



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

Monthly Message for the Priests Wives

March 2020

Acts of Service

Dearest Sister in Christ,

When you commit your life to Christ, your whole life becomes a life of service. Wherever you are, whatever you're doing, you can choose to make it a good work and an act of service. You can choose to do it "wholeheartedly, as to the Lord" (Colossians 3:23).

Sometimes, though, we can feel that our will to serve is waning. The desire is there, but we're starting to feel a little resentment or bitterness towards our good works.

When someone asks for a favor, does the voice in your head say, "Doesn't she know I also have this and this?" or "Doesn't he understand how annoying that task is to me?" or something similar?

Do you think to yourself, "He has never lifted a finger to help others—why should I help him now?" Or perhaps you sometimes catch yourself thinking, "She will never return this favor! Why should I do it! I'm sure when it's time for her to help me, she won't."

In those moments, it's helpful to remind ourselves of three important facts. These are things we have to keep in mind whenever our attitude towards our service starts to sour.

IT'S NOT ABOUT ME

First, an act of service is not about us at all. It's about following Christ's example, and it's about loving one another as He commanded us.

Service won't always be convenient. The request won't come at the right time or at the right place. Think of the widow Elijah visited in 1 Kings 17. To try to feed a man when your grain isn't enough for even you and your son? It's madness. But it's precisely when it's uncomfortable, unpleasant, and inconvenient that a service has the greatest reward.

When the monks sped to the top of the mountain to meet Christ, they met an inconvenient service opportunity: an old man sitting by the road wishing to be carried up. Saint Pishoy was their leader. He could have said, "I can't be late!" just as they did. But he tried to set aside thoughts of himself for thoughts of others. He carried the old man on his back and only later discovered it was Christ Himself.

When you decide to do a good work, a voice will come to nag about how it's uncomfortable for you. That's when you get to make a decision about whether this service is about you, or about Christ and the person you are called to serve.

IT'S NOT ABOUT DESERVING IT

Second, when we serve, we do it regardless of the person in front of us. We aren't waiting for them to have racked up enough points in order to serve them. We aren't waiting to see if they like us or if their attitude about something changes first. Acts of service are not to be given only to those who deserve it or have earned it.

Christ said, *"If you love those who love you, what reward have you?"* (Matthew 5:46), and Saint Peter said, *"When you are beaten for your faults, [it's no credit to you]"* (1 Peter 2:20). Instead, it's when you reach out to and serve people who might be unpleasant or who might be ungrateful, that you can find a heavenly reward.

I wonder what kinds of blessings come to those who seek out people whom no one wishes to serve and chooses to serve them. I think of Saint Verena in the mountains of Switzerland attending to those no one else can reach but her.

IT'S NOT ABOUT RECIPROCITY

Finally, an act of service is not about what we will get back. When we do a favor for someone and expect something in return, that is not service. If today I help someone move with the expectation that he will help me move in the future (or do me some other favor), that was not an act of service.

Service is a gift, and gifts come with no strings attached. Service is when we give above and beyond what's possible to repay to us, and without any expectation of repayment.

Actually, the most beautiful thing I have found in service is that while this person doesn't return the favor to me personally, I find that they "pass it on." Acts of service, even the smallest ones, have a massive ripple effect when given with a sincere heart. Even the smile you give to the person behind the cash register, they take home with them to their children.

So, remember my sister, when the voice in your head objects to your service, service is not about convenience to you, it's not about whether the other person is deserving, and it's not about what you will get in return. It's about Christ: conforming to His image and living up to His commandments. We all know this, but likewise we all forget now and then.

Your sister in Christ,

Ni-Ni