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The 5 D's in Every Christian's Life— **DANCING, DATING, DRESSING, DRINKING & DRUGS**

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Three essential principles of Orthodox Christianity:

1. We are the Image of the Lord Jesus Christ. “God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him, male and female He created them.” (Genesis 1:27). And thus, this implies that we are not Egyptians, we are not Americans, we are not Japanese, we are not Indians, but **WE ARE CHRISTIANS**, and so any of our behaviors, thoughts, emotions should be according to God’s fitting image. St. John Chrysostom said “God created us in His image and likeness and every Christian is obliged to keep himself and to preserve and honor himself in God’s image and to be sanctified by good works.” And since we are Christians, we should do our ‘good works’ for the Glory of God as St. Paul instructed us saying “therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the Glory of God.” (1 Corinthians 10:31).

2. We are Children of God and Children of Light, not children of the world (1 John 4:4-5). Many times we forget that this temporal world is really not our permanent home as The Divine Liturgy says, “we are sojourners in this world.” And thus our minds should not be according to the commandments of the world, but of heaven as St. Paul says, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” (Romans 12:2) and we should “set (our) minds on things above, not on things on the earth” (Colossians 3:2). And even Our Lord warned us that we do not belong to the world for He says, “If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world...” (John 15:19). Since our permanent citizenship is in Heaven and we are heirs to the Kingdom of God, we should not be upset or shaken when the world approves of activities that are not Godly.

3. We are the Temple of God. “Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is



*The Tabernacle and the
Ark of the Covenant*

in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?” (1 Corinthians 6:19). We are the Temple of God because 1) We were consecrated to God through the Holy Myron during the Holy Baptism, and so our bodies do not belong to us, but they belong to God meaning that we should treat our bodies according to God’s Will. And 2) We are the Temple of God because God resides and abides in us through our partaking of The Holy Eucharist.

DANCING:

Dancing can be defined as moving any part of our body to some musical stimuli, e.g. if we are listening to the Midnight Praises and we move our foot with the rhythm, we are considered ‘dancing’. So is it wrong for a Christian to dance? It depends on what type of dancing we are doing for there are two types, Godly Dancing and Worldly Dancing.

1. Dancing for the Glory of God:

King David wrote the beautiful Psalms and his heart danced while chanting them and playing his harp, and also when he returned the Ark of Covenant to Jerusalem, David “danced before the Lord with all his might.” (II Samuel 6: 14). Even though Michal, daughter of Saul, rebuked David for dancing, he answered her saying; “It was before the Lord, who chose me...to appoint me ruler over the people of the Lord, over Israel.” (II Samuel 6:21). So David’s dancing was justified because he was ecstatic that God chose him to be king and for returning the Ark of Covenant peacefully, and thus we can conclude that when King David danced, it was **for the Glory of God** or Godly Dancing.

Miriam, Moses’ sister, danced. She took the timbrel in her hand and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances (Exodus 15). Let us examine closely WHY Miriam and the other women danced; they danced because they were full of joy for God’s mercy for saving His people from Pharaoh and his horsemen by having them drown in the Red Sea. Miriam exclaimed while dancing, “Sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has



Crossing the Red Sea

thrown into the sea!” (Exodus 15:21). And thus Miriam danced because of her exceeding gladness that God saved His people, so this dance was also **for the Glory of God.**

2. Dancing Stimulates Lust:

Any dancing that is performed to fulfill our desires and not for the Glory of God is considered Worldly Dancing. In an article “Shall we Dance”, it is stated “because of its physical appeal, dance itself leads to erotic purposes and arouses the lusts of the flesh” which St. Paul sternly warns us to beware of (Galatians 5:19). In the story of Herodias’ daughter, Salome, who danced and pleased Herod, we observe that her dancing stimulated lust in Herod. Was this dance for the Glory of God? NO, because at the end Herod was so aroused by her dancing that he was willing to give anything to her. Her dancing distorted his thinking so much that he was willing to give half his kingdom to her!!! (Mark 6).

3. Dancing May Offend Others:

We may say that we can dance, but we will not be aroused with lustful thoughts. This may be true, but what about the others? Worldly Dancing involves two persons, so if one person is not offended and able to control his thoughts, what about the other person? St. Paul tells us “not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother’s way.” (Romans 14:13), so how can we provoke others to sin because of our actions?

