



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

**The Monthly Message  
to the Priests' Wives  
September 2019**

**Dearest Sister in Christ,**

How do you react to being called out on your mistakes?

Our natural reaction is to be instantly defensive, to go into a primitive fight-or-flight instinct. Unfortunately, then we can no longer think or behave rationally.

But Christ calls us to something higher than our instinctive nature. He calls us to a spiritual and divine response.

There is the old saying "Think before you speak." What can we do so that our immediate reaction isn't denial or shifting blame?

How can we learn to step back, listen and understand first? How can we learn to apologize and then calmly explain or defend?

*"Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults." (Psalm 19:12)*

When God allows someone to accuse us, it isn't necessarily their accusation that God is trying to cleanse us from but from the ego that rises when we're accused. To say it another way, God doesn't want us never to make mistakes but to be humble and learn from them.

### **The Flight Instinct**

In our "flight" instinct, when we are accused of making a mistake, we're quick to deny it. When David took Bathsheba, at first, he didn't even recognize that he had done something wrong. Although David knows God's law, it took the clever prophet Nathan to wake him up to his sin.

When someone comes to us directly with our sin, not in the gentle way Nathan did it, we try to run away and hide from the accusation. In order to overcome denial, we have to first weigh the accusation in a neutral space, away from our accuser. We can say to them something like, "Let me think about that," and go into our closed room in prayer before responding. What's needed is awareness, and this awareness comes from the Holy Spirit working in us.

## **The Fight Instinct**

Other times, we have made a mistake, and we're trying to blame others for it, going by our "flight" instinct. I once heard that most confessions given aren't people truly repenting from inside but complaining about others who are making them fall into sin. This is what Adam did when he pointed at Eve, and what Cain did when he took his shame out on his brother Abel. We have to practice taking responsibility for our own mistakes—and leave other people out of it.

In education, it's a known practice that when we talk to one child's parents about a problem or situation at school, we don't mention any other child's name. Even if there's enough blame to go around, focusing on one's own sins is a virtue.

## **When We Are Falsely Accused**

It takes humility to face our mistakes in a better way. And if we are justified in our actions, we should slow down even more in defending ourselves.

St. Isaac the Syrian says, *"A man who is truly humble is not troubled when he is wronged and he says nothing to justify himself against the injustice, but he accepts slander as truth; he does not attempt to persuade men that he is [falsely accused], but he begs forgiveness."*

My parents used to say that if I hurt someone's feelings, even if I think their reaction is silly, I should first apologize and reassure them. This can be true in so many situations. Sometimes an accuser just needs a kind and comforting word.

## **Let God Redeem You Through Your Mistakes**

Lastly, let's get in the habit of redeeming our mistakes. Take a mistake that was made and look back and reflect on it. Let's ask, "What did I learn from this mistake?"

It's natural for our brain to focus on the negative, on the shame and embarrassment of the confrontation, or to repeat a new refrain about our stupidity. Instead of letting our mistakes define us or become part of our identities, let's humble ourselves to remember that everyone makes mistakes.

Businessman Donald Miller says, "Mistakes aren't bad things. Mistakes that you don't learn from are bad things."

Look back at your life, at the mistakes you've made in the past. Sit with a piece of paper and write down all the blessings and lessons and benefits God has given you through this mistake. Let God redeem you through your past mistakes instead of letting the devil enslave you with them.

Once you start to build a better relationship with your past mistakes, you might not be so quick to deny or shift blame when you (inevitably) make new ones.

Your sister in Christ,

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