



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

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

Priest's Wife And Flexibility

Flexibility is one of the traits of the mature personality. It is defined to be the person's ability to cope with change. Its linguistic meaning is the ability of something to be bent without being broken. Opposite to the flexible personality is the rigid one, and it is the personality which resists change even if it is minor and holds strongly upon what she got used to regarding patterns, manners, attitudes, relationships, persons and places.

The Holy Spirit and personality flexibility

A person whose personality is flexible is the place where the Holy Spirit finds rest because such person

is ready to easily and smoothly accept the Holy Spirit forming of him and of all his life's events like the clay in the hands of the potter (Jeremiah 18:6). As for those whose personalities are rigid, they are the most resistant people to the work of the Holy Spirit within them. In such case, God, who is the clever physician of souls, is pushed many times to hand them to different tribulations so that they come out of these tribulations delivered from every rigidity and severity. The story of Job is a clear example of that. The furnace of tribulation fulfilled its role in melting all hardness present within him and lead him finally to proclaim, "*I will question you, and you shall answer me*" (Job 42:4). Opposite to Job's personality, are a lot of other figures in the Holy Bible who showed high degrees of flexibility that made God's hand free in working within and through them. **The most eminent of these figures on an absolute level is St. mary.** Changes in her life were steep, strong, rapid and even

sometimes illogic. Nevertheless, she was, through the grace of God, able to smoothly cope with all these changes. She moved to the temple in a very young age where she had to deal with a large spectrum of people. She then moved to live in Joseph's house who was unknown to her. She submitted to the annunciation and easily accepted to conceive a child without knowing a man. After that she accepted to give birth to her child in a manger then to endure the suffering of fleeing to Egypt and coming back to live in Nazareth. She then followed her son Jesus everywhere with Mary, a sword pierced her soul when she saw her son crucified and finally she moved to live in the house of John the beloved till her departure. What a great flexibility this great saint, who was really filled with the Holy Spirit, showed making her an easy dough in His hands!!

Also among examples of flexible personalities is Abram the patriarch who, as soon as God ordered

him to get out of his country, family and his father's house, immediately obeyed and went out "*not knowing where he was going*" (Hebrew 11:8). He even, when ordered to offer Isaac, showed a very strange flexibility and obeyed. Flexibility was also shown in the different events of calling the disciples who as soon as they heard the call of Jesus Christ forsook everything and immediately followed Him. Among them were those who forsook their discipleship to John the Baptist, their nets and the tax office. As for St. Paul, he was unusual in his flexibility and said, "*For I have learned in whatever state I am to be content. I know how to be abased and I know how 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*" (Philippian 4: 11-12)

Causes of inflexible personality:

(1) Fear of change and holding upon what is old under the title of, "*The old is better*" (Luke 5:39).

Lot's wife held upon the old and lost her life as a consequence of that.

(2) Feeling insecure and low self-esteem make the person uncertain about his ability to deal with what is unusual for him. He delivers his sense of security from circulating in the circle of the routine.

(3) Perfectionism, as it is well known that a perfectionist personality strongly holds upon certain patterns, regulations and systems and feels great tension and anxiety when these regulations and systems are broken.

(4) Insisting on remaining within the contexts one's comfort zone even if on the expense of one's spiritual and psychological growth, "*He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it*" (Matthew 10:39).

(5) The pride heart, as the self-inflated person trusts his own understanding and relies on his powers. He is therefore closed to others' experiences and opinions. He even rejects God's counsel and

providence in his life. The saying of the Holy Bible, "*Pride goes before destruction*" (Proverbs 16:18) means that the proud person totally loses his flexibility to the degree that he becomes vulnerable to be destroyed in tribulations.

Changes in priest's wife life

If a regular person is in need to flexibility in order to cope with changes without feeling stressed, then a priest's wife is in need to a much higher degree of flexibility because of the plenty and variable changes that take place in her life, whether on the level of important events or on the level of daily life arrangements. Accepting the call to priesthood means for a priest's wife a great change in style of life, distribution of roles, dealing with a large spectrum of personalities, moving to live in a new place, serving in another church, change in the socioeconomic level...etc. But these changes are not the only changes a priest's wife faces. She also needs a great daily storage of psychic energy in order to be able to

face the emerging changes in daily life plans and arrangements. A priest's wife may wake up in the morning putting in her mind a specific plan for her day, but she ends up at the end of the day with many changes in what she planned for in order to be in harmony with the schedule of her husband priest that is full of surprises!!

A priest's wife doesn't need only to be flexible regarding plans and time management, but she needs also to be flexible regarding her relationship with her husband priest, her children, the congregation...etc.

Virtues associated with flexibility that a priest's wife needs

(1) Virtue of simplicity, as a simple person does not complicate things and reacts with smoothness and content. The simple personality of St. Mary made her qualified to accept God's plans in her life with flexibility.

(2) Faith is the spiritual energy that leads one to surrender all his life's affairs to God's hand trusting Him. Faith was the source of Abram's flexibility.

(3) Humbleness makes one calmly accepts everything considering himself unworthy.

(4) Abstaining from earthly matters and pursuing the God's kingdom make all alternatives equal and free one's heart from all attachments.

(5) Being conducted by the Holy Spirit who transforms rigid stony hearts to flexible hearts made of flesh.

Finally, I like to remind you of a wonderful statement in the fraction to the Son that can be your daily prayer in order to get from God flexibility added to flexibility. This statement says, “***O My Lord Jesus, My beloved, if you see me as a withered organ, soften me with the oil of your grace***”