

TEZĂUR LITURGIC
9 NOIEMBRIE
SF.SIMOEN METAFRAST

VIATA
SF.CUVIOASE
MATRONA
DE LA
PERGA PAMFILIEI



PG 116



ΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΙΚΗ ΔΙΑΚΟΝΙΑ
ΤΗΣ ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑΣ ΤΗΣ ΕΛΛΑΔΟΣ

The Life of St. Matrona of Perge as given by Symeon Metaphrates

Patrologia Graeca CXVI, cols. 920-953
see also *Acta Sanctorum*, Nov III, 813-22

The translations are by Khalifa Ben Nasser

I

It is most beneficial, and at the same time a holy work, to praise as much as we can those who lead a temperate life and who love virtue. For they are worthy of it [praise], and also, speaking about them will make other men desire to do similar things. If the object of praise is a woman who is the weaker part of humanity and too delicate for hard work, this praise is beneficial to men at the same time as it is to women. It is able to kindle the enthusiasm of both [men and women] toward good work(s). Women would be moved to take up the same pains [hard work] and rewards since they belong to the same sex, while men would not want to seem second to women and less noble in their labors.

Matrona's life was one of those of praiseworthy and virtueloving ones. She competed with men in virtue, and surpassed all in marvelous accomplishment, as will be made clear as the story continues.

II

There is a region called Pamphylia, subject to the Roman Empire, that lies on the frontier between Cilicia and Isauria. Many lived in that land and it had inhabitants from all cities and that is how it came to have such a name. The blessed Matrona was brought up in one of its cities, called Perge. She was liberally educated and taught by her parents. When she reached the age for marriage [note] (and because she was very beautiful) she married a man, not a vulgar one or of the common people, whose name was Domitianus. She became the mother of one girl. Forthwith, the little girl was given a name proper for her future, Theodote, and from the cradle was dedicated to God.

NOTE:

Roman law fixes the minimum age for marriage at fourteen for boys and twelve for girls. The Byzantine legislators preserved such a tradition and the Church followed suite. cf. E. Patlagean, "L'enfant et son avenir dans la famille Byzantine (IVeXIIe siecles)." in *Annales de demographie historique*, 1973, 'Enfant et societies', (Paris: LaHaye, 1973),p.86; idem, *Pauvreté économique et pauvreté sociale a Byzance, 4 7 siecles*, (Paris, LaHaye, 1977), 146; J. Beaucamp, "La situation juridique de ea fememe a Byzance," *Cahiers de*

civilization médiévale X XII siècles, Vol. 20, no. 23 (AprilSept., 1977), p. 169.

III

As she [Matrona] led a moderate and modest social life. after marriage and cohabitation [wifehood], she did not care for vain beauty, but she trained the inner man, thus trying zealously to go through life with dignity and sobriety.

While it would be worthy and even desirable to discuss things in details, it would be superfluous for us to disregard better and more perfect matters, and to prefer to engage the audience with the memory of these things. It is fitting to begin the narrative with what she preferred above all others. For she decided to keep to the utmost [the word of] the Apostle. He says that those who have wives [must] be [live] as if they had none [I Cor. VII. 29]. Therefore, she willingly abandoned her fatherland, I say by divine providence which helped her with her plan, an she went to the queen of cities, Byzantium, with her husband, who (went with her and) did not stay away from her, but was neither aware of her plans nor know what she had in mind. When she entered the imperial city, she went to the churches of the saints every day. She would not stay away from them day or night, fasting, praying, sharing her possessions with the

needy, and earnestly begging God to put an end to her inner fight against the flesh, for she was young then, not more than twentyfive years old.

IV

At any rate, as has been said, she needed to be freed from the flesh so that she might live without her husband and be able to have the time to live freely the life of spiritual and divine persons. It was a certain Eugenia who incited her towards these good things. Noble as her name, she was one [of those] who spent her whole life in continuous vigils and prayers. Matrona competed (in) the good competition with her, and diligently trained herself in the way of an ascetic.

While this was taking place, Domitianus became grieved by her practices, and was driven to improper thoughts, saying that her absence from home was not motivated by good things, but she was drawn by her mind to cheap desires So he guarded her as much as he could so that she was not even able to come out of the bed-chamber. A contest developed between them. While he did not allow her to do her usual things, she tried not to be deprived of association with holy people. Although he continued to resist (this) she was very: persistent in her entreaties, and at length she was

able to persuade him to let her do what she wanted.

V

She quickly went to the church of the holy Apostles, where she earnestly prayed and entreated that there would be no obstacles in her way to flee the world, but that she would be led to Christ along with the people who had already been led there. Now, as she was praying, evening had already fallen, and the door-keepers of the church ordered everyone to leave. But she found near one of the porticoes, the home of a certain old acquaintance, Susanna, who, from youth, had dedicated herself to the virginity and a life of devotion. With her, she passed the whole night. At day break, however, Matrona went to the teacher Eugenia, and discussed with her certain matters. And after many words had been exchanged, the teacher said that she must consider before anything else how to handle the affairs of her daughter, Theodote. Since Matrona's only goal was God, and she was contemptuous of all other concerns, she said, "Let the ascetic and solitary life accept me. I give Theodote to Susanna and God, and free myself of worrying about her." The deed immediately followed upon the word.

VI

Again, as Matrona was seeking to learn how she must live in quietude (and) to please God, she was taught by the Lord through a vision in her sleep. Hers was a marvellous one. It seemed that her husband was chasing her and, as she fled, she was saved by some monks, which signified that she must go in a monastery of men and enter into the life of monks. For in this way, she would not be recognized either by her husband or by others.

She shaved her hair close to the skin and dressed herself like a eunuch. [That is to say that she put on men's clothes]. Once more she went with Eugenia to the said Church of the Holy Apostles, and desiring to learn the meaning of secret things from the divine, she opened the Holy Bible, and there she found it stated: "He who wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, and take his cross, and follow me." [Lk. IX. 23). Thereupon, they had a firm knowledge of the things that please God, and having abandoned themselves to Him and expecting Him to be their assistant in their practices, they parted from each other.

Matrona, as has already been said, pretended to be a eunuch, and called herself Babylas. She went to the monastery of the holy Basianus. There she was received by the monks and immediately engaged in spiritual competition. She did not feign devotion by

sadness and paleness of her face rather, she was truthfully pursuing virtue and was eager to escape notice, so that she soon elevated herself to the perfect life according to God, and all marvelled that a man afflicted with the weakness of a eunuch could so endure hard labors and seek to surpass all the monks, winning over the spirit and despising glory as vanity and being completely obedient out of great modesty.

VII

They were not envious of her for the zeal for virtue is free from envy. Rather they wanted to observe her as a teacher and to imitate her. But her secret almost came out, and it would have become evident that she was a woman, if she had not put an end to the suspicion through her spiritual wisdom.

It happened that once she was working in the garden with other monks, (and) she was more zealous than they in her work. A monk by the name of Barnabas, who was assigned to work with her, looked at her curiously. He had entered the monastic life a short while earlier, (and) even though he had come from the stage later he increased in virtue and became a hegumen [abbot]. He asked her to tell him why the lobes of her ears were pierced. The blessed woman quickly gave him

an intelligent answer saying, "You have, O brother, suffered something human which is alien to our profession. One must pay attention to the land and not gaze curiously on human features. But to answer your question: the woman who had owned me before and who raised me was so affectionately disposed toward me that she wished even to place gold ornaments in my ears." So, the blessed woman, wisely, rid the monk of his suspicions.

