SAINT EPHRAIM THE SYRIAN
—Commemorated January 28th—

   When the city of Nisivis was conquered by the Persians, St. Ephraim the Syrian left his homeland and decided to journey to Edessa in order to venerate the holy relics that were found in that city, and also in hopes of finding a virtuous and knowledgeable man from whom he could receive spiritual benefit. Towards the end of his journey, just prior to entering the city of Edessa, he prayed with the following words: "O Master and Lord Jesus Christ, please allow me to meet a person in Edessa who can speak to me with words that are spiritually edifying for my soul."

   Having completed his petition, he proceeded to enter the city, attentively looking to take notice of such a person. Walking along with such intentions, the first person that he came across was a harlot, who was dressed immodestly as customary for immoral women of promiscuity. This unexpected encounter was a result of God's providence, Who oftentimes uses unexpected means to achieve the exact opposite through mysterious and unfathomable processes.

   When St. Ephraim saw the harlot, he was surprised and saddened, and he stood still wondering how the exact opposite of what he prayed for actually transpired. In the meantime, the lady also stopped across from him and stared at him for some time. The saint then, in order to make her feel ashamed, said, "Why are you standing there and looking at me immodestly and shamelessly, O woman?" She in turn responded, "What I am doing is not so bad, because I was formed from your side when the Lord created the both of us. You, on the other hand, should look toward the earth from where you were brought forth. Thus, you should not even have looked at me at all in the face, especially since you are a monk and are supposed to have mortified the flesh."

   Having heard this unexpected response, St. Ephraim thanked the lady at length, acknowledging that she had spoken the truth, while he glorified and praised the Lord for fulfilling his prayer and edifying him in this manner.