



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States
Monthly Message for the Priests Wives
May 2021

House of Sand

My Dearest Sister in Christ,

I was flipping through available podcasts, when I saw an episode reacting to the global pandemic with the title: “What do you hold on to when your world stops?” I sure could relate.

It was incredibly jarring, wasn't it, this time last year, when neither we nor our husbands could serve in the ways we'd become accustomed? Churches were closed, home visits were halted, and even smiles were impossible to come by.

It got me thinking how tempting it is, for us as priests' wives too, to build our houses—our identities—on sand: the sand of our service, the sand of our careers, the sand of our children, spouses or families, even the sand of our own vision of ourselves whatever that may be. As we've seen in these hard days, all of these can shift or be taken away.

Last year, when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, a friend of mine lost her job and with it all her moorings to her life. Without the job that she had grounded herself in so firmly, she began a terrible downward spiral. I watched her destroy her friendships, call it quits on her marriage, and flounder publicly in a myriad of ways. It was incredibly difficult to watch her descent and self-destruction. Because her job was her foundation, when it became quicksand, she sunk with it.

In these feasting days, let us look at our lives and see what we've decided to tie our identities to, what we've made our foundation. What will happen to our sense of self if we lose this job? What will happen to our sense of self when our children are grown and out of the house? What will happen when someone younger or more experienced or more suited takes up our service?

We are called to grow and multiply our talents, our skills, our positions, even our family and community, as God calls us. But we must be very wary of centering our identities on any of these.

We don't want every bump in the road to become a challenge or an existential threat. We don't want to be left aimless and confused when faced with the inevitable changes of life. We don't want passing circumstances to confuse or undermine us. We don't want to make just anything, especially temporary things, "our world."

When Christ is our world, on the other hand, all these crises are a non-issue. When everything falls away, we know we can only hold on to Christ, our foundation and chief cornerstone.

Building our identity in Christ is a surety, a stability, that time and circumstance cannot shake. Relying on Him for peace and grace gives us access to deep reserves that never run out.

Saint Paul reminds us in his letter to the Hebrews: *"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever"* (Hebrews 13:8). In Shakespeare's famous tragedy *Romeo and Juliet*, Juliet says to Romeo, *"Don't swear you love me by the moon that changes throughout the month, or else your love will prove as unsteady."* Our Beloved is not inconstant; His love is consistent and guaranteed. We never have to wonder if He still loves us with the same fire because *"While we were still sinners, Christ died for us"* (Romans 5:8). He didn't wait for us to make the first move, to be constant or steady in our love first: *"We love Him because He first loved us"* (1 John 4:19)

The Prophet Jeremiah tells us in his *Lamentations* that *"Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning"* (Lamentations 3:22-23a). His compassion and gentleness toward us are renewed every morning. Whereas our coworkers and even family members might become weary of us and our weaknesses, God who knows us so intimately, since before our conception, never wearies but loves us unendingly.

He gives this love freely and without reservation, "for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:45). This same God has called us to be adopted into His family and given us a purpose and identity in Him that cannot be shaken by time or circumstance.

From all the blessings He has given us undeservedly, we can only confirm ourselves in Him, relying on Him, and affirming with Jeremiah: *"Great is Thy faithfulness!"* (Lamentations 3:23b).

So, let us take this time to reflect on what we are choosing to be grounded in. Let's recommit ourselves to saying YES to whatever the Lord has planned for us, trusting in His sure promises.

Your sister in Christ,

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