



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

**The Monthly Message
to the Priests' Wives
March 2017**

Must Be Reverent

In the first epistle of St. Paul to Timothy, his disciple, he talked about the attributes that must be present in the bishop and deacons. He continued talking about the women saying, “*Likewise, their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things*” (1Timothy 3:11). Different translations and scholars gave different interpretations to those women. Some said they are the wives of the deacons whom St. Paul just talked about, and

others said they are the deaconesses. Anyway, whether considering this interpretation or that, these attributes must be acquired by women in general and priests’ wives in specific.

“Must be reverent” is the first attribute St. Paul started his list with. He did not make this attribute exclusive to the deacons’ wives but he mentioned it also in the list of the bishop’s attributes saying, “*One who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence*” (1Timothy 3:4), and in the list of deacons’ attributes as well saying, “*Likewise, deacons must be reverent*” (1Timothy 3:8). It is therefore clear that this attribute was, according to St. Paul, a very essential prerequisite that is mentioned in

the top of the list and that must be present in all of them.

What is amazing is repetition of this attribute many times in the description of Jesus Christ written in the letter of *Publius Lentillus**, governor of Judea at time of Jesus, sent to the Roman Counsel. He prescribed Him saying, “*with very reverent countenance, such as the beholders may both love and fear ... cheerful without loss of gravity ... pleasant in conversation, mixed with gravity*”

* Discovered by French scientists who accompanied the French army of king Philipe IV when they entered the city of Napoli in Italy 1280 AD. This letter is kept in the Vatican.

What is meant then by being reverent?

The Arabic dictionary, El-Waseet, defines the word reverence to be gravity, consistency and patience, while the English dictionaries define it as respect and awe.

How can this be applied on a priest's wife?

A priest's wife is required to liken her Master, Jesus Christ, who was prescribed to be reverent. Being reverent does not mean to frown and be sad, to be haughty, or to be isolated from people. Reverence is actually a word that expresses many compound attributes including respect, gravity, patience, consistency, awe, seriousness, meekness, and serenity. It is a natural consequence that whoever feels the presence of God continuously, God's reverence will be

reflected on him/her. What a wonderful passage that the Book of Esther used to prescribe the presence of the king which symbolizes the awesome presence of the Lord. It says, “*And so, entering hesitantly through a series of doors, she stood opposite the king, where he sat upon his royal throne, clothed in royal robes and shining with gold and precious stones. And he was terrible to behold*” (Esther 15:9); “*She answered, “I saw you, my lord, as an angel of God, and my heart was disturbed for fear of your glory. For you, my lord, are great and wonderful, and your face is full of grace*” (Esther 15: 16–17).

A priest wife can be reverent by showing the following:

1) Reverent body language that shows serenity with gravity.

- 2) Modest clothes with appropriate appearance.
- 3) Soft voice with a low-pitched tone and moderate pace of speech.
- 4) Appropriate talk without cynicism or disinhibited joking.
- 5) Relationships with others characterized by healthy boundaries that are not loose.
- 6) Angelic meek conduct.
- 7) Contrite attitude in liturgies and prayers.
- 8) Serious deep pious thinking with self-control.
- 9) Spiritual wisdom rather than a psychological one.