But many troublesome thoughts came to her, and she remembered the exhortation of Eugenia who said: "it is difficult for a woman to live with men and pretend to be a man. It is impossible to avoid detection forever." Still, she thought more carefully, being alone with God, and said, "By Your sign, O Lord, I have entered the monastic life, and when You order me to follow You, I have followed the unalterable path wherefore You will neither deceive me nor will You allow me to stray from such a good purpose. But watching over my weakness, deign to help my aim and purpose." As she said these things, she envisioned a good outcome because of the purity of her soul.

VIII

For a long while she was living thus and acquiring her spiritual training, Basianus remained ignorant about her true identity, although he was not

without a charismatic gift of prophecy. Thus, she escaped notice by the wisdom and hidden judgment of God, as once Elisha did with the Shunammite [woman] [II Kings, IV.]. Then, with time, the truth about her became known to him. It happened that the great Basianus saw in some dreams a man in modest habit, with a remarkable appearance who seemed to be of divine nature and who three times told him that, "The eunuch Babylas, whom you have among your flock of monks, is certainly a woman, but pretends to be a eunuch for disguise [to conceal her identity]". After this, a certain man named Acacius, known for his fear of God and who was the hegumen of the monastery of holy Abraham in the Triton [3rd district], saw the same vision.

Early in the morning, the great Basianus summoned a certain monk named John, who ranked second in the monastery, and described the dream he had to him. While he was discussing this, someone who was sent by Acacius, came to report to Basianus what he (Acacius) had seen in his vision. The great Basianus, wishing to be more sure, took the Holy Book in his hand, opened it, and there he found the words saying that "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman (took and) hid in three measures of meal, until the whole was leavened." [Lk, XIII. 20].

IX

Then, when things became clear through his deep understanding, he began to consider how he could delicately deal with the problem without making it known to many. Therefore, he called the blessed woman, looked hard upon her, and said "What, O woman, made you perpetrate such a daring deed upon us and bring among us a totally unworthy temptation and shame by managing to remain undetected for so long." While this was being said, she sat crushed by the harshness of the speech, and being panicstricken by the cloud of bitterness on his face, and since her conscience clearly bore witness to what had been said, she threw herself on the ground at once and held the holy man's feet. and with very humble words only whispered she said, "I did not intent to bring temptation when I came among your flock, (but) rather to flee the temptation of the adversary and to avoid snares in life." Again Basianus told her, "How could you, a woman, come to the Holy Mysteries with your head uncovered and give fearlessly your mouth to the brothers in the Kiss of Peace?" She said, "As regards Holy Communion, I used to feign illness and come to communion with my head covered. I did not refuse the sign of brotherly love, for I thought , did not touch human lips, but men who search for angelic apathia."

X

Amazed by such wisdom, Basianus said, "And why did not you go to another monastery, that is, a woman's monastery?" She recovered herself a little and shook away her fear. She then began to say more words in her defense and made clear the thing pertaining to her. [She said] that she was married to a man according to the law and was the mother of a daughter, that she used to go and spend whole nights in the holy sanctuaries, and because of that she was sometimes threatened by her husband and sometimes suffered blows. In order to put an end to such violence, she sought a way that her husband would not be able to find her and that she could do what she wanted. She related this and how she entrusted her daughter to Susanna, and finally she related her dream, that as she fled from her husband, she seemed to be saved by the hand(s) of the monks, because of which she changed her habit and even her name.

When Basianus heard these things, he felt a great admiration for her inordinately sharp wisdom and considered her intention acceptable. He inquired whether she still chose the monastic life. When she said [she liked that] very much, for in this way she would be away from the world and those of the world, Basiarius said, "take courage, my daughter,

about the future." He gave her a useful admonition. "From now on, daughter," he said, "put a veil over your head, for it is proper according to the law of nature, and thus wait for divine help," and [he added] that he too would do whatever was possible.

XI

As she departed from there, God, who orders all things for the best, took Matrona's daughter from this life to himself so that the child would not become a temptation from the devil against Matrona. Since it had already become known that she was a woman, [the devil] could have distracted her from divine thoughts and could have led her mind to worldly concerns with the child as a pretext. Therefore, she did not grieve but was delighted in the matter, since she considered what had happened not to be the loss of a child, but relief from concern about the child.

She was in hiding with Susanna, or rather it was God who was looking after her through Susanna. Her fame proclaimed her everywhere, and through her deeds it reached every ear. Domitianus, her husband, was gradually trying to find out the truth of what had happened. As he continued tracing down his wife, after having been to the other

monasteries, he finally came to the monastery where the blessed woman had been living. Sending forth incomprehensible and improper sounds from anger, he knocked [at the monastery's gate] at an unappropriate hour, and loudly said, "What violence and what great injustice have been done to me. Yes, O monks, yes, you have indeed done good things' Why did you wish to divide what was well united? Give me my wife, give me my legal partner"

XII

He shouted these things and more being motivated by desire and seized by sorrow. His voice was hoarse from pain. Then he heard them [the monks] say, "We did not have your wife, for entrance to the monastery is not allowed to women. We have known a certain eunuch. a monk called Babylas, who lived with us for sometime, but suddenly decided to move and go to Jerusalem. He separated himself from us a few days ago because, we know he wished to live abroad. Where he is now, only He [God] knows, to whom nothing is unknown. The truth of this will be confirmed by the whole city." Hearing all this, Domitianus was beaten off and lost every pretext to resume the search. He tried everything. [He turned every stone]. Failure grieved him. He was angry, impassioned by his love for

her. He left them, being torn apart by such passions.

XIII

Many concerns afflicted Basianus since he was entrusted with Matrona's soul lest it be lost. He summoned the first in rank among the monks and said, "We must consider further what to do about our sister who has been separated from us. For although she is of the other nature [sex], since she brought herself among us, her separation from us must be viewed as the removal of a limb. Let us arrange her affairs so that they will reach a good end, for fear that the evil one, who tries to tempt us every day, might prevail over her, using her husband as his instrument." Thus spoke Basianus, putting [the matter] to all for deliberation. A certain Marcellus, who then was a deacon, proposed an opinion saying that in the city of Emesa, whence he came, there was a hermitage of w/omen in which a sister of his was one of the nuns. "Therefore, if this seems acceptable to you, have her sent there, for when she is there, you may put worries about her off your minds." Basianus agreed, the deacon found a ship setting sail to that place, and put the holy woman on board.

XIV

She cheerfully accepted the decision as being made with God's aid. She brought along very little food. As she began the voyage, pushed by a favorable and fine wind, she crossed over to the monastery in Emesa. She was kindly received. She performed the labors of virtue so well that, as she was seen as a model, it was not easy for the nuns who tried to equal her in their labors. Thus, it seemed good to all the nuns to entrust her with the leadership of the monastery after the death of the abbess. As much as Matrona tried to hide herself, so God wanted to make her manifest and to place her light in the lamp and make her virtue evident.

At that time, a farmer, who was working on his small piece of land for several days, saw a flame gushing out of the earth. It [the flame] was constant and did not stop. Not being able to subdue the flame, the farmer went to the bishop of the city and reported it. The bishop realized that the phenomenon signified something very great. He went to the place and brought with him his clergymen. When he arrived there, he held a prayer and ordered them to dig up the earth. When this was done, an earthen jar was discovered. It contained no gold nor any other worldly ornament which may charm the worldly soul. It was an object of more valuable than all precious things. It was the venerable head of [St. John] the Baptist.

