names, she was reminded to live a life of virtue for Christ. She and her daughters would need to use all of the virtues to face the ultimate trial set before them in their lives.

Saint Sophia and her family lived in a time of intense persecution of Christians, but they refused to hide

their faith. When the girls were only 9, 10, and 12 years old, they were reported to the government along with their mother for being Christian. They had to appear before the emperor who demanded that they offer a sacrifice to the false goddess, Artemis. One at a time, he called up each daughter to demand they make a sacrifice, but even though they were being tortured, they refused to offer incense to a false god. For such young children, they showed incredible bravery and in the end, they were beheaded because they would never turn away from our True God.

Through all of this, St. Sophia was forced to watch her children suffer and then die. This is a particularly cruel punishment for any mother. After the girls were killed, she was permitted to take the three girls and bury them just outside of town. She laid by their graves for three days, and then she too gave up her spirit and joined the girls in Heaven. It is said that she is a spiritual martyr. Though she did not suffer physical torture and death, the ache and suffering caused by watching her children suffer brought about her death.

Now that you know a bit about their story, let's take a look at the icon. You can see that the family was not wealthy by their simple garb, but their heads are covered as a sign of modesty and reverence for God. You might also notice the intricate braids in the girls' hair and imagine the love and tenderness with which St. Sophia must have brushed and styled her daughters' hair. The three girls hold a cross in their hands to show that they are martyrs.

Many of you reading this article are between the ages of nine and twelve, just like Faith, Hope and Love. Many of you have had your hair brushed or braided by a mother who loves you. May all of us strive to have the courage to stand our ground when our faith is tested. St. Sophia, pray for us!