



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

**The Monthly Message
to the Priests' Wives
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Gossip

Gossip is a chronic psycho-spiritual illness that affects almost all people in general and priests' wives in specific. Although gossip in its external aspect is negative talking about people behind their back, yet its essence is cruelty of heart and severe shortage of love.

Psycho-social role of gossip

(1) One of the eminent researches done by scientists about gossip and its role in the life of a gossip is the research conducted by a social psychologist, Jennifer Bosson at 2006 under the title of: *“Interpersonal chemistry through negativity: Bonding by sharing negative attitudes about others”*. She concluded in her amazing

research that we feel a closer kinship over shared dislikes of people than shared likes. This means that gossip about others' negative attributes and weaknesses is the mean by which a gossip gets closer to his hearers and acquires their attention and attachment to him.

(2) Gossip is for many people a way of entertainment and passing time. They use it to overcome the feelings of emptiness and boredom.

(3) Gossip is the way of gossip to gain his hearers' approval of his negative attitude about someone. He feels comforted when he sees them also annoyed from the person he gossips about. In such a case, he gets sure that his negative attitude towards this person is justified. Therefore, he feels no more guilt about his rancor.

(4) Gossip is one aspect of passive aggression against the person who is the object of gossip. The gossip feels anger, aggression or jealousy towards a specific person. He then starts to gossip about him as a way

of revenging and attacking him but in an indirect way.

(5) Gossip is the way by which a weak person with low self-esteem tries to acquire power and prestige in the sight of others. He thinks gossip makes him a powerful source of information for them.

Priest's wife and gossip

While priest's wife is an attractive object of gossip, yet she is at the same time one of the most people attacked by the devil to fall into the sin of gossip. The following are some of the factors that attribute to the involvement of a priest's wife in gossip:

(1) Her role as a priest's wife makes her exposed to many secrets and private information related to the bishop, other priests and their families, the diocese and the congregation. Therefore, all these categories are good objects of her gossip.

(2) Many of the opportunists seek to get closer to the priest's wife out of curiosity aiming at getting information and exploring secrets.

(3) Priest's wife's feelings of boredom and emptiness push her to get entertainment through gossip and chatting and of course this ends up with what the Bible says: "*In the multitude of words sin is not lacking*" (Proverbs 10:19).

(4) Priest's wife's feeling that she is in the shadow may push her to be influential through transferring news and private affairs. She therefore gets others' interest and loyalty.

Psycho-spiritual damages caused by gossip

(1) While the gossipier thinks he gets others' attachment and loyalty to him through gossip, he actually loses their trust as they know well he will also spread negative information about them. They therefore do not entrust him their news and secrets.

(2) The gossipier is not immune himself against gossip of others. Actually his gossip invites others to gossip about him.

(3) Solomon the wise repeats twice saying: "*The words of a talebearer are like tasty trifles, and they go down into the inmost body*" (Proverbs 18:8),

(Proverbs 26:22). This repetition is not in vain but he actually wants to emphasize that the words of gossip easily insinuate into the minds of hearers remaining there for long time. Therefore, it would be difficult to erase them from their ears and minds. This in turn would duplicate their damage in the gossiper, the hearer and the person who is the object of gossip.

(4) Gossip leads to cruelty of the gossiper's heart. It antagonizes the laws of love as love "*does not behave rudely*" (1 Corinthians 13:5)

(5) Gossip engenders partiality, schism and prevalence of an atmosphere of rancor and jealousy. Joseph's gossip about his brothers engendered in them hatred towards him: "*Joseph, being seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brothers. And the lad was with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives; and Joseph brought a bad report of them to his father... But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and*

could not speak peaceably to him" (Genesis 37: 2,4)

(6) Gossip is one of the signs of the debased mind St. Paul mentioned: "*And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them*" (Romans 1:28-32)

(7) St. Paul puts gossip on the same level with fornication: "*For I fear lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I wish, and that I shall be*

found by you such as you do not wish; lest there be contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, backbitings, whisperings, conceits, tumults; lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and I shall mourn for many who have sinned before and have not repented of the uncleanness, fornication, and lewdness which they have practiced (2 Corinthians 12:20–21)

(8) The gossip is an idle person who does not bear fruits: *“And besides they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not”* (1 Timothy 5:13)

(9) Gossip is engendered by pride and engenders it like the case of Diotrefes whom St. John prescribed saying: *“But Diotrefes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. 10 Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words”* (3 John 9–10)

How to get rid of gossip

(1) St. Paul says: *“...nor share in other people’s sins; keep yourself pure”* (1 Timothy 5:22). Therefore when you feel that the one who talks to you started to deviate the conversation by gossiping about others, then you must fix this immediately. If you fail to do this then you must show your disapproval of such types of talk: *“The north wind brings forth rain and a backbiting tongue an angry countenance”* (Proverbs 25:23)

(2) Sirach says: *“Have you heard a word against your neighbor? Let it die within you, trusting that it will not burst forth from you”* (Sirach 19:10). Therefore, let you be the last station at which words stop. Do not transfer them to others. Remember that: *“Whoever spreads slander is a fool”* (Proverbs 10:18)

(3) Do not take the gossip as true. Know well that passed words must be distorted, exaggerated or lacking a lot of objective facts. If you believe this,

then it will be easy for you not to pass the gossip along.

(4) Let you be honest regarding keeping the secrets entrusted to you by others. Remember that one day you will be required to give account about secrets entrusted to you.

(5) Do not be a source of information for others. Your role in the church is not supposed to be a news reporter.

(6) Occupy your time with fruitful useful things as chatting is the work of idle people.

(7) Liken the Virgin Mary who used to talk little and contemplate more as: *“In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise”* (Proverbs 10:19)

(8) Seek to acquire the virtue of covering the sins of others like St. Makar remembering that: *“Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all sins”* (Proverbs 10:12)

(9) If someone offends you then you must be courageous by following Jesus' commandment

saying: *“Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’ And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector”* (Matthew 18:15–17). Keeping rancor within one's heart engenders gossip while wise reproach spreads an atmosphere of love and forgiveness.

(10) Make this bad sin of gossip an object of your prayers. Ask for the Holy Spirit's help to untie its bonds. Expose the devil of gossip by frequently confessing this sin. The Lord is the only One capable of granting you victory over this malicious devil.