



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

Monthly Message for the Priests Wives

June 2022

Sunday Dread

My Dearest Sister in Christ,

Many a priest's wife over the years has developed a strange condition I like to call Sunday Dread. Tell me if you've ever dealt with this. It's Sunday morning (or any other time before a church service), and instead of feeling excited about going, you feel anxious and a little afraid.

You feel yourself leaning back, resisting, desperate to find an excuse not to go.

Because of our role as priests' wives, we can feel wary about being the center of attention, the focus of strange comments, or questions. We can feel overwhelmed that what we wear or say or do might change someone's opinion of us—or worse, their opinion of our husband or children.

If, instead of welcoming our precious time in God's house, we're consumed by these concerns, our soul will begin to shrivel. But, as with plants, a soul needs regular care to overcome this kind of social anxiety, this form of agoraphobia. A soul needs to be watered with good thoughts, weeded of bad ones, and bathed in the sunlight of gratitude and joy.

Water Your Soul with Good Thoughts

To begin the healing, you need to water your soul with good thoughts. Remember that the church is your Father's house. The Lord says to you, "See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding" (Matthew 22:4). Whoever else is there, and whatever else is going on, the church is your own Father's house and He has invited you there expressly to partake of His blessings.

There He has provided for you the Bread of Life and the Living Water. There He "will guide you continually and satisfy your soul in drought." He'll make you "like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail" (Isaiah 58:11).

There, all your brothers and sisters in Christ gather: those who still live and those who have departed and all the beloved saints, accompanied by angels. Let these thoughts fill your mind and crowd out all negativity:

- "This is my Father's house"
- "I have been invited by name to partake of the Eucharist," and
- "Inside is my entire family: living and departed, saints and angels."

Then to continue the healing, you will need to weed your soul of bad thoughts. There are two specific thoughts that make it hard to go to church. The first is “I am not good enough,” and the second is “What will they think?”

Remind yourself that Moses too felt crippling shame and feelings of inferiority, but that God called him anyway. Remind yourself that these thoughts of how you don’t measure up are not from God but are attacks from the devil to keep you from spending time with the Lord. And these thoughts come to everyone—to other members of the congregation, maybe even to the priest himself.

Instead of trying to “fix” yourself before you come to church (with one more swipe of mascara, one last pat of the hair), take the example of the publican and know that you go to stand humbly before the Lord, beating your chest.

Remind yourself that other people are not as occupied with judging you as you fear they are. We are all coming to church with a low-grade worry about what others will think. Those who *are* pre-occupied with you need your prayers and pity, not your fear of them. Come to church with a heart ready to look on others with love and not judgment, so you can serve as an example of how you would like others to look at you.

Finally, to seal the healing, you need to bathe your soul in the sunlight of gratitude and Godly joy. When the service is done, even though you may be exhausted, take a few minutes to dwell directly on the good that has happened. Think back on happy or touching moments from the day.

Accept the feelings of warmth and satisfaction for having spent time in God’s presence. Embrace the good work the Holy Spirit has done for you and for the congregation. Don’t brush aside the joy of Sunday, but instead take a few minutes to really feel the gratitude.

Were the kids engaged in your Sunday School lesson? Thank God for that. Were you able to be welcoming to a new family? Be glad for that.

Taking that extra bit of time Sunday afternoon (or evening, depending on your schedule) to be grateful for time spent at church will help you the following week to be able to say confidently, “I rejoiced with those who said to me let us go to the house of the Lord!” (Psalm 122:1).

Watering, weeding, and sunbathing your soul won’t be like flipping a switch. You won’t instantly be filled with grace every Sunday morning. It may be more like a new habit you’ll practice, over and over.

But it’s a worthwhile habit that will help you lean in to Sunday services, instead of leaning away.

Your sister in Christ,

Ni-Ni