4. To Dance or Not to Dance, that is the Question:

Should we attend dances at school (e.g. Homecoming, Prom, etc)? We may ask, “what is wrong with attending these dances if we do not dance?” We will not be glorifying God or upholding His Image at these dances, whether we dance or not. It can be exemplified as attending a rave; we may go to the rave convincing ourselves that we will not use any illicit drugs (e.g. Ecstasy), but the environment itself is inappropriate for we are Godly children and these are NOT Godly places. Thus, these worldly dances are not Godly places, and consequently if we attend them, we may offend others or we may even become offended by watching others dance. So, when is it appropriate to dance? Since Worldly Dancing does arouse sensual desires, it is only limited to married couples for “marriage is honorable

among all, and the bed undefiled” (Hebrews 13:4).

DATING:

King Solomon the Wise said, “To everything there is a season and a time to every purpose under heaven.” (Ecclesiastes 3:1). Why is dating not appropriate for the teenage years?

1. Dating Escalates to a Fire of Sins:

Let us examine how dating can possibly lead to sin. Let us imagine becoming acquainted with someone that we are attracted to allowing ourselves to spend more time with him/her on numerous dates. We promise ourselves that we will not be emotionally involved, and we would go out only as ‘friends’. Nevertheless, by a vast number of interactions with this person, we begin to truly love him/her and since we love them very much, the devil begins to tempt our desires, and we yield to his temptations and lose the purity and innocence of our thoughts and/or bodies. We may feel guilty for committing these sins, but since our desires are aroused, we continue to engage in our sinful deeds. Of course these events would not have happened within a week, but as time passed, we would have become, without even realizing it, more emotionally involved with this significant other, and thus committing sin. Do we see how ONE SINGLE date led to a destruction of sins as St. James warned us that this would happen for he says, “but each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and sin when it is full-grown, brings forth death.” (James 1:14-15).

2. There is NO LIMIT with dating:

Some of us may have read the above and thought “this will never happen to me. I know my limit.” But what is the limit? Is the limit just having thoughts about this person, or holding hands, or kissing, etc? We could say to ourselves, “my limit is just to think about this person. Nothing else will happen, and besides how harmful can my thoughts be?” It is true that no one will be hurt by these thoughts, but they do not coincide with the three basic principles mentioned previously. And if our thoughts continue, they could lead to action meaning that our limit of only having thoughts of this person could be stretched to holding hands, and then after a

couple of weeks, the limit again could be stretched to kissing, and so on. **SO THERE IS NO LIMIT WHEN PLAYING WITH THE DEVIL.**

3. Don't Trust the Devil:

There is a popular Arabic proverb that says, 'when a girl and a boy are together alone and are attracted to each other, the third person that is **ALWAYS** in their midst is the devil.' When being alone with a person we are attracted to, we may try to convince ourselves that we are very strong and have control over our emotions, but why should we even tempt ourselves? The temptation will be there for we cannot deny the existence of the devil's temptations, and thus the devil is not to be trusted, for St. Peter describes him as "a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour." (I Peter 5:8). Sometimes we argue with our parents or our church leaders about dating and how they do not trust us. We should have complete faith in our parents and church leaders, for they **DO HAVE COMPLETE TRUST IN US**, but it is **THE DEVIL THAT THEY DO NOT TRUST**. Thus, if we find ourselves in a situation where the devil may entice us, we should escape for St. Paul warns us to "flee youthful lusts" (II Timothy 2:22). By rejecting the devil's traps and not yielding to his temptations, we will be upholding God's Image portraying ourselves as the Temples of God.

4. Dating is Losing:

When we date during our teenage years, usually one person loses and the other wins. It could happen that when two persons are involved, at the beginning they both share the same feelings, but as the relationship proceeds, one person is emotionally exhausted while the other no longer returns the same feelings. And thus this can lead to sadness, anger, and even depression. This is why the Holy Bible tells us to "keep (our) heart with all diligence" (Proverbs 4:23). We should guard our hearts and be careful whom we share our feelings with and whom we give our affections to.



Sts Peter and Paul supporting the church.

