



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

**The Monthly Message
to the Priests' Wives**
April 2016

From well to well

I would like in this message to look over the biography of St. Photini in order for this biography to be a rich source from which you, the priests' wives, can be inspired with the light of her model and the courage of her faith.

St. Photini is the Samaritan woman whom Jesus met at the well. The word Photini means "the enlightened one". This saint had two sons: Victor and Joses, and five sisters: Anatola, Phota, Photis, Paraskeva and Kyriake. They were all baptized by the Apostles after the Lord ascension to heavens and the Pentecost and they travelled from city to city preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ. After the martyrdom of St. Peter and St. Paul, St. Photini

travelled to Carthage with her family to proclaim the Gospel there. Her eldest son, Victor, joined the Roman army and due to his braveness he was appointed by Nero a military commander without knowing he is Christian. Later, Nero called him to Italy to arrest and torture Christians. Sebastian, an official in Italy, knew that Victor and his family were Christian. He advised him to renounce his faith. While they had a conversation during which Sebastian was vainly trying to convince him to forsake his faith, he suddenly felt on the ground blind and remained unable to talk for three days. On the fourth day, he shouted declaring his faith in Christ. Victor started then to teach him Christian faith and he was baptized and immediately regained his sight during his baptism and he glorified the Lord. Reports of this reached Nero. He then ordered to arrest them and bring them to Rome. The Lord Jesus Christ appeared to Victor and said to him: *"From this day forward, your name will be Photinus, because through you, many will be enlightened and will believe in Me. You must strengthen and encourage Sebastian to*

persevere until the end and he will be blessed with martyrdom".

At that time, St. Photini, her younger child Joses, and her five sisters left Carthage to Rome in order to confess their faith in Jesus Christ. There, Nero brought them with Photinus (Victor) and Sebastian and began to inquire about their faith. St. Photini was the first to talk courageously and to declare their faith. The tyrant then ordered smash the martyrs' finger joints. The saints were then brought to the place of torture and their fingers were smashed for three continuous hours. But the confessors felt no pain, and their hands remained unharmed. When Nero knew this he was puzzled and ordered his soldiers to cut off their hands. The soldiers tied St. Photini and started to strike her hands with knives. They repeated this several times but they were not able at all to cut her hands and fell exhausted. As the saint remained unharmed she praised God. The emperor then became confused and was thinking about the way he can defeat the saints and make them renounce their faith. He ordered to put men

in a dark prison after making them blind and to send Photini with her five sisters to a luxurious golden room where there was a golden table upon which were put seven golden crowns and luxurious clothes. After that, Nero sent his daughter Domnina and her servants to that room to coddle the saints and to seduce them with money and prestige. But St. Photini taught her and her 150 servants the Christian faith. She baptized them all and gave the name of Anthosa to Domnina who ordered her servants to distribute the gold and money to poor and needy.

When Nero knew what happened, he became so furious and ordered his soldiers to throw them all into a burning fiery furnace and to leave them there for three days. When the soldiers opened the furnace on the fourth day they found the saints unharmed praising God. The tyrant then ordered to give them poison prepared by a sorcerer named Lampadius to drink. St. Photini was the first to be given the poison. She prayed upon the poison, drank first and then gave the others to drink. Nobody was harmed. Lampadius then believed,

was baptized and was given a new name, Theoclitus. When Nero knew about this, he ordered his soldiers to behead him and thus he obtained the crown of martyrdom.

Nero continued to torture the saints by cutting their limbs, pouring boiled chemicals on their bodies, scourging and burning them but God was strengthening and healing them. When Nero got fed up with them he ordered to make them blind and put them into a dark filthy prison full of poisonous snakes. All of them began praising, the prison became full with sweet fragrance and the snakes died. The Lord appears in the midst of them saying: *"Peace to you"*. He then held the hand of St. Photini and raised her up saying: *"Be always joyful as I am with you all the days of your life"*. They immediately regained their sight and as they saw the Lord they worshiped Him and He blessed them saying: *"Be courageous and strong"*. While the Lord was ascending to heaven the wounds of the saints fell down like scales and they regained their full health.

After three years, the emperor ordered to bring one of his servant from the prison to kill him. The soldiers who went there to bring the servant noticed that the Christians were healthy and they reported that to Nero saying that the Galileans who were made blind were seeing and in good health. They also told him that the prison was full of light and unuttered sweet fragrance and was converted into a holy place where people hastened to go to learn about Christ and to be baptized. This made the emperor so furious to the degree that he ordered to crucify the saints upside down and to comb their bodies with sharp iron combs for three days until they breakdown. After the soldiers did that they left the saints hung upon their crosses for four further days. When they came back to see whether they were still alive they suddenly lost their sight. An angel came down from heaven, untied the saints and put them down from the crosses. After he greeted the martyrs he healed them from all their wounds. But St. Photini felt pity for the blind soldiers and prayed for them. They then regained their sight,

believed and were baptized. Shortly after that, Nero was informed about what happened. He ordered his soldiers to flay the skin from St. Photini, to throw her down a dry well and to throw her flayed skin into the river. As for the remaining men saints, Sebastian, Photius and Joses, they cut off their genital organs and threw them to dogs. After that, they flayed their skin and threw it into the river. They were then enclosed into an old bath. As for the five sisters, Anatola, Phota, Photis, Paraskeva and Kyriake, they were brought before Nero who ordered to cut off their breasts then flaying off their skins. When the soldiers came to flay the skin from St. Photis, she did not let them touch her and flayed her skin off by herself in a very courageous way that made the tyrant astonished. An expert in cruelty, the emperor readied the fiercest execution for St. Photis: they tied her by the feet to the tops of two bent-over trees. When the ropes were cut, the trees sprang upright and tore the martyr apart. The emperor ordered the others beheaded except St. Photini who was removed from the well and

locked up in prison for twenty days. After that, they brought her before Nero who ordered her to worship idols. She rebuked him and cursed him with his idols. He gave then orders to throw her down a well, where she surrendered her soul to God in the year 66.

This is how the life of this saint, whom the Antiochian church call "Equal to the Apostles", was totally converted when she met Christ at the well, at the well also she was martyred for His name, and between the two wells she became really enlightened and travelled from city to city to preach the light of Christ.

O priest wife, who feels exhausted and drained of power spiritually, psychologically and physically, be strong and contemplate the work of the Holy Spirit in this woman. Know that the Holy Spirit who worked with her from well to well is the same Holy Spirit working in you. He is the one capable to strengthen and confirm you as He is the one who "gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength" (Isaiah 40:29)