XV

When the story spread, no one stayed home, but everyone came to the site, and with hymns and praises they brought the honorable head to the church. When the blessed Matrona and all the nuns arrived at the scene of the spectacle, she came close, the head was laid out and myrrh was extracted [from it]. She gave myrrh from the head to all those who were around. She did that unwillingly. How that was and why it was imposed by God against her will will be explained.

She was in the middle of the crowd and was not allowed to leave as everyone was pressing to get the myrrh for himself. She herself got myrrh and was forced to give it to others. At that time, someone, who was born blind, came running past everyone, for there were also some of the priests distributing the ointment. He came toward her and begged with many prayers. She put the holy myrrh all around his eyes and at once he was able to see the light he who had never seen before. This made her famous and known by everyone, so that everyone said that she was the one who had managed to spend so much time undetected among monks.

XVI

The illustrious fame brought Domitianus again and led him to the monastery, as if leading him by the hand. When he heard that it was prohibited for men to gain entrance, he decided to conceal his true identity and pretend reverence. He asked some women to let him see Matrona to get grace from her and to prostrate himself before her. By more precise questioning, and some marks on his face, and from what she heard, she well recognized that he was her husband. What did she do? She asked for a period of seven days after which she would receive him at her leisure [at the right time]. When Domitianus heard this from the woman, he was in suspense with expectation, and waited for the appointed day. While he was going around waiting to see her, he was imagining that he already had her in his hands. Meanwhile, Matrona hastened and disguised herself again and went straight to Jerusalem, putting on only a hair shirt and carrying with her a very small piece of bread.

XVII

After the seven days had passed, the women came back as agreed. They heard from the nuns, who were saddened by great grief, that since the time they came and spoke to her, "she was neither seen by us afterward, nor do we know where on earth she is." As they learned these things, the women

left at once, and told Domitianus. Having been stricken with a severe pain in his heart, Domitianus did not relax or waste any time until he reached Jerusalem. And again, he gave the description of the missing woman to other women he met. He turned every stone wishing to know her whereabouts. They [the women] said that they had seen a woman who fit the description, but they did not know for sure where she was. They said, "Wherever she finds herself, she stays in one of the churches and then rushes to go elsewhere. We will tell you how we will manage to find her. We shall split up, one by one, so that whoever sees her first will come as soon as possible to inform you." And so they did just what they said.

XVIII

It happened that Matrona met and recognized Domitianus. Casting her eyes down and bringing her hand toward the earth, pretending to pick up a stone, she intelligently concealed herself from him. Then she met those women who were going round the entire area in a circle looking diligently for her and she knew that they spotted her by her features and that she would soon be caught. So she fooled them through her wisdom. She asked that she be allowed just three days to go to Sinai. After that she would return at once and go to see her

husband. Learning this, Domitianus knew that such an answer was an excuse and, immediately followed [her] as quickly as he could. Again, when Matrona learned this, and that her pursuer was near and she was in danger; she became oppressed with a great fear. She went to an idol's temple near Beirut and stayed there, since she thought that to encounter demons and wild beasts was better than being taken by Domitianus. For if they [the demons] caught [her] they would harm only the body. But if her husband caught [her] he would be more deadly than demons and wild beasts, for he would destroy her body and soul at the same time. He would drag her back to the things of the world and claim her as his wife.

XIX

Therefore, she settled there and devoted her time to singing hymns and prayers to God. She heard the demons echoing her songs and sending forth the same sounds. This lasted for many days and occasioned fear and timidity in her. Then she crossed herself with the sign of the cross and came out against those fearful things. Because she could not see anything, she asked the divine grace to make evident [visible] what was in question. At once, she saw clearly what was invisible coming with fire and making inarticulate sounds. Again,

they were censured by her and they departed and disappeared as if they were smoke.

Sometimes, when thirst seized that noble woman and got unbearable, she would come a little way out of the [idol's] temple and bring modest refreshment to her mouth by the green herbs and moist grass. The Lord, who had once sent the unexpected manna and fed an entire people -- an evil and ungrateful people gave her both food and drink. In that hot country, where the sun is very strong, she discovered a place with a little moisture. She dug it with a sharp stone as much as possible and at night fall she returned and offered God the usual prayers. The next day she came and found the pond filled with water and edible herbs, a table not unworthy of the eater, but more pleasurable to her than those which delight the rich and delicate.

XX

Thus she lived, constantly turned toward God, [but] the Evil One considered this to be bad and unbearable. On that account he disguised himself twice as a very beautiful woman and came to her and said, "Why, my lady, did you choose to settle in this gloomy and out of the way place? For solitude is long and the scarcity of necessary

things is great. Besides you are young and very beautiful. I am greatly alarmed that you may become an occasion of desire for licentious eyes, and that is not good. And because this place is far away and there is no help [nearby], you may bring violation unto your body. But if you trusted me and listened to me, I would take you to town, and there you would find a house suitable for your purpose, and live quietly as pleases you, and be in no need for any of the things that are necessary." But, detecting this to be a treacherous counsel by the adversary, she considered the words to be nonsense, and she overcame this snare. But that demon did not rest. He strove with all kind of cunning to attack Matrona. To be sure, he took the form of an old woman beggar. He let fire shine through his eyes. Trying to frighten her, he threw himself at her feet screaming strange and corrupt words. Since Matrona paid no attention, and the blessed woman did not even turn towards the demon, the demon became angry and audacious, "If I was not able to defeat you, the brave one, while you are a young woman, in old age, I shall bring upon you the most painful of things. Now I will set against you those who are in Beirut, for you dishonor their temple and, as much as you can, you neglect it." Revelations and divine vision came after these mischievous plots of the Evil One,

which is God's way of sending his aid to the oppressed and relieving sad things through good ones. n For in the multitude of my thoughts in my heart." says the Holy David, "Your encouragements [comforts] delight my soul." [Ps. XCIV. 191. And so it happened.

XXI

She was holding the evening prayers as usual, when three men stopped by and openly [audibly] began to sing with her. They knelt down behind Matrona for many hours. She turned her face around to know who they might be. The three men in such a gentle and serene manner, said, "Pray for us," thrice, and departed immediately.

As her virtue was making her wellknown, her fame traveled all over: that the evil spirit fled before Matrona, and that the [idol's] temple became devoid of demons. Because of that, many came to her thinking it a great thing just to hear her words. Hence, a woman called Sophrone, who lived a life [that is] prudent like her name and who was of the Greek religion, and at the same time others who shared the same belief with her, gave themselves to Matrona, abandoning their parents, friends, and the world. They listened obediently to her and soon became worthy of holy baptism. Among them was a

virgin, a Greek priestess of the temple who, when she heard these things about the holy woman, became filled with divine zeal and condemned her own gods. She (hastened and) gave to the poor the offerings lavish by the Greeks in unlawful sacrifices to demons. She separated herself from the others and came to Matrona and eagerly made herself one of those who chose to follow her.

XXII

As the day came when she was to offer the sacrifices, a multitude of people and her relatives assembled, and not finding her, had no way to perform the ceremonies without the priestess. They were not able to know what had happened before. But when her parents learned the matter, they came quickly to the temple where the holy woman lived, and seeing her [the priestess] at the holy woman's feet, they said to her, abusively, "only, O girl, have you looked with contempt upon the greatest of gods, and have left the sacrifice unperformed and agitated the people against us, for they would not tolerate insult against the gods? And why have you chosen this dishonorable and unworthy life over the noblest and most praiseworthy conduct? Now, abandon the irrationality that seized you, be sensible and of wise thought. Put away this mournful habit and be

joyous and come to us who are joyous, lest what you think is the place of your salvation becomes your grave for if you do not do what we tell you, tomorrow your dwelling place will be destroyed by fire." Saying these things, they did not hear anything from her.

