

St. Olympias the Deaconess

St. Olympias was born in 361 AD into a wealthy family of high ranking in the Christian Roman Empire (probably in Constantinople). Her father was the senator Anicius Secundus and through her mother, Alexandroka, she was the granddaughter of the noted eparch Eulalios.

When Olympias was still very young, her parents betrothed her to a nobleman. The marriage was supposed to take place when Olympias reached the age of maturity. However, the bridegroom died before the wedding took place, and Olympias did not wish to enter into another marriage, preferring a life of virginity.

After the death of her parents, Olympias inherited great wealth. She then began to distribute this wealth to the poor and needy, the orphaned and the widowed. She was also very generous with her donations to the churches, monasteries, hospices, and shelters for the homeless. She established a hospital and a shelter for young orphaned girls and undertook their care and education. She also established a monastery for women where she resided, as well. All of her wealth was put to work for the benefit and comfort of the poor of Constantinople.

Because of her many philanthropic activities, she was appointed a deaconess by the holy Patriarch Nektarios (381-397). She would provide great assistance to the hierarchs of Constantinople as well as the visiting bishops from many places.

She became especially close to St. John Chrysostom, who was elevated to Archbishop of Constantinople on February 26 of 398. St. Chrysostom had high regard for Olympias and showed her goodwill and spiritual love. When Chrysostom was unjustly banished in 404 AD, Olympias and the other deaconesses (Pentadia, Proklia, and Salbina) were deeply upset. Eventually, Olympias was sent to exile because of her devotion to St. Chrysostom's innocence. St. John Chrysostom wrote to her several letters from his exile, consoling her in her sorrow.

St. John Chrysostom reposed on September 14, 407. Almost a year later, St. Olympias died in exile as well after a long illness somewhere in Nicomedia on July 25, 408. Shortly before her death, Olympias gave instructions that her remains be placed in a coffin and tossed into the sea, leaving her final resting place to divine providence. Her coffin was washed on the shores of Constantinople and she was interned in the Church of the Holy Apostle Thomas. Later her holy relics were brought to the monastery which she had established. Many miracles and healings occurred from her relics.

