

15/12/2020

His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America Homily at the Vespers of the Feast of Saint Eleftherios the Hieromartyr



Saint Eleftherios Greek Orthodox Church

New York, New York

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I am so very pleased to be with you this evening, in this historic community of Saint Eleftherios, where the blessed Patriarch Athenagoras was enthroned as Archbishop of America. Your Heavenly Patron is the patron Saint of all the clergy, and indeed, the Director of my office is named Eleftherios.

What makes Saint Eleftherios so remarkable goes well beyond his courage in his martyrdom. I want to remind you of something that many of you know: Saint Eleftherios, the patron of priests, was ordained at an extremely early age for every

rank of the clergy – deacon, priest and bishop. He was only fifteen years old when he became a deacon. He was eighteen when he was ordained a priest. And a mere twenty years old when he became a bishop.

Think about your children and acquaintances at those ages! Think about yourselves! Would you be ready to assume any of those responsibilities at such an age? Eleftherios was clearly a very special young man.

His mother, Anthia, was a martyr herself, but she was also a disciple of the Apostle Paul in Rome, in the last years before his own martyrdom at the hands of the Emperor Nero. This is an amazing connection, because Eleftherios learned the Gospel from his own mother, who learned it from the Apostle of the Nations, the same Apostle who wrote the majority of the book that we call the New Testament.

This direct relationship to the Apostles was deeply personal for the young Eleftherios. His mother was his greatest teacher, and thus we are reminded of our own mothers and the Mother of Lord, our Panagia. The knowledge they convey to us is often ineffable – it cannot be summed up in words. A mother's teaching contains hidden wisdom and secret insights that are based in intuition and the equipoise of silence. It is why we hear in the Gospel that the Virgin Mary “kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.” [1] Who knows what secrets Anthia gave to her son Eleftherios?

She dedicated Eleftherios to the service of the Church and he became a disciple of the Bishop of Rome, Aniketos. The Bishop was the one who elevated him so quickly, because he saw in the young Eleftherios the gift of the Holy Priesthood made manifest.

As for his mother, Saint Anthia, she accompanied her son on his missions, and like the Virgin Mother of the Lord, she was not spared to see her son arrested and unjustly put to death. In fact, her martyrdom was just after his, full of courage and faith in Christ.

Their example of how mother and child unleashed such faith, hope, and love into the world became a reason that both these Saints are associated with expectant mothers and childbirth. And this is a natural connection because they are mother and child. You all know that the most common salutation in Greek for an expectant mother is: Καλή λευτεριά!

Therefore, my beloved Faithful of this most historic and beautiful Church of Saint Eleftherios:

Celebrate this night and the feast tomorrow with great joy and expectation, knowing that your Heavenly Protector attends to your prayers. Dedicate this season of Christmas to his memory, and apply your attention to the wisdom of the Mother of us all, the Holy Virgin Mary. She will teach you the mysteries of the kingdom, if you will but listen in silence to her unspoken words.

Through her holy intercessions, and the prayers of Saint Eleftherios and his mother Anthia the martyr, may we find the freedom to give birth in our souls the virtues of faith, hope, and love that will truly make us free.

Amen.

[1] Luke 2:19.

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