XXIII

Matrona was peaceable and friendly to them. "Let her be," she said, "she has already been ordained handmaiden of the God of you gods. No longer is there anything in common between you and her." When they heard this, they turned away threatening to burn the temple and other worse things. The girl fell at the feet of the blessed woman and begged Christ that she be sealed by the seal of baptism as soon as possible. Then Matrona told the rest of them to stay and went to gather dry wood. When she collected a great deal, she returned. "Some of you," she said, "go quickly and tell those who came a short time ago, 'we have prepared for you fire and abundance of wood, why do you delay your arrival so as to complete what you threatened.'" When they heard these things, they were puzzled by the wisdom of her thought and her courage. They could not answer, and after that they never dared return to that place.

Then the blessed woman ordered those who returned to go again and find the bishop who was to send with them one of the priests and a deacon. As this was very quickly done she handed over to the priests, who had already arrived, the priestess who lately came to her. They taught her, baptized her and brought her back to her [Matrona].

XXIV

After baptism, therefore, Euche [Prayer, Blessing] for that was how she was renamed was educated and trained in all the spiritual disciplines. She joined the rest, who became eight in number, in ascetic practices.

The holy woman was so pleasing in speech and sent forth such a sweet and goodly a scent, that it happened very often that those who came to see her, when she finished her discourse [with them] and wanted to return home, could not move. It was as if they were held by some kind of fetters, by their love for her, or as if they were thirsty and had not enough water, and for that reason they were reluctant to retire. Thus she was spiritually amiable to those who approached her.

She had a desire to see Basianus again. He was in the queen of cities, Constantinople, and so was Domitianus, her husband. The fear of her

husband, lest she shall fall in his hands if she came to the city, pushed away the desire. And so she was torn by two thoughts: the desire for her spiritual father and the fear of her lawful husband. She thought she would rather go to Alexandria or, if that were impossible, to Antioch. The she devoted herself more intensely to prayers and waited for a sign from God of what she should do.

XXV

And when she was asleep, she thought she saw three men exerting themselves with full force, competing with each other as to who of the three would be chosen to take her for a wife. She turned aside what she heard and regarded the matter as very improper. (Those dreams which are contrary to the thoughts of the day confuse [us]). "Who are you?" the holy woman said to them, "What are your names?" One was called Alexander, another Antiochus, and the last Constantine. At the end they tried to put an end to the dispute by casting lots. It fell to the one who was the youngest in age, that is Constantine. When she woke up from sleep, the holy woman perceived what the revelation of the vision meant. She decided to give up going to Alexandria or Antioch, and to go to Constantinople. For this would please God who makes obscure things clear.

XXVI

Relating the vision to the sisters who were with her, she saw that they opposed her plan. Their opposition was not because they doubted the meaning of her dream, but because they had great affection for her and could not bear to leave, for, just like a new plant, they were refreshed by her words and were in danger of dying if they were deprived of her. "But," they said, "since it was divine providence which inspired your decision, we would in no wise be able to stop you." But they also said, "You should ponder to whom you will leave us after your departure."

At once she made their situation clear to the bishop. She asked that two deaconesses, whose virtue time had confirmed be sent to her. When they [the deaconesses] arrived, she entrusted them with the women who were under her responsibility. She greatly exhorted them to watch carefully over the souls handed to them, 'so that," she said, "those whom God has prepared to leave the world are not again abandoned to return to the vanity of the world and to neglect their covenants."

XXVII

Having said these things and embraced them [the sisters], she took only one of them, the nun

Sophrone, with her and went on board of the vessel which set sail, in favorable wind, to Constantinople. Soon she came to the church which was by the sea and dedicated in the name of God's Peace [the Church of Holy Irene]. She called in the deacon Marcellus and made known who she was. He was the one who had advised Basianus to send her to the monastery in Emesa. She was gladly received by him, and she was asked what might be the cause for such a long journey. She said "nothing else (for what possibly could it be that might make her disregard so much labor) except an unconquerable desire to be in communion with you and above all with holy Basianus. For this I have overlooked old age and female infirmity, and peaceful living and everything else and have taken the road which leads to you." She then told him briefly how Domitianus pursued her to Jerusalem and Sinai, how she lived in the idol's temple, and how innumerable crowds were brought to the faith by her. She did not relate this to boast, but for the love of truth. For vain display is alien to modest spirit and to a woman who pursued nothing as much as anonymity. Besides, she thought it improper that someone who had once belonged to the monastic life should abandon it: it could become a cause for scandal.

XXVIII

Marcellus immediately explained everything to Basianus. The latter was annoyed by the report. He ordered him to return as quickly as he could and set apart a quiet and noiseless place for her not far from the monastery so it would be easy for him [Basianus] to visit her if he wished. Marcellus carried out the order at once and a suitable dwelling was prepared where he lodged the saintly woman. Here the great Basianus came and met her, and said what was fit, and he learned from her what she had done and he gave what was necessary and asked her if she needed anything else. When she said that there were other sisters in Beirut who wish to come and live with her, he sent letters to the bishop of Beirut informing him of this, and he allowed those whom Matrona had asked for by name to be sent at once. So they were sent and came to live with Matrona. She presented herself in the most perfect virtue, as was said by many mouths and was clear to all.

With many others .he empress Verina, the wife of the great Leo, came to her, feeling that she was not honoring the saint, but herself by this [by visiting]. She was greeted by her [Matrona] with moderate friendship and in what was appropriate for that peaceful and philosophic soul to give. She [Verina] left admiring her virtue and that she [Matrona] did

not accept anything from this woman who was able and willing to give many things.

XXIX

A certain Euphemia, former wife of Anthemus, the ruler of the Romans, visited the holy woman frequently and believed, through experience, what was said of her. At about this time, she saw that the wife of the patrician Sphoracius came down with a terrible illness that defied the medical profession and she had not a single hope of life. She [Euphemia] said to her, "If you listen to me, bid the physicians farewell, and now give yourself to the common good that came into the city, I mean the holy Matrona, who has freed many not only of corporeal illness, but that of the souls too and led them from impiety to righteousness, and you will soon hold her up for a marvel and send many others to her." Having said that, she related her (Matron's): life from beginning to end.

The next day, both of them came to her (Matrona), and having prayed together for a long time, the sick woman placed the holy woman's right hand upon the suffering part of her body and immediately felt the pain decrease. Matrona asked what the purpose of the touch [contact] was. When the sick woman told the truth, she [Matrona] said,

"The Lord will release you from your affliction, for this is beyond our ability."

XXX

At any rate, from that time on the sick woman felt the illness leave, and she decided to remain with the holy woman until she was completely cured. So she demanded that her pack animals remain there. When she was told that there was no house for her to stay in, for the house was a single one, and rented, at once she had a talk with the blessed woman. She said "Through my illustrious birth I have a useless possession and plenty of houses already built, which are large and beautiful. I am ready to give you as many of them as you want, provided they are in a single place, for this will benefit me because they will become the habitation of many souls which will be saved in the future." Knowing in her heart that with this the door of salvation would be open to many souls, she [Matrona] agreed to accept the offer.

