



**Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States**  
**Monthly Message for the Priests Wives**  
**May 2020**

**Pretending**

My Dearest Sister in Christ,

I know that we are all going through tough times right now. I know that everything is not ok. Perhaps you, like me, are thinking of all the people struggling in this time.

There are those who have tested positive for COVID-19 and who are quarantined at home or who are in the hospital fighting for their lives. There are those in hospitals with all the other diseases and conditions we face who must be alone without family or visitors. There are those who work in hospitals, pharmacies, schools, nursing homes, and grocery stores who may be facing danger each moment they work.

There are those who are obeying stay-at-home orders but have no one at home with them at all. They are completely isolated and alone. There are those who are home with abusive spouses or parents, trapped constantly in their nightmare. There are those who lost their jobs or had to close their businesses and are struggling to pay their bills.

These are family members, friends, neighbors, and members of our congregations.

To top it off, most of us spent Holy Week praying from our houses, outside our beloved churches. As of writing this, it has been over a month since I've been able to partake of the Eucharist with no predictable return.

Everything is not ok.

**JUST PRETENDING**

For a while there, I considered pretending that everything was ok. I considered brushing off my feelings of grief, sorrow, confusion, and so on. Maybe if I just ignore my feelings, everything will be ok. That did not work.

Sometimes I see people pretending, trying to, as someone once described it, "have faith in their faith." The idea that, if I am a really good believer, nothing bad will touch me. This is a kind of spiritual arrogance. The holiest among us suffered great and terrible things. Our faith in our own

righteousness cannot save us, lift us up, or correct the horrors of the world. Christ is our righteousness.

The heroes of our faith were not the type to pretend. When King David was sad or scared or felt forsaken, he did not put on a show of everything being alright. He wrote long grieving psalms that cried out to God and clung to Him. When Job was suffering, he didn't put a big smile on his face and pretend that it was ok that his children died, his livelihood was destroyed, and his health decimated. He grieved and clung to God. If it wasn't for the courage to face sorrow, we wouldn't have the Lamentations of Jeremiah that move us all on Good Friday.

Sister, we cannot make everything ok by pretending. Really, we can't make everything ok at all. We don't have that power. But, although everything is not ok, we are not like unbelievers who sorrow without hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

Our God is the Almighty; our God is Pantocrator. There is zero doubt that He knows all, controls all, and has everything well in hand.

There's no virtue in keeping up a show of perfect Christianity. Virtue is humbling ourselves before God. Only He saves.

### **THROW YOURSELF AT HIS FEET**

God never promised to teleport us out of the Valley of the Shadow of Death. He promised to walk through it with us: "Fear not. I am with you."

It is in admitting our own weakness and human sensibilities that God is able to work and be glorified. It is our helplessness that reveals to us His complete and ultimate power. "A broken and contrite heart, God will not despise" (Psalm 51:17) — this is the gift we offer, this is our sacrifice.

Our tears are not scorned by God. They are counted and bottled. He doesn't tell us to "Man up." Rather, through our tears, He encourages us and cheers us on to spiritual growth, virtue, and holiness. He cleanses us. God pats us on the back and says, "I'm with you. I'm with you."

And this is the gift of God that He will be with us in this difficult time and He will support us and light the darkness. This time is a gift not because it's not hard, but that it IS hard, and God is here in it with us.

- If I am afraid, He says, "Fear not, for I am with you" (Isaiah 41:10)
- If I hesitate, He says, "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage" (Joshua 1:9)
- If I am sad, He says, "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33)
- If I am weakened, He says, "I will strengthen you; yes, I will help you" (Isaiah 41:10)

But if I'm pretending to be unafraid when I really am—why listen to His voice? If I'm arrogantly courageous, I won't get to hear His sweet encouragement.

So, let us throw ourselves at the feet of Almighty God, our Lord and Savior.

*Come, Lord. Lift us up. We trust in Your promises. We know You're true and faithful.*

Let us offer our prayers imperfectly with no show, with empty hands, and broken hearts.

*You come, Lord. Fill us with joy. Show us Your salvation. We hope in You because You listen to our quavering voices and You thunder.*

So, sister, I won't resolutely say, "I'm not scared." No, rather I'm going to run to my Father and rest in His embrace.

Your sister in Christ,

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