



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

Monthly Message for the Priests Wives

December 2021

Leave it on the Court

My Dearest Sister in Christ,

I recently attended a championship basketball game. From the minute the clock started counting down the first quarter to the buzzer at the last quarter, the five girls on the court played with a constant energy, focus, and diligence that amazed and humbled me.

As we move forward in our lives, we often look around at other people and try to stay about average. We try not to fall behind those around us—and not to exceed those around us either. That was not the case for these girls. They were not looking to be average.

They were aggressive. They played through injuries. They fell and got back up many, many times. They were not playing to be mediocre and common.

When athletes run long distances, there's usually a few people running ahead, a few lagging behind, and a big core group—a pack—in the middle.

It's comfortable in the middle of the pack. It's safe. You know you're pacing yourself in a reasonable way, if it's the way everyone else is running.

At this basketball game, these girls were not looking for safe. They were not looking to play the way everyone else was playing. They had not beaten every team along the way to let their guard down in the last game. They were playing to win.

That's what Saint Paul demands of us in his first letter to the Corinthians:

"Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it." (1 Corinthians 9:24)

This game made me think about the way we approach our spiritual lives. Are we looking to be safe, average, in the middle of the pack?

Middle of the pack prayer life, middle of the pack canon, middle of the pack church attendance, middle of the pack service... is that what God asks us to do?

When Christ called Peter out into the water, He did not ask him to swim. He did not ask him to bring a friend. He asked him to do the impossible—to walk on water—trusting He would carry him through.

When God called Jonah to preach, He did not give him easy assignments. He did not send him to "usual" places. He asked him to preach to the hated Ninevites—and it terrified Jonah.

Again, when Esther was put in a position to confront the king to save her people, it was not an average request. It was not a mediocre service. It was life or death. Yet Cousin Mordecai told her, "Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14)

God calls us out to deeper waters. He asks us to go where only He can carry us. He does not ask for average.

Many times, Saint Paul exhorts us to push beyond the pack, to step forward, to forget average and strive for first place.

To the Colossians, he says, *"Whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men"* (Colossians 3:23). The Romans, he exhorts saying to love as Christ taught us, *"not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord"* (Romans 12:11).

Saint Paul says to Timothy to do his best, give it his all, so before God he has *"nothing to be ashamed of"* (2 Timothy 2:15). When the Galatians struggle, he reminds them not to tire *"of doing what is good, for at the right time we will reap a harvest—if we do not give up"* (Galatians 6:9).

These girls were facing a tough opponent. They fought for every point. They left it all on the court—their tears (so many were shed), their injuries (one pushed through a twisted ankle), and their sweat.

In life and for our salvation, we need to leave it all on the court. We need to do our best in every moment, so that there's no question in our minds that we have been diligent, that we worked heartily, that we have not given up but have worked without shame to reap the harvest in due time.

"Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it." (1 Corinthians 9:24)

In a recent sermon, His Grace Bishop Youssef emphasized that we are not competing for our salvation, that it's not like there are limited spots in heaven. Rather that we, in our diligence, should be working out our salvation with our full strength.

We should be seeking God beyond the average, unashamed to seek Him always, to rejoice in Him always, to pray always. Not content with comparing ourselves with what others do, but pushing beyond that to a closer friendship with our Lord.

Your sister in Christ,

Ni-Ni