5. Courtship Accompanies Maturity and Starting a Family:

Dating (the word preferably used is courtship) coincides with maturity and those who wish to start a family. When we are about 25 years old and have finished college, we are not only financially stable, but we are emotionally, mentally, and spiritually stable. We have completed the years of adolescence and by acquiring experiences at college and work; we develop into a mature and stable adult. Courtship is for those who are **SERIOUS** about starting a family and getting married. Courtship leads to interacting and knowing a person

better which leads to an engagement period, which leads to marriage, and all of this is done under the supervision of the Church. When we are 16 or 18 years old, are we serious about starting a family? Can we support a family at age 18? Most probably not, so courtship is reserved for those who finish college and are ready to establish a Christian family.

DRESSING:

"Put on the Lord Jesus Christ..." (Romans 13:14). Our behavior and the way we dress should not only be for the Glory of God, but also pleasing and not offending in the sight of men (Romans 12:17 & II Corinthians 8:21).

1. The Interview:

How many of us have attended an important interview either for college, or a new job, or for a scholarship program, and we wore our favorite GAP jeans or our Polo shirt? Probably none of us dressed this way because we wanted to leave a strong impact on the interviewer and for him to hire us for the new job or accept us in the college program. In the Book of Sirach (a book of Apocrypha), it says "a man may be known by his look and one that has understanding by his countenance when you meet him. A man's attire and excessive laughter and gait show who he is" (Sirach 19:29-30). And thus we 'Dress for Success' because we want to leave a good



influence on those we meet. So if dressing for an interview, which is a temporary and passing event, is so important, should not dressing for Church be as important for we are meeting our Lord?

2. Meeting The Lord at His House:

The expression of not judging a book by its cover obviously should be followed, and it is true that God looks at our hearts and not at our outward appearance (1 Samuel 16:7), but this actually is applied to the humility and meekness of heart. If we have appropriate attire for Church, should we not wear it? Let us answer this question honestly, how many times did we attend Vespers or The Divine Liturgy and we did not think twice about what we chose to wear? We would wear very casual or informal clothes. If we were attending a social gathering at school or at a friend's house, we could change our clothes maybe 3 times until we found the most suitable attire for the event. So why do we not pay the same respect to Church as we do to social events? When attending Church Services, we should dress well because we are meeting our King and Saviour, and thus we should choose the BEST ATTIRE for Him, meaning if the best attire that is hanging in our closet is a pair of jeans or capri's, so be it. But if our best attire is a collared dress shirt with clean slacks, and a tie, and we decided not to wear it, are we not disrespecting and dishonoring our Lord and His House? It is like being invited to a King's Palace or visiting the White House, should we not wear our 'Sunday Best'? We observe this when our Lord entered Jerusalem; since people were rejoicing in receiving their King, we can conclude that they put on their finest clothes, cut palm leaves, spread out their clothes, and shouted with joy rejoicing in their King.

There is a story of how a bishop during The Divine Liturgies would dress very extravagantly. His tonia and his robe were glorious with jewels and rubies that shined. It happened that one day a visiting priest was praying with him, and the priest judged this bishop in his heart saying 'why is the bishop wearing such expensive and extravagant clothes.' After The Divine Liturgy ended, the bishop perceived these thoughts and so he took the priest privately to his room. The bishop began to take off his robe and his crown and his tonia

and underneath all these lavish clothes were the oldest and dirtiest rags the priest ever saw. The bishop spoke, 'You see, my son, I dressed with the glorious tonia and robe because I am meeting my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, MY KING. Do you think it would be appropriate to meet Him with my rags?' The priest humbly apologized to the bishop and prostrated to him a metanoia.

After meditating on this story, we should NOT rush out and buy the most expensive clothing and dress extravagantly for everything should be done with discretion and wisdom, but the moral of the story is to choose our best, BUT IN MODERATION AND WITH DISCERNMENT, clothing for meeting Our Lord Jesus Christ.

3. Having Two Wardrobes:

Sometimes in our closet, we have two different wardrobes, one for school and one for church. What we wear at school (e.g. sleeveless shirts/dresses, short skirts, etc.) may not be appropriate for church, and thus we should ask ourselves 'are we only Christians on Sundays? Are we Christians part-time or full-time?' When we shop for our clothing, we should ask ourselves: 'would this be appropriate to attend a church activity, is the clothing too revealing, or too offending for God or others?' And thus by asking ourselves these questions, we will be able to uphold God's Image and portray ourselves as Children of God, not only at church, but also at college or any other place we may go for we are Godly children everyday of our lives and not only on Sundays.

