



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

**The Monthly Message  
to the Priests' Wives  
July 2018**

## **Misunderstanding Others**

Feeling understood is one of the person's basic psychological needs that leads one to feel peace in himself and with others when well fulfilled. On the other hand, misunderstanding is a great barrier against good communication. It is responsible, to a great extent, for a lot of problems in daily life in general, and in interpersonal relationships and service in particular. It is one of the devil's tools he uses to plant seeds of anger, judgment, and rancor in the souls. Everybody must have been suggested to situations of misunderstanding being either the one misunderstanding or the one misunderstood. In fact,

misunderstanding is not just a mere superficial thing taken lightly to justify a lot of situations. When it is repeated frequently, it carries a sign that deep psychological roots are behind it. Therefore, we need to study these roots and examine ourselves regarding them.

### **Causes of misunderstanding**

(1) **Transparency illusion:** it is described by psychologists to be a belief that what one feels, desires and intends is crystal clear to others even though he has done very little to communicate clearly what is going on inside his mind. He expects certain reactions to certain things he never clarified enough. Therefore, he becomes angry and feels let down because others understood not what was going on inside his mind!

(2) **Depending on one's personal intelligence, mind reading, rapid conclusions based on first impressions, intuition and assumptions:**

psychologists call this type of thinking *the lazy thinking* because one does not put enough effort to understand others and realize the message they are trying to convey.

**(3) Seeing others and dealing with them through one's own personal experience and biases:** needless to say these factors would influence one's interpretation and understanding of different situations. He may project his own attributes on others. Hence, he does not understand them objectively but in a subjective way that carries a lot of misunderstanding.

**(4) The emotional state of the perceiver:** of course, our emotional state would color our perception and understanding of events. A sad, mad, or hopeless person is usually inclined to interpret events negatively and unobjectively leading him to misunderstanding a lot of things.

**(5) Text messages and emails:** messages sent through these ways are many times misunderstood

because they are usually composed of abstract words unassociated with tone of voice or body language that help clarifying the meaning lying behind them. Abstract words usually carry more than one meaning.

**(6) Distraction and lack of concentration:** when one is preoccupied with other things while communicating with someone else, he ends up misunderstanding him. Therefore, complete presence, reflective listening, and asking for clarification of obscure things during conversation are very important things to avoid misunderstanding.

**(7) Fatigue and exhaustion due to whatever reason:** they usually lead to decrease in one's brain ability to concentrate and to put the automatic thinking system based on shortcuts into action. This in turns increases the likelihood of misunderstanding.

**(8) High sensitivity toward the speaking person:** when a relationship among two people is deteriorated to a great extent, even simple things and good intentions are misunderstood and misinterpreted in the light of conflicts. The apprehension and hunting mistakes are there.

**(9) Labeling:** classifying others under certain fixed labels and keeping them within certain frames of prejudice make us put no effort in understanding each new interaction or situation. This would eventually lead us to misunderstand people and misevaluate situations.

**(10) Differences in cultures and degree of education:** variability in degree of intelligence, culture, and education among people leads to a lot of misunderstandings. The meaning of a certain word or a certain behavior may be totally different from one culture to another. Even within the context of the same culture, a single word may carry different definitions and concepts like for example

the word *respect* that means something for someone and different something for one else.

### **Love is both the motive and the remedy**

*“Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things”*(1Corinthians 13:4–7).

Love makes one labor patiently to clarify what he wants, to ask for explanation of what he does not understand, and to listen to others with all care and respect. It makes him depend not on prejudices of bad intentions and read not others through anger and provocation. Love *“gives no place to the devil”* (Ephesians 4:27). Love really never fails!!