



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of
the Southern United States

The Monthly Message
to the Priests' Wives
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I Arose a Mother in Israel

When Deborah the prophetess wanted to praise God for the great work He did to sons of Israel and the victory over their enemies He granted them, she sang her well known song saying, “I, Deborah arose, arose a mother in Israel” (Judges 5:7). This phrase may seem to be strange as she did not praise the Lord for being a prophetess or a judge for Israel but she praised Him for her spiritual motherhood to the people considering it as heavenly gift she must praise God for.

Of course, every priest’s wife, in addition to be a priest wife, she is also a servant. Yet she needs to take example from Deborah the prophetess by praising God not for becoming a priest wife or a servant but for becoming a mother to many which is a gift and talent she must trade with like any other talent.

In fact, we always deal with God as a compassionate caring father but we many times forget that He is also a mother in the same time. Did not He himself give testimony about Himself in this matter many times in the Holy Bible? Did not He said, *“Then you shall feed; On her sides shall you be carried, and be dandled on her knees. As one whom his mother comforts,*
So I will comfort you; and you shall be comforted in Jerusalem” (Isaiah 66:12-13)?

Yes, indeed God is a compassionate mother and what a mother He is!!! It is a natural thing that when one clings to God then the light of God's face shines upon him turning his cruel nature into a compassionate gentle tender nature acquired from God's motherhood to him. A priest's wife is not required only to perform her role, whether in service or as a priest wife, but she is required also to perform this role with a full motherhood to everybody starting with her husband priest himself and ending at the smallest child in the congregation.

Physical motherhood is nothing more than a faint image of the gift of spiritual motherhood. The former is natural and shared also with animals while the latter is a spiritual gift coming from above and is supernatural. Physical motherhood is sometimes corrupted with some

defects. It may be affected by negligence and carelessness. It may be characterized by control and struggle over power. It sometimes shows cruelty and violence. As for the spiritual motherhood, it does not lack the fruits of the Holy Spirit. It is a loving, joyful, peaceful, longsuffering, kind, good, faithful, gentle and self-controlling motherhood.

An ordination of a priest means adding a new spiritual mother to the congregation. She must, in all her dealing with the congregation, show a real motherhood that extends to include everyone. She must do that without partiality, prejudice, strife, argument, control, authority, boredom, negligence, carelessness, rejection or degradation. But in all things, she shows herself as a compassionate mother in much patience, in labors, in longsuffering, in sleeplessness, in care

for weak and needy people and in a zealous fulfillment of the congregation's needs.

Of course, when we talk about a model of the spiritual motherhood we cannot neglect the model of Virgin Mary. She, through her motherhood to Jesus Christ, became also a mother to St. John the Beloved, St. Mathias and to all the Apostles too. Later on, she became a mother to all generations expanding her intercession, compassion and care over the entire world. Thus, a priest wife must acquire the heart of St. Mary which is open to everybody without exception with full love and compassion.

If we say that spiritual motherhood is a heavenly gift, then this must mean that for a priest wife to acquire such a gift she must do

God's will by always obeying His commandments, *"For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother"* (Matthew 12:50). A priest wife who lives in a state of constant inner prayer, who always attach her mind to the Lord, and who is guided by the Holy Spirit pours from the motherhood of the Lord who dwells in her over whoever meet and deal with her. She can, therefore, praise proudly with Deborah saying, *"I arose a mother in Israel"* and with St. Paul also, *"But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us"* (1 Thessalonians 7:8)