



**Coptic Orthodox Diocese of
the Southern United States**

**The Monthly Message
to the Priests' Wives
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The War of Anxiety

The devil puts all his effort in waging war against God's children in general and His servants, including the priest and his wife, in particular. Jesus Christ concluded His sermon over the mountain by clarifying that wars will come by all means saying, "*And the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house*" (Matthew 7:25). Actually the rain, the floods and the winds are variable types of wars that face us on the way.

The war of anxiety is a common war. We barely find a person who was not subjected to such a war. It is also a complex war as the devil uses it to shoot many targets by one arrow. To understand this we need first to clarify the meaning of anxiety. Anxiety is basically a sort of fear, but a harmful fear. There is a useful fear that God created in us in order to help us to avoid harmful things. For example, if one does not fear fire he

will jump in it, be burnt and die. As for anxiety it is an inner feeling of intense fear and disturbance. This feeling is accompanied by a general condition of tension, apprehension and anticipation. Of course this tension has its effects on the body who suffers from a lot of illnesses like peptic ulcer, irritable colon, hypertension, diabetes ... etc.

There are some people who out of being habituated and addicted to anxiety it became part of their personalities. It turned into a personality trait that colors all their reactions in life. Those people are described to have anxious personalities.

The war of anxiety and fright starts with the priest's wife as soon as her husband is called to priesthood. The devil starts then to whisper to her a long list of fears. There is no doubt that some of them are true and objective nevertheless most of them are fake and exaggerated most of the time. Examples of such fears are:

- 1) The call of my husband to priesthood is not according to God's will.
- 2) My husband will fail to take such a horrible responsibility.
- 3) My husband will lose his eternal life if he will accept this priesthood.

- 4) My husband will lose his health due to the heavy tasks of this service.
- 5) Our income will decline after priesthood and we will live a life of deprivation and poverty.
- 6) I will be in charge of the house and of parenting the children alone.

If the wife, through the grace of God and the guidance of an experienced spiritual father, overcomes this war she becomes not immune from this war after the ordination of her husband as a priest. What change are the object of her anxiety and the intensity of her fears and doubts. The devil then intensifies the war by bringing to her mental images and imaginations of fearful situations to convince her that she, her husband and her family will, by all means, be subjected to them all.

The Holy Bible is full of various examples of this type of war. It also clarifies how the reactions to such a war are different. The clearest example is what happened with **Nehemiah** when he started to build the wall of Jerusalem. His enemies started to wage a strong frightening war against him. They hired prophets to put horror in his heart. But Nehemiah, the man of prayer, stuck to His God and perceived the war planned against him and did not respond to their

threats. *"Afterward I came to the house of Shemaiah the son of delaiah, the son of Mehetabel, who was a secret informer; and he said, 'Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, for they are coming to kill you; indeed at night they will come to kill you'. And I said, 'Should such a man as I flee? And who is there such as I who would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in'. Then I perceived that God has not sent him at all, but that he pronounced this prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. **For this reason he was hired, that I should be afraid and act that way and sin**, so that they might have cause for an evil report, that they might reproach me"* (Nehemiah 6:10-13).

The above Biblical passage shows that anxiety is a sin in itself. It is a complex sin that engenders a lot of other sins. It is a complex sin because:

1) It is composed of coward: *"But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death"* (Revelation 21:8).

2) It humiliates God as an anxious person does not trust God's love, care and power. He who believes that God is a loving powerful ruling Father will be afraid of nothing. *"The Lord is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; Of whom shall I be afraid?"* (Psalm 27:1).

3) It is against faith: "*Now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back* (i.e. surrendered himself to his doubts and fears), *My soul has no pleasure in him*" (Hebrews 10:38). Peter failed the test of faith and denied Jesus Christ out of fear to be killed with Him.

