



**Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States**  
**Monthly Message for the Priests Wives**  
**December 2022**

**Friends for Sundays**

My Dearest Sister in Christ,

I've written before to you about the feeling I call the "Sunday Dreads," that anxiety we get before we head off to Divine Liturgy. Sometimes that weight of expectations and conflicts, that crowd of people with opinions and judgments on our life, can make it difficult to go to church with a light and cheerful heart.

In past letters, I have reminded you that everyone has their own problems (they aren't all looking at you, all the time), and that church is your Father's house, where you are always welcome and loved.

Often that's enough to ease the worries and send you off to church happily. Other times, you may need a different approach.

There may be times when you don't feel like you belong. Maybe beloved friends have moved away, and the faces in the crowd are less familiar. Maybe everyone has broken off into comfortable groups, and you're reminded that, in some ways, you are an outsider. How are you supposed to handle that feeling? That particular warfare?

When I recently faced this situation, I asked my husband for a pep talk, for advice and encouragement to work up the courage to go to church with gladness and not dread. I loved his suggestion so much, and it worked so well, that I'm eager to share it with you.

Liturgy, he said, is heaven on earth, and there we meet our heavenly Father, yes, and the angels, and also all of our heavenly friends, the saints who came before us.

Suddenly, my whole paradigm for the day shifted. I am going to church to meet friends, best friends. In the Divine Liturgy, I may be surrounded by fellow humans, striving for salvation in our own small way, but I'm also surrounded by those who are on the other side of the journey, who have won their races.

While we pray, the saints and angels pray with us. While we praise, their voices are also lifted. They come to Divine Liturgy and wait for us. They cheer us on.

And those friends? They don't care what you're wearing today. They aren't eager to make a snide comment to put you in your place. They have nothing negative to say about your children.

They are waving their crosses, their gospels, and their palm branches, reminding you that the end is near and only one goal matters: God alone.

So, when the Sunday Dreads hit, forget the people stressing you out, and imagine five saints at church who are waiting to see you today. Choose five friends. Maybe Saint Mary, the patron saint of your church, and a few others. Make it a crowd of people, at the end of the finish line of your race, cheering you on.

Prepare in the morning as though you are getting ready to see those five people. They are your community, and you are very beloved to them. When they see you at church, they'll smile and wave without hesitation. They've already saved you a seat, and they will never comment on the brand of your handbag or the gray in your hair.

And because they are fully occupied with Christ Himself, you also turn your face to God's presence and His love—and your love for Him and your desire to serve. You're less afraid to have an open heart and to be vulnerable, and your sacrifices seem small compared to theirs—but in a positive way, as something to strive for and not beat yourself up about.

There's an unexpected bonus to this, too. There's a saying that we're the average of the five people we spend the most time with. Can you imagine those five saints as the people you spend the most time with? How will your experience of life change? How will you grow spiritually in their midst?

After the Sunday Dreads are over, bring them with you the rest of the week. Consult them on important issues and ask for their intercession and prayers.

When I think about the five saints that I've chosen, I am overwhelmed by how far I am from where they are. But then I remember how encouraging they are, and how much they love me and love those of us in the church who are still striving. I remember what an example that they set with their lives, and I yearn to spend that time with those five.

The saints are alive and eager to help you. They know exactly what you need because they're always in direct communication with your creator.

Next time you feel that spiritual warfare is pushing you to avoid church services, I want you to think instead of those five friends that you have in mind right now.

Let them take your hand and walk beside you and remind you of His overwhelming love.

Your sister in Christ,

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