



## Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

### Monthly Message for the Priests Wives

May 2022

### Fruitless Fig Leaves

My Dearest Sister in Christ,

One of the pits we can fall into as priests' wives is that of the leafy fig tree.

We can put all our focus on curating our reputation with the congregation. We can put effort into making sure that we appear (and that our children appear) as model Christians who check off all the boxes, go to all the services, sing in the choir, and so on. We can layer on those broad leaves.

Because of our relationship with the community through our husband's ministry, we can become all the gloss and shine on the outside and bear no spiritual fruit.

But a priest's wife who attends to her outer reputation with the congregation without attending first and primarily to her inner spiritual life is walking a mortally dangerous path—one that Christ cursed.

We must be careful not to be just outwardly acceptable to the people, but, much more importantly, we must be inwardly acceptable to God.

**Do a regular, intensive diagnosis.** Where is your focus, time and energy going? Is it going into polishing the leaves, so no one can see what's going on inside?

We all have some level of hypocrisy, some discrepancy between how we appear and what we are—but examine your time. Is most of your investment of energy going into the outer reputation or is your goal and focus to live in integrity?

One of the ways to check your focus is to look at how you fall into the comparison trap. *"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also"* (Matthew 6:21). Are you comparing your leaves to that of others? Are you anxious about their outer services and appearances? Do you look at their supermom abilities from the outside and feel inferior?

Or are you comparing *fruit*? Are you zealous to have their peace, their joy in tough circumstances, and their faith in troubled waters? You can have more leaves than anyone

else but be devoid of true spiritual fruit — and this will be a curse to you. What you *desire* is what you *treasure*.

Here are two important ways to attend to your inner life.

**First, spend time in prayer and reflection.**

While we certainly can and should spend time in communal prayer (going to liturgies and Bible studies and other services led by our husbands), we must be very careful not to neglect our own personal and private prayer life.

Our prayer life is the foundation of our salvation, our family life, and, indirectly through Abouna's service, the health of our congregation. There must be a constant conversation with God, small steel threads throughout the day, that support that mammoth task of carrying others.

In these times of reflection, we can look at how we are comparing our lives to others. If we are comparing spiritual fruit, the fruit of the Spirit, and find ourselves lacking, in times of prayer and reflection we can call to God our desire to be more patient, joyful, kind and faithful.

Communication with God is the heart of our inner spiritual life.

**Secondly, attend to your confessions.**

Confession is of the utmost importance to a priest's wife. I say this knowing how busy our lives are and how hard it is to trust others. But in order to get a true diagnosis, we must have a professional look at our spiritual life over time. A stable, ongoing relationship with a father of confession helps us grow and helps us recognize if we backslide.

The devil comes for you hard when he recognizes you are in a weakened state, whether that is early in the ordination life or if something happens during the journey of life. You will not want to be alone when things are messy. A father of confession is a lifeline.

Just as scouring WebMD for a diagnosis of your physical ailments has its limits, the time you spend self-diagnosing needs to be balanced. The more accurate diagnosis and spiritual healing plan needs the eye of a spiritual father who knows you well.

When you check in with yourself regularly, make personal communication with God a priority, and confess with a trusted advisor, you guard against the fig leaf phenomenon. When your inner spiritual life is solid, you can face all the trials (and joys) that come with being the wife of a priest with the blessing of God's grace.

Your sister in Christ,

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