She summoned the deacon Marcellus, explained the matter to him and sent him to see the property which was offered. When he returned, he said that it was a nicely located place; it had the sea on the right side, and on the other, it neighbors the monastery of Basianus, and that it needed not a little and fortuitous care, but a great one.

XXXI

Thus were these things reported and she at last accepted the offer. The donation was confirmed in writing. In return, the gift of perfect health was given to that woman by God. After this she repaired the house, giving readily whatever was needed for restoring and decorating. Up to this day [these houses] are called "The Severiana." The holy woman moved there from her earlier residence. But in no way did she move from her godly purpose and work, unless you call "moving" the change from the lesser to the greater. To this great thing she moved and prepared her flock, and she preserved it from suffering (from) attacks, being helped by Him who is the cause of good. Along with other things, something happened that brought even more glory to her.

XXXII

The public and venerable feast of the martyr Laurentius was being celebrated and a great crowd streamed to his church and passed the day there. There were among the crowd two women, sisters by nature but not sisters in behavior, and much different one from the other. They were both notable and distinguished by race. Now, when the feast came to an end, they left there, and on their way back they came to the place where the

monastery of the holy woman was. There, they heard the harmonious sound of holy hymns. They liked the hymns and they inquired who was the abbess and came to see her. After they had a talk with her, they got a great benefit from her words and by the decency of her manner. One of them, seized by spiritual love for her [the holy woman] said to the other, "(You) return, but I am staying with her. I have been seized by oblivion from my husband, home, and relatives, and as the holy David says, 'I chose to be thrown in the house of my God, rather than to rejoice in the glory of this world [I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness] [Ps. LXXXIV. 10 = Gr. O.T. 83.11]". When Athanasia, for this was her name, said these things to her sister, the latter did not agree and openly opposed her saying that this matter was the [result of an] irrational levity and enthusiasm, easily leading to regret. She said this with a world-loving mind rather than with a [spiritually] sound one. The holy woman applauded her [Athanasia's] design towards God, but she too did not agree with the sudden decision. Rather she advised her to return first to her husband and discuss it with him. She said to her, "Try to live as simple a life as possible and God will make your way easy. Then you will come to me and you will achieve what you

want. For although this holy desire has entered your mind and occupied it, still many things make me hesitate: your youth and your lack of experience about labor, for you are accustomed to being served, not to serve. However, the greatest hindrance is your husband.

XXXIII

When these things were said, Athanasia kept quiet. She disliked being rejected, but she did not want to raise opposition and assert her will. Because of this she left, but did not abandon her goal and purpose. She followed the counsel of the holy woman, that she should take care of her chaste and simple life and consider it as training for the ascetic life. She went to one of her farms and separated herself from her husband. She was eager to imitate the holy woman, eating at the same time(s), as she and as simply, praying before and after meals and imitating the blessed woman as much as possible.

While she was there, seeking a seemly separation from her husband, something happened that offered her a very plausible cause for divorce. Since she was away from home, as we said before, her husband, who was extravagant and intemperate, spent all his fortune. As he became in need of money, he ordered his boyservant to,

secretly, steal money from the lady's chest and bring it to him. It happened that this did not escape the notice of the maid who was taking care of the lady's things. Later the lady was told about this by the maid. Athanasia used this as a reasonable excuse for separation. Finally, she persuaded her husband and collected the greatest part of her possessions, and took it with her to Matrona, to whom she entrusted her own soul. She came and brought her wealth with her. "Take these," she said, "and store them among the safe treasures of Christ. Don't suffer my soul to depart from your holy soul. It dedicates all these things to you for itself. "

XXXIV

Matrona rejected the busy and troublesome administration of the treasure. However, she wanted to admit the suppliant and did not know what to do. Therefore, she referred the matter [regarding the money] to Basianus. She took his opinion and accepted what was offered. Some of the money was spent on works in the monastery - building a wall all around the hermitage and a building of three stories. The first floor which was close to the earth was marked for tombs. The second floor was agreeable for winter and convenient for the congregation, and here, a

church was built. The third floor was wellaired and also was graced by a very beautiful church. These remain until now a witness to the magnificance and beauty of the building. On these things, as it has been said, some of Athanasia's money was spent. Some she (Matrona) distributed among the sanctuaries and other monasteries in Jerusalem that were in need. The rest was piously administered by the notable Marcellus to the poor. So Athanasia having, as we have said, rejected her temporary wealth, regained immortal wealth.

XXXV

After living for fifteen years in this manner, the blessed woman was freed from present matters and went on her way toward God. Thus, the disciples of Matrona became more numerous for many came to her everyday wishing to be tended for by the teacher. When the time of her departure was at hand, the holy woman clearly was neither disturbed by preparing for the act of separation, "For I am prepared," said the holy David, "and not disturbed," [Ps. CXIX. 60], nor again did she hasten the separation and this, as it was said, was because of her confidence and again because of her love for her flock. For her, it was more needful to abide in the flesh" according to Paul, [Philipp. I.24], and because of this [the need to abide in the

flesh] she was subjected to greater toil and thence could collect more fruit. Hence, she exerted herself more in her labor at the end, as good runners do, praying more and more earnestly.

XXXVI

God did not wish to deprive Matrona of her request to let her know clearly beforehand about her deliverance from this world. A more than usual sleep held her. In it, she seemed to be going around a faraway place full of trees and sweet water. Honorable and discreet women were standing there. They showed clear trace of virtue on their faces. They seemed to point towards a house further on, a house of unspeakable beauty, as if not made by human hand, and no tongue was able to describe it. They invited Matrona to go into the house saying, "It is yours, it was chosen and set apart for you." When she woke up, she interpreted the dream. After that occurrence, she had faith in what would receive her after her deliverance from life.

She lived to be a hundred years old, only twenty-five of them in worldly life. All the rest she spent in spiritual living and training. Then she left this world and went to her beloved Christ, having left behind her actions that were widely admired, but capable of being imitated by only a few. She came

to Christ and begged him evermore to bestow grace upon the churches [Church] and give salvation to all his people who glorify Him as one of the indivisible Trinity, to which is due all glory, honor, and adoration, now and always, for ever and ever, Amen.

Vita Prima of St. Matrona:
Selected Chapters

Vita Prima S. Matronae, I, ed. H. Delehaye, Acta SS., Nov. III., pp.790-823

1.

The books that are called, and in fact are, of Paradise [note] have handed down to us the lives of men and women, whether they pursued wisdom in a community or in solitude, and also [the lives] of these illustrious men in Egypt. It is worthy to add to them the edifying story of the blessed and holy Matrona. A woman who, living among chaste men as we shall tell a little later, proved herself in things that belong to holy men and accomplished things which are accomplished by those living solitary lives. She succeeded and not only was inferior to none of the distinguished women in [the history of] asceticism but was even greater than

they. This we can learn from the holy company around her which she brought together and brought toward God, being great in number and in virtuous harmony. This alone, therefore, would be enough for her as far as praise is concerned. so that one might leave the rest of her life unrecorded. I.e., it would be sufficient that she organized such a great flock which we do not doubt that she will increase, guard, and guide. For even after having left this life, she has not been separated from them. but she is present and helps every soul which loves wisdom and zealously seeks her life and words, especially now that she has stopped the struggles [fights] of askeses [the ascetic life], and exists with a naked soul free from toil. She is cleansed of the struggle regarding her own considerations, and she can cleanse our own [minds] through holy grace. She manifestly appears among those who lived, like her, free. She comes to us with love, prudence, and the foresight of an affectionate mother. Still, each of her achievements must be recorded for it is possible to justly honor her for everyone of the things recorded and to receive no small benefit from them. I will start narrating her story in a little while, you must pay close attention and emulate her. For where there is a wise and pious word, the hearer must pay attention to the narrative, so that he [the

narrator] imitates the good farmer and the listener the good land which receives the seeds. For if this does not happen so, the teacher will be giving his words in vein and to no purpose, and the hearer will not learn anything new from the narration, but will leave empty. But being persuaded that better things prevail among you, as the blessed Paul says, when I speak of these things concerning her, I shall follow the habit of narrators, as I said above..