DRINKING & DRUGS:

"Do NOT LOOK on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it swirls around smoothly; at the last it bites like a serpent and stings like a viper. Your eyes will see strange things and your heart will utter perverse things...when shall I awake that I may SEEK ANOTHER drink?" (Proverbs 23:31-35). The Holy Bible is very clear about drinking and using drugs for it knows they lead to a very destructive addiction. Many youth do not consider that alcohol and drugs are actually gateways for other problems.



According to Dr. Atef Moawod, there are many negative outcomes of drinking and using drugs:

- 1/2 of US car accidents are due to drinking
- Employees on drugs miss 10 times more workdays than non-users and have 3 times more injuries to themselves and others
- Those who drink and/or use drugs are more likely to steal to support their expensive habit
- Many airplane accidents are related to the abuse of drugs (esp. cocaine) by pilots
- Approximately 22 million people use cocaine.

If we always read or hear about these outcomes that are related to drinking and/or using drugs, then why do so many youth either begin drinking and using drugs or are already addicted?

1. “Evil company corrupts good habits.” (1 Corinthians 15:33):

We first should ask ourselves, “who are our friends?” If our friends are a negative influence on us, and they tend to drink or use drugs, we are inclined to imitate their actions. There is a saying that says ‘Tell me your friends, and I will tell you what kind of person you are.’ Are we allowing our friends to choose us, or **ARE WE CHOOSING OUR FRIENDS WISELY?** If we examine our friends and we realize that they do not help us grow spiritually, but actually drive us farther away from God, then we should be wise and end this relationship as St. Paul instructs us not to keep company with them (1 Corinthians 5:11) for they are children of the world, while we are Children of God and Children of Light.

2. Saying NO is hard without God:

We have all seen and/or heard the advertisements whether on the television, or the radio, or at school, or on billboards that we should “JUST SAY NO.” For those of us who have experienced peer pressure concerning alcohol or drugs, did we find that ‘Just Saying NO was easy? If it was difficult, then it is because our weakness is coming from the devil, but as children of God we are strong for God is abiding within us, and “God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of POWER...” (2 Timothy 1:7), and St. John the Beloved

and Theologian describes us as **STRONG YOUTH** “because the Word of God abides in (us) and (we) have **OVERCOME** the wicked one” (1 John 2:14). We should then not be intimidated or fearful to say **NO** to alcohol and drugs, but we should repeat psalm 23, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will **FEAR NO EVIL** for You are with me” (Psalm 23:4).

3. No Self-Control:

We all know that alcohol and using drugs are very addictive, so why should we begin to consume them if we know there is a potential abuse, which will override our self-control? Will we allow ourselves to come under the yoke of substance abuse? St. Paul teaches us that we should discipline our body and bring it under subjection (1 Corinthians 9:27), but with substance abuse, we can not discipline our bodies, but instead we become subjected to our bodies. We may say to ourselves, “what harm is there if I drink and not become intoxicated?” Initially there is no harm in drinking, but over time, we see our tolerance for alcohol and even drugs increases, and it is proven that the effects of alcohol on the liver causes damage, a disease termed as cirrhosis. By engaging in alcohol/drug consumption, we no longer become a Temple of God, for how can God be abiding in a body that has alcohol and drugs? Will we allow God to cast us away from His Presence and take His Holy Spirit from us (Psalm 51:11)?

Unfortunately, we have heard and seen many Coptic Orthodox Christian youth drink and/or use drugs, and if we see our brothers or sisters struggling with this particular sin, we should not judge them for “we have all sinned and fall short of the Glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Instead, we should be part of the solution and not the problem, and thus we should pray for them. We need to understand that addiction is a type of disease and can have a very strong hold on the person. Just like no one planned on being diagnosed with cancer or diabetes, no one intended to become an addict. We should help them by being compassionate and sympathetic and encourage them to seek help or if the problem is very serious, we should contact a trusted adult. As H.G. Bishop Youssef said “by helping others get help, that is Christianity in action!”