



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of
the Southern United States

The Monthly Message
to the Priests' Wives
February 2014

Role or Identity (5)

We talked in the last article about the second challenge faced by the priest and his wife which is [the discrepancy between the Private self and the Public self](#). We agreed that the entry of the priest and his family into the circle of light implies them to behave according to the public self more than the private self. We also prescribed their reaction to that challenge which varies between surrender and renunciation of the private self or exaggeration in holding it and total withdrawal away from any participation in any activity.

(3) The third challenge is actually closely connected with the above one and it consists of the offence caused to some of the priests' wives and their children when they face the private self

of the priest. They sometimes feel confused and perplexed out of feeling that there is much discrepancy between the private self of the priest and his public one. When a priest is at home in the midst of his family he then behaves according to his private self in a spontaneous way without any restrictions to the weakest and most private parts of himself. This sometimes goes in contrary to his behavior outside with others where his public self implies him to behave in a way that considers the avoidance of causing offences, the submission to expectations of congregation from him and taking care of the impressions he gives them. At this situation, the priest's wife and his children fall in wrong interpretation of that discrepancy in his behavior considering it to be a type of hypocrisy.

Let us take an example to clarify. Sometimes the priest is keen while dealing with his congregation to show kindness and to keep smiling although being subjected to the many stresses and temptations of the ministry. But this is not the case when he comes back home after a

long hard day of service where his body language shows some frowning, worry and even weariness. There is another example where the priest is keen to show calm reactions when dealing with others while he sometimes loses his temper when dealing with his family members as he may shout at one of them or rebukes him in a harsh way.

How the priest's wife and his children perceive this apparent discrepancy in the priest's behavior? They sometimes feel offended and accuse him of being hypocrite. They may even protest this in different ways that vary from repressed anger, cold anger, passive aggression or even crossing boundaries with him and accusing him in a frank inconvenient way. Some other times they feel frustrated and despaired and this is reflected upon their relationship with the priest which becomes tinged with indifference and isolation. Whether the first reaction happens or the second one, it ends up with them at displacing their anger at the priest upon the church. This in turn may lead to the accumulation of feelings of wrath and bitterness

towards priesthood, and even sometimes towards God Himself.

As for the priest himself, he from his side has **expectations** from his family members to understand the nature of his ministry with all its stresses and challenges. He also expects them to forgive him any human weakness from his side. But as he does not find this understanding, his expectations are frustrated and he feels upset and bitterness. Thus, a mutual feeling of wrath and bitterness accumulates and affects the relationship between the priest and his family members. This feeling is a good medium for Satan to rob the internal peace of all of them, to confuse their spiritual life and to negatively affect their psychological well being. All these factors lead us to consider this challenge to be one of the most dangerous challenges that face the priest and his family.

Then how to solve this problem? How to deal with such a dangerous challenge?

- First, all of them have to **understand the nature of what happens**, the definition of

private self and public self and the nature of challenge that faces them regarding this matter.

- The priest's wife and his children must not interpret the apparent discrepancy they find in the priest behavior as being out of hypocrisy and sanctimoniousness. **They must not deify him. They have to understand his humanity with all its needs and weak points. They must obtain a forgiving heart that does not take heed to trivial unintended mistakes.** They must also understand that the exposure of the weakness of the priest to them does not give them the right to judge and condemn him. **Let them remember that Shem and Japheth, the sons of Noah, when they covered the nakedness of their father they obtained the blessing while Ham, his youngest child, was cursed because he saw it and told others about it** (Gen. 9: 20-27).
- The priest himself has also from his side to struggle in that matter and pray for it. He must remember that if he is required to show calmness and joviality to his congregation, then how much more he is required to show

them to his wife and children *"For if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?"* (1Tim. 3:5).

- Adopting the habit of **frank conversation** between the priest and his family members where all of them can express, in a calm wise atmosphere supported with prayers, their needs, expectations and frustrations. One can also confess his weakness and apologize in a humble way when needed. This will lead to frustrating the trials of Satan and his snares as well as making his venoms that he pours in the thoughts of one against the other ineffective *"Do not grumble against one another brethren, lest you be condemned"* (Jam. 5:9), and also *"And above all things have fervent love for one another, for love will cover a multitude of sins"* (1Peter 4:8).

(To be continued)