NOTE:

Paradise was a generic name for all works on the Egyptian monks: "Liber qui appellantur Paradysus." C. Butler, *The Lausiatic History of Palladius*, Vol. II, (Cambridge, 1904) p.8; "Puredeieos" in *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, ed. G.W.H. Lamp, (Oxford, 1961), p.1013.

2.

There is a vast and great region, subject to the Roman Empire, that lies on the frontier of Cilicia and Isauria. It is called Pamphylia, probably because of the great number of inhabitants who came from every land. It has forty cities. One of them is called Perge, whence the wellknown and blessed Matrona came. She received the customary upbringing and liberal education from her parents

until she came to marriageable age. She was given in marriage to a man called Domitianus and became the mother of one daughter. She [the daughter] was named Theodote for she [Matrona], abandoning everything as we shall soon show, dedicated her to God. So, as she [Matrona] became moderate and modest after her marriage, she absolutely neglected adornment and makeup which were customary among women who love adornments, and tried to fashion her ways in dignity and sobriety. How she did not care for her body, neither using a bath nor wanting to have intercourse with her husband, for she had in mind the saying of the blessed Paul that; "They that have wives be as though they had none." [I Cor. VII.29j. I do not narrate more fully in order to shorten the narrative.

Having left her fatherland by the will of the God of all and the consent of her husband who was her fellow traveller but not of the same opinion as she concerning the good things she had in mind, she arrived at the queen of cities, Constantinople. Once she was in the imperial city, she visited the churches of the saints frequently. There, not only during the day but by night too, she continued praying and making vigils and humbling her body by fasting, so it would be submissive to the pious designs of the soul. For she did not regard the

body as the most hated enemy like the illreputed and abominable Manicheans, but she handled its irrational impulses with great intelligence, bringing it to a right order, and believing in that the blessed Paul says, "... make not provisions for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof." [Rom. XII1. 14]. Therefore, she was not content with humbling the body, nor did she consider it a great thing, unless she could also help the needy. Without being noticed by her husband, she cared for the poor with all the power she had. what is more, is that she has a young and vigorous body in which it is usual for the waves of desire to be aroused more strongly. For she was twentyfive years old when she carried out the activities of ascetics before entering the state of asceticism. She was training and preparing herself beforehand for the future. In the good and God-serving exercise, she had as a teacher the blessed Eugenia who, having virginity in body and manliness at heart, showed the nobility of her soul not only by her name but in fact [practice] too. She was one of those who devoted themselves to night-long psalmodies and who showed the things that belong to the martyrs by martyrs.

3.

As the blessed Matrona did these things, a great sorrow held her husband, Domitianus. He was

driven to improper thoughts and imagined that the blessed woman had become a prostitute because she frequented the nightlong vigils. From this a struggle developed between them; for Domitianus prevented her from going to those meetings, while the blessed Matrona forced him to allow her to do this. Having persuaded him with many words for many days, she came to the church of the Holy Apostles and there she exerted herself most earnestly and invoked them with tears saying; "Have mercy upon me, O Holy Apostles and light(s) of the universe. Be concerned about me that the Lord [Jesus] Christ would deliver me from this vain life, and that I would be worthy to serve Him truthfully. For I fear the judgement and I fear the punishment. O Holy Apostles, neither neglect my lamentable entreaties, nor reject me as an unworthy woman, but lead me and the whole world toward the philanthropous God, as you have led yourselves. Soften the heart of my husband who is hindering and obstructing me. Help me and grant me succor. I beg and beseech you." When the blessed woman had prayed to them in those and similar words, evening fell and the doorkeepers of the church, as usual, ordered everybody to go out. In the porticoes near the church, she found the home of a certain acquaintance of hers, Susanne, and he stayed with her because of her virtuous life.

Susanna was enrolled in the order of widows there, having adopted, from an early age, virginity and life in God. Matrona, having spent the night with her, went to her teacher Eugenia on the next day. She exchanged words [with Eugenia] more ardently concerning the matters at hand. This was done because of her great love for the Lord, and her contempt of the pleasure of this life. As many arguments were proposed, and neither the pupil weakened nor was the teacher exhausted, they considered, before anything else, matters concerning her daughter, Theodote. The blessed Matrona said something which was like Abraham and in truth superior to her nature; "Let nothing be in common between me and my child, but let the faithful Susanna take her. Let the ascetic life accept me." These things no sooner said then done. Therefore, the blessed Susanna took the child, Theodote, and filled the role of a mother to her.

10.

So when the blessed Matrona was separated from the monastery, having been taken away by the deacon Marcellus, she was received again at the home of Susanna. But before the blessed woman had come out of the monastery, God, who does the will of those who fear Him and always cooperates for the good of those who love Him [Rom. VIII. 28],

took her daughter, Theodote, to himself, so that she [Matrona] would not add discouragement and put an end to her purpose by thinking about her [Theodote]. Therefore, Matrona, having found out that Theodote had died, did not grieve, but rather was delighted that she was free from her [Theodote's] care and that the dead girl departed before she had tried the bad things of life. And as much as the separation from the monastery distressed her, the death of her daughter comforted her. For such is the work of God who lightened her in one way as she was depressed in another.

The holy Matrona was in hiding with the virtuous Susanna, or rather it was God who was looking after her through Susanna, as a spiritual treasure destined to enrich and enlighten many souls. But, although she was in hiding, her fame proclaimed her everywhere, and reaching every ear and resounding, proclaimed that she was the woman who lived in a monastery of men without being detested, but was not completely unnoticed.

When Domitianus, her husband, learned these things about her, he ran like a savage beast to the monastery of the blessed Basianus, after having gone to other monasteries. He cried violently and shouted aloud, knocking at the gates with stones

and saying: "Give me my wife, give me my hope, give me my solace, for what God had joined together, you should not put asunder" Matt. XIX.6: Mk X. 91. Having said these and similar things and having misrepresented Eugenia, as having led her into this, and having done many evil things, he heard from Eugenia the following; "I do not know who is the woman of whom you speak. I did lead a eunuch, named Babylas who wished to be saved, into the monastery." The disciples of the blessed Basianus said to him, "Brother, we did not receive any woman, for our monastery is a men's not a women's, monastery. We did receive a eunuch by the name of Babylas. Until recently, he was pleased with our way of life and remained with us. Then, he said that he decided to go to Jerusalem and shut himself in a cave, for he considered that to be better. Since this was his intention, we let him go a few days ago. Whether he remained in this city or went to the Holy Land, as he said, only God knows, for we have no information about him. As for you, who are now throwing stones and curses, if you wish to be saved, we will receive you with joy and we will not reproach you for the violence. For we are taught by the Lord to receive those who persecute us. For He received the persecutor Paul and made him an evangelist. Therefore, we will receive you, since you are a man,

even if you are such a one [persecutor]. For this is called, and is, a monastery of men. And if you do not know this, go, and the whole city will assure you about it." When Domitianus heard these things, he was stung with great anger and burned with wrath. But he had nothing reasonable to say or do, since he heard that the man they had accepted was a eunuch and that he was not with them. So he left, downcast and distressed.

