1. SAINT ANNA, THE MOTHER OF THE ALL-HOLY BIRTH-GIVER OF GOD

Today is the commemoration of the falling asleep of St. Anna but her principal feast is celebrated on September 9, on which date is written her service and her hagiography. Anna was from the tribe of Levi and the daughter of Matthan, the priest. After a long and God-pleasing life she died in extreme old age.

2. SAINT OLYMPIAS, THE DEACONESS

Olympias was born in Constantinople of very distinguished parents. Her father, Anysius Secundus, was a senator and her mother was the daughter of the famous nobleman Eulavius who is mentioned in the hagiography of St. Nicholas the Wonder-worker. When Olympias reached maturity, she was betrothed to a nobleman who died before the marriage took place. The emperor and the other relatives pressured Olympias to marry another, but in vain. However, she refused them this and devoted herself to a god-pleasing life, giving from her inherited estate great offerings to the churches and alms to the needy. She served as a deaconess in the Church, at first during the time of Patriarch Nectarius and, after his death, during the time of St. John Chrysostom. When Chrysostom was exiled, he counseled Olympias to remain in the church and to serve as before regardless who the patriarch after him would be. Immediately after the banishment of this great saint, someone started a fire in the Great Church [The Church of the Divine Wisdom Hagia Sophia] and the fire consumed many prominent buildings in the capital. The enemies of Chrysostom accused this holy woman of initiating this malicious fire. Olympias was banished from Constantinople to Nicomedia where she died in the year 410 A.D., requesting in her testament that her body be placed in a box and cast into the sea and wherever the water tosses it up, there she is to be buried. The coffin was cast ashore in the city of Vrochthoi, where there existed a church dedicated to the Apostle Thomas. From her relics, great healing miracles appeared throughout the centuries. The exiled Chrysostom wrote beautiful letters to the exiled Olympias which, even today, serve as a great comfort to all those who suffer for the sake of God's justice. Among other things, Chrysostom writes to Olympias: "Now I am very elated not only because you were relieved from infirmity, but more so, that you are nobly enduring all difficulties referring to them as trivialities which is characteristic of a soul full of power and abounding in the rich fruits of courage. For you not only courageously are enduring misfortune rather you do not even notice it when it comes and without exertion, without labor and disturbance not even talking about it to others but rejoicing and triumphing over it. That serves as the greatest wisdom" (Letter VI).

3. THE VENERABLE FEMALE EUPRAXIA [EUPHRASIA], THE VIRGIN

Eupraxia was the daughter of Antigonus, a nobleman of Constantinople and a relative of Emperor Theodosius the Great. Her mother, a young widow, with Eupraxia settled in Egypt and visited the monasteries there distributing alms and praying to God. By her fervent desire, the seven-year-old Eupraxia was tonsured a nun. The older she got the more she imposed upon herself the heavy burden of mortification. At one time, she fasted for forty days. She reposed in 413 A.D, in her thirtieth year. She possessed the great grace of God and healed the most difficult illnesses.

4. THE COMMEMORATION OF THE FIFTH ECUMENICAL COUNCIL

This Council was convened in Constantinople during the reign of Emperor Justinian the Great in the year 553 A.D. All the heresies of the Monophysites were condemned at this Council as well as the heretical writings of Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret of Cyrus and Origen (his teaching against the resurrection of the dead).

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT EUPRAXIA (EUPHRASIA)

Eupraxia, the young virgin,
For the sake of Christ, a hermitess became,
And boastful was of royal birth
But God-bearing was her soul.
All honors, as a burden she rejected,
And her royal lineage and riches.
Before God she prayed day and night,
By fasting and all-night vigils, herself exhausted.
To His servant, God harkened,
Tearful virgin Eupraxia,
Who many tears shed
And with tears inflamed prayers,
Upon her did God bestow wondrous gifts,
Both the young and the old to help,
Wicked demons to drive away,
Of every infirmity, heals the sick.
Before God, with a pure soul she came,
And for herself, in heaven found a home,
Built of faith and deeds,
And by much patience purchased.
With God Himself, that home glows,
Here, St. Eupraxia took up abode
To enjoy amidst eternal good
And to reign with the immortal Christ.

REFLECTION

"As virginity is better than marriage, so the first marriage is better than the second." Thus, St. John Chrysostom wrote to the young widow of Tarasius, a deceased nobleman of Constantinople, counseling her not to enter into marriage for the second time. The Church blesses first marriages with joy but the second marriage with sorrow. Eupraxia the elder, the mother of St. Eupraxia and relative of Emperor Theodosius the Great, remained a young widow following the death of her husband Antigonus, with whom she lived in physical contact for only two years and three months, and further lived one more year as brother and sister by mutual pledge. The emperor and empress counseled her to enter into marriage with another nobleman. She would not hear of it, but took her child Eupraxia and together they fled to Egypt. What can we say about St. Olympias and St. Eupraxia the younger? As with St. Macrina, not only was she also betrothed as a virgin but when her betrothed died, she considered herself a widow and would not even in her thoughts consider entering into marriage. What purity of heart! What fidelity to one's betrothed! What fear of God! What obvious faith in the future life in which the betrothed maiden hopes to see her betrothed.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous standing still of the sun and the moon (Joshua 10):

1. How Joshua, in order to complete the victory over the Gibeonites, ordered the sun and the moon to stand still in their courses;
2. How God heard the voice of the righteous man and by His power caused the sun and the moon to stand still;

3. How God created even nature to serve man and how God acts according to the will of the righteous.

HOMILY

About slaves who preach liberty

"While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants (slaves) of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage" (2 Peter 2:19).

The apostle still speaks of "the impure, the impudent, and the self-willed", reminding the faithful, to beware of their misleading "proud and false words". He first said about them that: "they speak evil of dignities of the glory of God" and second: "that they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness" (1 Peter 2:18). Now he further speaks about how they promise liberty i.e., they promise something which they themselves do not possess, for being overcome by impure passions, they are slaves to their own passions, submissive slaves to the greatest tyranny of this world. O my brethren, how relevant for us are these apostolic words written some nineteen hundred years ago! Behold, how everywhere around us they get carried away declaiming liberty, those who do not have even a little bit of liberty! Listen to the cry of the despairing slaves of passions and vices; how deceived, they are deceiving; how blinded, preaching light. Passions are a woven net, woven by the devil, to ensnare mankind. Captured in this net, they refer to other men as slaves and themselves as freemen to the laughter of the devil, who silently gathers in the net hauling it toward his shore. O brethren, guard yourselves from those desperate ones who call themselves the heralds of liberty, while they serve their master and lord, the devil, day and night. Their poverty they call wealth and the wealth of others they call poverty, as does the ignorant one calls the entire world ignorant and himself intelligent. Thus, those who are least free call others enslaved. Service to God and to fellow men out of love, they call slavery, while service to the devil, they call liberty. They are malicious both to God and to men, as is the devil himself malicious to God and to men. Whenever you hear anyone who speaks to you of liberty, question him well, as to whether he is not a slave of some passion or vice. By the impurity of their life, by their impudence and their self-will, you will recognize all false teachers of liberty. The apostle reminds you of this.

O Lord, the only Giver of true liberty, safeguard us from the net of all those who are malicious toward You and us.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.