



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

Be Yourself

My Dearest Sister in Christ,

Sometimes it's difficult to be the wife of a priest because there are so many expectations. There's this feeling that you have to fill a mold that other people have for who you should be. The external pressure to perform in a certain way can make you crazy sometimes—at least I know this is true for me.

We want desperately to be good Christians, good wives, and, yes, just plain good people. But, inside, it sometimes feels like everything is a jumbled mess. We can't—absolutely can't—live up to our own expectations and everyone else's at all times. But, rather than letting that lead us to despair, we should instead let that give us a sense of relief.

First, I want you to know that God knows exactly who you are — because He made you exactly as you are. He is the Great Potter: "But now, O LORD, You are our Father; We are the clay, and You our **potter**; And all we are the work of Your hand" (Isaiah 64:8). God carefully chose all your attributes, and, while sin sometimes tempts and distorts us, He has a great plan for us. We are "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14). In the book of the Wisdom of Sirach, it is written, "As the shining sun is clear to all, so the glory of the LORD fills all His works" (Sirach 42:16). You, my dear sister, are one of those masterpieces of God.

Second, remember that the Lord knows well your strengths, your talents that are gifts He gave you. Those strengths, even if you are blind to them, will be used by God for His will (if you let Him). Get to know your strengths, not to relish in them, but to appreciate that God has made you a whole being with failings, yes,

but also with positive attributes. If you are completely unaware of your strengths, you might fail to realize that your strengths (and your calling) will differ from those of others. You might be tempted to compare yourself.

In John, Chapter 21, Christ says to Saint Peter: "When you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish" (John 21:18) indicating to Peter the way in which he would die, that is, by martyrdom. Peter asks Christ, "What about this man?" (John 21:21), gesturing to Saint John the Beloved. Peter wants to know if John, too, will be martyred.

But Christ's response to Peter is His response to all of us: "What is that to you? You follow Me" (John 21:22). Christ teaches us all through this exchange that though we're all members of His body, though we're all priests' wives, we won't have the same function, and we won't carry the same crosses. Peter was a martyr, but John lived to old age—"What's it to you?"

Finally, and this is very important, I want you to know that your weaknesses even if they are glaringly obvious to you and to others will be a source of great blessing in your life if you give them over to His will. Just as God has a plan for your strengths and talents, He has a plan for your weaknesses, too. They serve a function for Him. In your weaknesses, He wants you to rely on Him — and He will bless you more than you can imagine through them.

I was listening to a sermon recently that talked about how every single thing is in the hand of God. All of nature cannot and does not move without God's permission. In the sermon, the example was given of a wild animal that you meet. Whether it kills you or runs from you, God already knows and has willed it. So, too, He knows your weaknesses. He allows them to remain, for a time, as the thorn in your flesh, to push you forward to Him and to help you grow in holiness and His perfection.

One of the most mentioned examples of God using someone's weakness is Moses the Prophet. We often talk about Moses and his stutter. When God from the burning bush called him to stand up for the Israelites before Pharaoh, Moses said, "O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue" (Exodus 4:10). But why would God use a person who isn't skilled at speaking to advocate for His people?

Imagine with me for minute if Moses had been a very confident and eloquent speaker. He might have spoken very boldly in front of Pharaoh and said the wrong thing. The words he said could have backfired, and he would have blamed himself.

But knowing he had no ability to speak, he trusted God's words and obeyed Him in that matter. What Moses said before Pharaoh was what God had asked him to say—whether it succeeded or not in the way he would have hoped or imagined. Ten whole plagues before Pharaoh's will bent (temporarily) to God's—and not because Moses was an eloquent speaker.

If we choose to do the will of God and dedicate our lives to His service, we must rest assured that He **will** help us. Whatever you do that is true, noble, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous or praiseworthy (Philippians 4:8), you must trust that He will help you.

Let us get to know ourselves, accept ourselves, and ask for God's help to grow and heal and become more in His image and likeness. Let us remember to give ourselves, warts and wrinkles and all, over to the Lord to do with as He wishes: "God, here I am, weak and scared and useless, put me to whatever use You see fit."

Your sister in Christ,

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