12.

Since it was necessary to guarantee this greatest virtue and life [ascetic life] through signs, the Lord did not withhold them. For at that time, the honorable head of the holy John, the Forerunner and Baptist, was discovered. It was revealed in this fashion: For many days, a farmer, one of the natives, noticed a fire coming from the place where he was and where the holy head of the Baptist was [to be] found. As he was not able to understand the significance of the phenomenon, he went to the bishop and gave him a full description of what he saw. The bishop, understanding that the fire signalled a mystery, was neither delayed nor deterred. He came to the place and brought with him all his clergymen. He held a prayer and ordered the earth to be dug up. And when this was done, an earthen jar, which contained the holy

head of the Forerunner, was found. As this took place, it was heard all around that country. [People of] every age, together with those in monasteries, came there so that they would bring it [the holy head], with psalmodies and proper honor, to the church. At that time, the blessed and truly perfect servant of Christ came with the sisters from the monastery. She was [just] one of those who assembled for the veneration of the holy head. Myrrh was coming forth from it for the assurance of the assembled multitude and the confirmation of the discovery. And since everyone wanted to be anointed with it for blessing, she [Matrona] went to get some for herself. Having drawn [the myrrh], she unwillingly became the dispenser of it. For the crowd did not make a way for her [to withdraw] and she was stopped among them and was forced to distribute [the myrrh] to all. Everyone was shouting aloud, "Divide [it] among all, O servant of Christ." As she was doing so and distributing generously to all, a man, who had been born blind, running past everyone; the bishop and the clergymen (for all of them were distributing [the myrrh]), came toward her entreating and begging that she anoint his eyes with the ointment. The blessed women extended her hands and did to him what he asked for. The blind man recovered his sight at once and began to honor God who allowed

him, through the blessed Matrona, to see the image and perceive the beauty of man and delivered him from continuous falls and many stumblings, the cause of which was his blindness and the accompanying darkness.

It was this miracle that showed her as a great woman at that time. For everyone strove anxiously to see her, stepping on each other and standing on the tips of their toes. After these things, she was admired even more by all. For everyone said, "She is the one who lived alone with men and was undetected for a while. She was glorified for this through the gift of healing which she received from Christ."

29

When the deacon Marcellus heard these things, he went and gave the holy Basianus a full account. He said that the Lord Babylas, the eunuch, had arrived from the East and had with him a sister [a nun]. The holy Basianus listened and was greatly annoyed. He said to the deacon, "Why did he come back?" The deacon said, "He came to be blessed by your holiness." The holy man thanked the Lord saying to Him in his usual words, "Blessed be the Lord." And pausing a little, he said to the deacon, "Go son, and look around for a dwelling place where he may stay. God and we will take care of

the place's rent. Pay also for the fare [of the ship] and take him there." Then the deacon returned and did everything just as he was ordered. Having found a suitable place near the church of St. Thomas, above the jetty, he gave a deposit. He took the key, and going down by the sea, he brought back the blessed Matrona and the sister who was with her at the same time.

The free women who had sailed with her asked [to accompany her] and went up together to the monastery with her in order to be blessed by the holy old man. When they came there and the holy man saw the blessed Matrona and the free women who were with her, he thanked the free women and prayed saying, "May the Lord Jesus Christ give you the reward of compassion, because you took her with you and did not allow her to suffer in any way." To the blessed Matrona, who was lying at his feet, he said, "Arise child, what is it that you wish again [this time]? Why did you come here?" The blessed Matrona answered and said, "I came, holy father, to be blessed by your holy mouth," He inquired about the sister who was with her and when he learned whence she joined her, the blessed and truly holy man became dumbfounded and wept. He paused a little and then ordered the deacon to bring three blessed [loaves of] bread (*treis eulogios* used in the eucharist), and three

belts, and three pallia. When they were brought, he prayed for many hours and sealed them and gave them to her saying, "Go child, sit and save souls, taking care of your affairs and setting up your conduct as a model, so that the very things that you teach by words, those who are taught by you will see them accomplished by you through deeds. Because of the holy canon, do not receive a slave girl against the will of her master or mistress.

38

At the annual feast of the victorious martyr Laurentius, the city came together, en masse, to his holy church. For his celebration is great and is gloriously carried out, because on this day, a fragrant ointment comes forth from his holy relics to the honor and glory of his martyrdom. There, in the congregation with all the people, came two sisters, who were religious in their way of life and notable by race. to partake of the holy myrrh. Having received the blessing along with everyone else after the completion of the holy mysteries and the end of the mass, they left by one o' the roads that was adjacent to the monastery. They heard the sound of psalmodies coming from the buildings. The, were amazed by what sounded strange [wonderful] to their ears. For they knew that the place was a villa not a monastery. They

inquired of those who were living near thf place about those who were singing psalms. When they [the neighbors] told them about the holy woman and fully described things that happened to her, they [the sisters] left their litters and went to [see] her. They kept looking at that holy and angelic habit and admiring the strange [wonderful] and different way of clothing. They remained for many hours and benefited from and were admonished by, her. They were greatly encouraged by her holy words and by the strange habit of the sisters. So that one of them, Athanasia by name, having been seized by divine love, said to her sister, "Go, my lady sister, go to your home, fare well' for from now on, this holy woman is my mother, father, and sister. What have I to gain from what remains of this vain life? Even if I seem to have or control something, isn't there death after all these things? Shall I not turn to ashes and dust? Am I not today attended upon by boyservants and eunuchs and a little later escorted by them to the grave and will be trampled upon? Will not glory be followed by disgrace and suffering obscure admired beauty? So go, please go, go in peace and let me mourn my sins."

When the honorable and blessed Athanasia said these things, she brought fear and anxiety to her sister who was compelled to say to her, "Haven't I given your husband sureties about you? Having known beforehand what you intended to do, wouldn't he rightaway have prevented you from coming? What did happen to you all of a sudden? Why do you insist on torturing me with temptation? What can I say about you if I leave you? Keep your desire within you and guard your design in your heart. I will not force you to give up this good undertaking even if it is very burdensome and difficult to endure and accomplish. Only come with me now. Spare me these troubles and embarrassment(s). Manage your home well, persuade your husband, and you will not [have to] change your good purpose."

Having said these things and more, she also begged the blessed Matrona to make her [Athanasia] go to her home. The blessed woman sat with both of them and listened to what both were saying. And while she admired how sudden her [Athanasia's] change was and blessed the sincerity of her faith, she admitted that her [the sister's] advice was reasonable and understood how important the matter was. She said to the blessed Athanasia, "Now child, go with your sister to your home for a while. Test yourself and do not let your

design be known to your husband. And if this thought persists within you, then God's will be done. For God's love is like a seed which, while it grows rightaway, does not bear fruit immediately. As the seed will sprout wherever it is cast, but will not come to perfect growth everywhere, so the word of God inspires warmth in every soul it enters but is not kept by every soul it comes to, but is either suppressed by time or quelled by the anxieties of life, or dies out through indifference. Thus it is neither strange, child, nor peculiar that you, having come here and received the sparks of the love of God, should rightaway acquire a desire for the ascetic life. Nor does this make you worthy of a great approval. We must not trust you now until you can bring forth a witness. For you are a very young woman and [still] have the burning fire of corporeal desire in you. The flower and beauty of bodily form show themselves clearly in you. You are endowed with great wealth, living with your husband now, and have a notable family. You possess great wealth and your poor body is delicate and very weak and you are [accustomed to being] served by slavewomen and boyservants in every way. The ascetic life, child, is for him who serves not for him who is served.

