



## Drifting down through the Dodecanese... Patmos to Leros.

**Mayday! From Holiness to War !**



Sailing in sunshine and brisk winds from Samos to Agathonissi, we heard what you hope never to hear. A **Mayday** from a 50 ft. German yacht with 2 persons, lost rudder, no engine, water pouring in, in heavy seas. "Help us..We're desperate..We're not going to make it...we're sinking. Someone please help us." 8 n.miles from us. A catamaran was closer and we followed their progress on VHF for 2 hours, hearing the yacht's pleas and them pumping. Just as frightening was the chaos, unprofessionalism and slow response of the rescue services...though they got there in the end (after the catamaran). The crew were rescued .We don't know if they saved the yacht. A chilling reminder of how fast things can happen.



**Patmos** was declared a Holy Island in 1981 – one of the 7 most important religious destinations in Europe, visited by 20 **million** pilgrims a year. At Easter, the celebrations are huge and it is one of only 3 places in the world that re-enact the washing of the disciples' feet (Rome & Jerusalem being the others). Perched high above the town lies the UNESCO World Heritage site of the Monastery of St. John the Theologian. In AD 95 in the Cave of the Apocalypse below, he is said to have written the Book of Revelations, last book of the New Testament, after seeing visions. The tiny white-walled town around the base of the monastery is a labyrinth of dazzling white. Impressive and beautiful, the views were heavenly but somehow there was a commercialism that spoiled the atmosphere in the town. Prices are elevated to match the cruise ships' passengers' pockets.



**Leros** was one of those places that surprise you. It has a negative image and unfortunate history. We didn't expect to like it yet we found it fascinating, beautiful and unspoiled, with down-to-earth, cheerful and friendly people. It is easy to forget, amid the tavernas and tourist shops, that these islands have a dramatic recent history. The main town Lakki is, admittedly, strange. It has been described as a deserted film set with its dilapidated Art Deco style half-empty buildings. A huge natural harbour, Mussolini's naval base during WWII, it was occupied by the Italians from 1912-1943. The scene of the last great defeat for Britain at the Battle of Leros. Strangely enough, on the day we arrived, 26 Sept., it was the anniversary of the sinking of the British destroyer HMS Intrepid in 1943 in Lakki harbour with the loss of all hands (184). They still lie at the bottom of the harbour. There had been ceremonies held that day, wreaths floated on the water as we sailed in. Surviving relatives had travelled from the UK to place a wreath at the memorial. Large war cemeteries for the British, German, and Italians are located inland. A local man unlocked his private collection of war artefacts-helmets, ammunition, uniforms, letters from relatives, magazine articles about him from around the world, for us with pride. Very moving. Contributing to its negative image, Lakki also has the largest psychiatric hospital in Greece with over 1500 staff- a depressing and shabby building behind high walls in the centre of town where patients and hundreds of mentally disabled children are sent out of sight. In 1989 there was a major scandal involving embezzlement of EU funds designated for improvements.

And yet, Leros has places of great natural beauty with huge vistas and small charming resorts such as Pandeli which we were very taken with. We had a wonderful climb up the stair pathway (371 steps) to Kastro, the Byzantine fortress above Platanos. It's breathtaking. Aghia Marina, the old town, is very picturesque with traditional houses in pastel colours and has a nice taverna by a mill. The water is astonishingly clear but colder than up north! Everything is blue, sea, sky, window frames, doors, chairs, fishing boats. Hard to stop taking pictures but it really is that blue.



The Dodecanese – 12 islands- stretch from Limnos to Rhodes – with a total population of 190,000. There are also apparently a large number of illegal Albanian immigrants. During the 60's many Greeks left for USA, Canada, Australia and Germany. In the 1990's some began to return. Agriculture (fruit & vegetables) and fishing play a large part in the islands' economies. Here there are still some Italian and even Turkish influences in the style of architecture. The Dodecanese only became a part of Greece again after 1948 (after Italian occupation).



We've enjoyed these islands a lot. We didn't make it to Rhodes due to unseasonably strong winds so Peter left us in Leros to travel home via overnight ferry to Athens. That's how it goes sometimes. **Thanks, Peter**, we shared a lot of new experiences and unusual places and really enjoyed it. Leros will be our winter marina. We're pleased about it. We still have a couple of weeks to go. It's now 04 Oct.- election day in Greece- expecting a noisy evening! We're on **Kalymnos**- island of the sponge divers- waiting for Willie!

