



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

What Shall I Say?

My Dearest Sister in Christ,

In the early years of Abouna's priesthood, I used to, whenever there was a tough situation, quote to myself Saint Peter in his first epistle where he says, *"For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps"* (1 Peter 2:21). I used that verse to remind myself that whatever suffering, hardship, or trouble I was going through this was my calling: to pass through those rough waters and learn to thrive through them and rely on God alone.

Recently, I was confronted with another passage that reflected much the same idea, except this took it a step further. Now we've all heard and studied Christ's prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. We all know well that night when He sweat blood (Luke 22:44), that it was such a difficult night, such a tough moment for Him. He was under the most extreme stress imaginable. I've sat through many lectures and presentations about how this is a real, physiological response (*hematidrosis*) that can actually happen to people when they're under this kind of stress. And what Christ says that night is so familiar to us: *"Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done"* (Luke 22:42).

Yet, as part of Pascha prayers, I felt I was learning a new facet of the story. It hadn't clicked to me that this wasn't the only time Christ talked about the cup and whether He should ask for it to be taken away from Him. After Christ's triumphant entry into Jerusalem, He talked to His disciples a little about the challenge to come, that is, the Cross. What He says there shows how carefully Saint Peter was listening to and emulating his Master.

Christ begins, *"Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say?"* (John 12:27). How often are our souls troubled, and we're struggling with something? How often do we face something that causes us great pain and feelings of devastation? And in the depth of our agony, sometimes we don't even have words or ability to pray what we really want. We know already that God knows that what we want is for this struggle to be lifted from us. Whatever trouble, trial, persecution or suffering we're enduring or others are enduring—we want it to go away.

In this moment, Christ echoes our words, *"And what shall I say 'Father, save Me from this hour'?"* That is the obvious request. We all yearn for that salvation from trouble, for the lifting of the curse.

Then Christ continues, saying, *"But for this purpose I came to this hour."* I'm here in this moment for a reason for, whatever this is that I'm going through, again that prototype of the phrase *"to this you were called."*

It makes me think of the story of Esther, of the words of Mordecai her cousin. *"Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"* (Esther 4:14). We always imagine our purpose in life to be something grand and beautiful and victorious. And it's not always that. Sometimes it's pleading with the King for mercy, for the glory of His holy name, in a way we cannot yet comprehend.

Christ, as He is predicting His death on the cross in the Gospel of John, says, *"Father glorify Your name"* (John 12:28). Rather than saying, *"Father, save me from this hour,"* His cry was *"Father, glorify Your name."*

And isn't it incredible to imagine that right then the voice came from heaven and said, *"I have both glorified it and will glorify it again"?*

God says to us, *I've created the world. I've raised mountains and dug valleys. I've parted waters and sent bread from heaven. I heal the sick and raise the dead and have broken the gates of Hades. I have both glorified My name and will glorify it again.* That is God's promise to us in our difficulties.

Now Christ told His disciples, *"This voice did not come because of Me, but for your sake"* (John 12:30). For our sake, yours and mine, we need to remember that God has both glorified His name and will glorify it again, whatever we're enduring.

When your soul is troubled and your heart can't even bring itself to say the words, *"Father, save me from this hour,"* instead say, *"Father, glorify Your name"* and remember His clear response: *"I have both glorified it and will glorify it again,"* that He is looking out for you and that you were called for this moment.

Oh, that's so easy to say on a sunny afternoon, as I write this, but I'm praying that we both embed these words in our hearts, so that, when times are hard, in those dark moments yet to come, we pull them out and in them find comfort.

Your sister in Christ,

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