40

Having said these and similar things, the blessed Matrona was not able to convince her. For the desire for the ascetic life and the love of God on the one hand enabled Athanasia to oppose the teacher, on the other, urged her to be ready to agree to everything. The blessed woman, therefore, summoned the deacon Marcellus and gave him full account concerning her [Athanasia]. The deacon exhorted Athanasia a great deal and prayed for her saying, "The holy God, who placed this thought within you and warmed your heart so that you may love Him fullheartedly, will fulfill your desire and complete your course." He persuaded her to leave the monastery. The blessed ones said these things not because they were opposed to her good purpose and her zeal but in order to test her design, and fearing lest she begin erroneously and be unable to fulfill her purpose, because of her youth: for she was eighteen years old. Then, after she was persuaded, the blessed Athanasia went back with her sister.

41

She [Athanasia] did not abandon her purpose, nor did her good zeal decrease. but she followed a spiritual strictness. She trained herself and became accustomed to humility by bodily exercise. She prayed incessantly, and continuously

lamented and denounced her sins. But while the blessed Athanasia was [engaged] in this most beautiful pursuit and good exercise that was beneficial to the soul, her first and only begotten child died. She did not grieve much or mourn improperly, as it is customary for women, who love their children to suffer. But she wept a little, as much as beseemed her [sex] nature to show. She did not submit to, nor did, cowardly things. And after a few days, she came back to the monastery. She did not bring anything at all for herself as regards domestic service; neither fragrant wine nor white bread nor fish, nor pillow nor small carpet, nor anything else that a distinguished and wealthy woman is accustomed to. But she was content with their [the sisters'] austere way of life. She endured the pain [of sleeping] on the floor. She was satisfied with vegetables with no oil and a few dry figs. She endured the roughness of mats instead of the softness of pillows. For that holy, honored, and beloved of God community of the blessed Matrona did not have even this. But being rich in godly poverty and abounding in love, it [the community] enjoyed the limited space and poverty [considering it] as comfort and luxury. She [Athanasia] completed three days and endured them without pain and did not miss a single daily or nightly psalmody. She learned well how the sisters

assemble for the time of psalmody, how they kneel, how they rise, how they begin, and how they sing standing up without distraction, and how the blessed Matrona, from evening to matins, did not lay down her body for a rest, but satisfied the need of sleep seated on a small wooden stool and kept this position even after the prayers and the great toil of standing. [She learned] how the blessed woman, when the sisters were asleep, would first spread her hands in prayer and weep, and [then] wake them at the time of psalmody. She [Matrona] did all these things in imitation of her hegumen, the most holy Basianus. Having learned all these things, she [Athanasia] returned to her home.

42

Having the harvest as an excuse, for it was the right season, she [Athanasia] left her husband home and went to her country house. There, she made a praiseworthy imitation of the monastery. She prayed the third, sixth, and ninth hours and performed everything else the same way as [in] the monastery. There, she was informed by her senior chambermaid, who was taking care of her movable property, that the boyservant, Callopodius, had broken into the chest that was left behind, had taken a bag of gold [money], and disappeared. When the blessed Athanasia heard these things,

she entrusted the whole matter to God, as a worthy woman should, and went to her home. The boy had stolen the gold under instructions from her husband. Since he was an extravagant man and his own [money] was not enough, he got the opportunity when the honorable and praiseworthy Athanasia was at her country house. He ordered the maid, against her will and contrary to custom, to leave the house. As the maid, unwillingly, came from her post down to the door, he ordered the boy to break into the chest, take the bag which his hand would find, and come down. Then when the boy emerged from behind coming down the stairs, carrying the stolen gold on his shoulders, and followed by his master, the chambermaid met him and, suspecting what had been done, she stopped the boy and put her hand in the bag. Then when his master shouted from behind, she let the boy go. He went down with his master to the door and gave him the gold.

The maid went and reported the wicked act. Then when the blessed Athanasia returned from her country house, she learned what had happened from the maid. Calmly, she summoned the boy and asked him why he did this thing. When he, rightaway, told her all about the matter and that he did it on his master's order, she let him go as guiltless. She found the accusation of theft a

reasonable excuse for divorce from her husband, and she lived alone avoiding him [away from him].

51

For after having adorned the desert through his achievements and destroyed many wiles of the devil, that holy man, the companion of angels and equal to holy men in honor, received the rule of monastic life from God and was taught the service by an angle. He founded many monasteries, according to his own rule throughout the whole world. He founded two in the queen of cities. One through himself, a monastery of men which, by the grace of God, still stands until the present time, following his rule and receiving its name from him. [That is to say that it was called the monastery of Basianus.] The other [monastery] was founded by the most holy Matrona, and was also founded to follow the same monastic rule. It received its name from her. [It was called the monastery of Matrona.] For in the same way as the most holy Matrona, having given up [her old life?], was deemed worthy to receive the habit of a monk by the holy man, in the same way did she continue to give the habit to those who came to her. And just as the most holy Basianus laid the hand upon those whom he ordained after a long time and with careful examination, so the blessed Matrona would not

consent to give the habit to the women who came [to her], until time had borne witness to the woman's intention. Again, she performed, before the holy altar, just as the most holy old man did. The sacrificial vessels were prepared, the appropriate readings were read, and psalmodies were sung: then the monks received the holy habit with a great admonition and instruction. They confessed the Lord's crucifixion and vowed the denial of their own desires by assuming the habit. They were first tonsured by him [Basianus], then they girded themselves, and finally he invested them with the pallium. So too did the blessed Matrona before the holy altar. She received those women who came to her and gave them over to [the sisters] who would take care of them. She then consecrated them before the holy altar after those who had received them had testified as to their conduct. She did everything in imitation of her hegumen. For at the time when she returned from Beirut, he [Basianus] ordained her bishop, so to speak, of souls, and gave her the authority to lay the hand upon others. He [Basianus] did not give her woolen girdles and veils which women are accustomed to use, but [he gave her] men's wide black leather belts and men's white pallia, which they wear continuously. This order has been preserved in her monastery until the present by the good will and philanthropy of

our Lord Jesus Christ, and is observed by those who, after her, were in charge of its [the order's] affairs.

52

Thus, the blessed Matrona lived, piously and devoutly, keeping the monastic rule which had been given to her by the most holy Basianus. She reached the hundredth year, having lived by herself for twentyfive years. The rest, she had spent in training (living in a monastery). Having completed the course of her ascetic trial well, and having kept the orthodox faith until the end, [II Tim.IV.7] she left this life in a good old age, on the seventh day of the month of November, and was joined to her holy fathers and brothers from of old [Since the world began]. She left as her heir and guardian of her flock the honorable and dearest to God, the deaconess Mouselia who was full of years and sagacity and was rich in humility and love.

The spiritual fathers and brothers of the most pious and holy Matrona were and are the most holy Basianus, her hegumen, and all those who will keep his [rule] after him. May we all be worthy to receive mercy through their entreaties on the day of judgement, by the grace and philanthropy of our Lord Jesus Christ, for His is the glory and the power for ever and ever, Amen.