4) It makes one reacts to his anxiety in a wrong way: an anxious person tries to control his worries through controlling those who surround him. He may resort to human ways in order to overcome his anxiety. For example, Abram lied when he went to Egypt and to Gerar to escape his anxiety about being killed because of Sarah. Jonah escaped from his worries by deep sleep. David killed Uriah the Hittite out of fear that his deed would be exposed. One can take wrong decisions out of confused mind and being disturbed by his worries. He may reject the useful and accept the harmful.

5) It harbors clamor: an anxious person never enjoys life. He cannot see the graces he was granted. His thinking is always absorbed in his worries and fears. Therefore he neither knows how to acquire the life of thanksgiving nor how to be grateful to those who surround him.

6) It harbors pride and self sufficiency: the person who thinks that he is the source of his own life and that his life depends on his money, on his own economy and on his talents suffers a deep anxiety. He knows well in the depths of his heart that he is much weaker than he can

manage his life and face all the dangers that threaten him. "*Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature*" (Matthew 6:27).

7) It is associated with anger and irritability: an anxious person is liable to outbursts of anger, irritability and shouting more than others. The escalating tension within him makes him explode many times for very trivial reasons.

8) It is associated with sorrow: anxiety and sorrow are inseparable. An anxious person expects the worst in all things and waits for catastrophes in all cases. Therefore he feels frustrated, despaired and depressed.

9) It brings offence to others: an anxious person is contagious to those who surround him as he transfer anxiety to people who deal with him. Therefore they feel tense and irritable because of his irritability.

10) It is associated with perfectionism: a perfectionist person never tastes calmness and never relaxes. How comes that he relaxes while he is always unsatisfied with his performance and with others' performance considering the small imperfections great unforgiven crimes?

How can a priest's wife overcome the war of anxiety?

1) First of all, priest's wife needs to strengthen her faith and trust in God that He is the Pantocrator and that all His economy in man's life must lead to his good, "*The*

Lord is righteous in all His ways, gracious in all His works"
(Psalm145:17)

2) The life of surrender is an antidote to every worry,
"*Cast your burden on the Lord, and He shall sustain you"*
(Psalm55:22); "*Commit your works to the Lord, and your thoughts will be established"* (Proverbs16:3).

3) The war of anxiety starts in the mind and then moves to the heart. Therefore a priest's wife must face the thoughts of anxiety by one of the following ways according to what is suitable for her:

- Confronting these thoughts by replying to them using verses from the Holy Bible. Remembering God's beneficences in the past and His care in many previous situations also helps.

- Accepting these thoughts and agreeing with them by expecting the worst thing to happen and being prepared to it in an objective way. For example if the utmost fear of a priest's wife is that her husband may suffer a serious illness then she can tell to herself: "Fine. Let it be to me if this is God's will".

- Escaping these thoughts and not negotiating with them as soon as they appear and before they move to feelings and behaviors, "*Escape for your life! Do not look behind you nor stay anywhere in the plain"* (Genesis19:17)

4) The majority of fears are fake and exaggerated. If one keeps them within his heart they ferment, but if he talks

loudly about them and discussed them with an entrusted friend they wither and fade up. Therefore, it is important for a priest's wife to confess the sin of anxiety to her father of confession and to vent her fears and worries to an entrusted friend to cut the road before the devil, "*A little leaven leavens the whole lump"* (1Corinthians 5:6).

5) A lot of worry is engendered by feeling the necessity to perform a lot of tasks in a little time. A priest and his wife must know well that the tasks required from them will never end. Therefore, worry and tension are not the solution but a good management and organization of time that help them to relax are, "*In quietness and confidence shall be your strength"* (Isaiah 30:15).

6) It is useful to divide big goals into small daily achievable steps. This helps the priest's wife feel self confidence and competence to meet the expectations of people from her. This in itself dissolves her worry and makes her feel satisfied, calm and happy.

7) Caring for oneself through being keen to take periods of relaxation and retreat, enough sleep and rest as well as taking healthy balanced food. All these things help getting rid of anxiety toxins as soon as they are formed.