



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of
the Southern United States

The Monthly Message
to the Priests' Wives
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The War of Feeling Lonely

One of the most effective weapons used by the devil to wage war against the priest's wife is the weapon of feeling lonely and isolated. In fact the nature of female psychology helps and contributes a lot to this type of war. It is well known that woman actualizes herself through building social bridges and relationships. She is more interested in communication, conversation and intimacy. The most satisfying relationship for her is her relationship with her husband who is the closest one to her heart and mind. Therefore when she fails, for a reason or another, to achieve this she becomes highly frustrated and overwhelmed with deep feelings of loneliness, isolation and absorption in her worries and sufferings.

Causes of the development of these negative feelings within a priest's wife are numerous. Among them are the following:

- 1) A priest's wife may be forced to keep her relationships with the congregation's members on a superficial kind level without allowing these relationships to go deeper. By doing this she protects her husband priest and her children from the severe curiosity, intrusion and breaking privacy of her family. Of course this superficiality in relationships does not satisfy the priest's wife and contributes to her intense feelings of loneliness and isolation despite the huge number of people surrounding her.
- 2) Many times the many tasks of the priest entail that his wife has to perform some tasks by her own without his sharing and this makes her feel lonely. For example, a priest wife may be obliged to take their child to the emergency room due to high fever as she cannot wait for her husband priest until he returns home from a convention or a meeting.
- 3) The tight schedule of the priest may cause him not to give enough time to listen to his wife and to

understand her feelings and this increases her feeling of isolation.

4) The tight schedule of the priest's wife and her many responsibilities make her caring less for her physical, psychological and spiritual well being. This in turn makes her more vulnerable to frustration and chronic feelings of loneliness.

5) The psychology of the priest as a male makes him more interested in practical things and in speedy achievements. Therefore he is not patient enough to listen to the many details his wife is talking about. This makes her feel that he is not interested in her with the same degree he is interested in his congregation. Of course this contributes a lot to her feelings of loneliness.

6) The nature of the priest's service entails his refraining from physical relationship with his wife in certain occasions that may last for relatively long periods. This may make their relationship lukewarm and may cause the wife to feel deprived from the feelings of intimacy and security that she obtains the most through this physical relationship. This in turn deepens her feelings of loneliness and isolation.

7) Most of the times the priest's wife cannot find a good entrusted friend to whom she can vent her secrets. She needs a friend to whom she can turn for help when she feels upset and with whom she can be spontaneous, weeping and laughing when she wants without feeling scrutinized. She needs a friend who loves her for herself not because she is a priest's wife, who accepts her without judging her and who has no expectations from her. She needs a friend to whom she can openly vent her highly confidential secrets without doubting her loyalty and honesty in keeping her secrets. But as the priest's wife feels that it is almost impossible to find such a friend with such characteristics, she prefers isolation thinking that this is the safest way to avoid breaching her confidentiality and the confidentiality of her family.

8) The available supportive network of a priest's wife is usually restricted. Many times when she feels upset towards her husband priest she hesitates a lot to talk about this with one of her family members like her mother for example. She wants to keep his ideal image in their eyes. Also she finds it very difficult to resort to the bishop or to another priest lest she seems complaining about

him, his image becomes distorted in their eyes and he gets angry at her when he knows about this. Of course this deepens her feelings of loneliness and isolation.

The war of feeling lonely may take an interrupted course in the beginning as it attacks the priest's wife sporadically and does not last long. Here the priest's wife is still able to get use of all her psychological and spiritual strengths to conquer. But by time the devil condenses his attacks in this direction and intentionally brings to her life events and circumstances that deepen these negative feelings within her and overwhelms her in a chronic manner. Here the devil of boredom and the devil of despondency find easily their way to the heart of the priest's wife.

The husband priest reactions to the war of loneliness and isolation to which his wife is exposed differ from one priest to another. One can respond to these feelings by feeling guilty towards his wife and then starting to show more care to her and to give her more time. Another

one may become angry at her and accuses her of being selfish not understanding the nature of his service. He may even accuse her of lacking spirituality as she is preoccupied with her own emotional and psychological needs. This in turn increases her feelings of loneliness and doubles the war against her.

How can the priest's wife conquer the war of feeling lonely:

- 1) The priest's wife must learn how to deal with events in an objective way as much as she can. Many times the devil of exaggeration takes the chance to aggravate the situation.
- 2) The devil of self-pity is the most malicious of all the devils. He paves the way for the devil of loneliness and isolation. Therefore if a priest's wife wants to conquer this war she must not surrender to self pity as this devil engenders a lot of sufferings.
- 3) This war starts in the mind then moves to the heart. Therefore a priest's wife must get rid of thoughts of sorrow and worry from which the feelings of lonely are engendered as early as possible. She has to keep exposing even the minor

of her thoughts to her father of confession to quench the fire before its kindling.

4) The priest's wife must be trained to accept everyday events and circumstances, even the trivial ones, as from God's hand. She has to understand that whether God wants or allows them He is doing this for a single purpose which is her sound spiritual and psychological edification for the sake of her salvation.

5) As much as the priest's wife masters the exercise of contentment she will feel satisfaction and will never complain. There is no place for feelings of deprivation within the psyche of someone who trained himself to be content on both materialistic and emotional levels, *"I know to be abased, and I know to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need"* (Philippians 4:11-12).

6) May be getting a loyal friend is something difficult yet it is not impossible. So, a priest's wife must pray God to send her the appropriate people who can be Simon of Cyrene for her bearing the cross with her.

7) When Jesus Christ said about Himself, *"but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head"* (Luke 9:58) He was not only talking about the materialistic renunciation but also about the emotional one. Therefore, blessed is the priest's wife who imitates her God by walking behind Him bearing the cross of renunciation every day.

8) Constant prayer remains always the faithful refuge and reciting the psalms remains the true source of the sweet peace. As for the Holy Spirit, He is the Comforter friend whose comfort exceeds every human comfort.

O you who feel burdened now by this difficult war, rise up and cry unto Your God with faith and trust in His mercies saying,

"I looked on my right hand, and beheld, for there was no one who noticed me. Refuge failed me, and there was no one who cared for my soul. I cried unto You, O Lord, and said, 'You are my hope, my portion in the land of the living'."

(The Compline, Psalm 141)