



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

Monthly Message for the Priests Wives

March 2023

The Holy Great Fast

Dear Sisters in Christ,

As we approach Great Fast, unquestionably the most holy time of year, we encounter particular blessings, challenges, temptations and opportunities:

- Blessings as we intensify our inner life in Christ through increased prayer, fasting and almsgiving and come to know Him more intimately.
- Challenges -- navigating the decreased availability and support of our husbands, due to their increased responsibilities; perhaps some physical weakness from fasting, which can make us more irritable; providing nutritious meals; discerning our children's attendance at Fast services and, if the children are older, what choices we will give them with worship, etc.
- Temptations – to become resentful of carrying yet even more of the responsibilities in the home and with the children; to become embittered toward our husbands for their lack of availability and support; to not take seriously the opportunities the Church gives us during this season to draw nearer to Christ; to indulge in many meat and dairy substitutes while keeping the “letter” of the fast, etc.
- Opportunities – with His grace, to cultivate our inner life and commitment to Christ; to keep the fast joyfully; to become more grateful; to become better stewards of all the gifts God bestows upon us; to become more generous through almsgiving; to come to see God at work in our daily lives and the lives of our children more clearly; to become more loving and compassionate women; and, most importantly, to grow even just a little in loving God with “all

our heart, soul and mind and loving our neighbor as we love ourselves.” (Matt. 22:37-39, paraphrased)

As I reflect and write to you, I am realizing that the opportunities given to us by the Church during this holy season far outnumber the challenges and temptations, and that the challenges and temptations, are, in fact, opportunities.

- the challenge of the decreased availability of our husband is an opportunity to make sure we create more sacred spaces for family time and to be better prepared inwardly for our husband’s increased time away from home;
- the preparation of nutritious meals an opportunity to be more “creatively simple”;
- the temptation to become resentful toward our husband, an opportunity to grow in compassion toward him;
- the temptation to indulge in substitute foods an opportunity to follow a cleaner, simpler and more wholesome diet, etc.

In the therapeutic world, the practice of “reframing” is often recommended when people struggle with negative thoughts, that is, to reframe negative thoughts into positive thoughts. So, thinking of Great Fast as a time of opportunities to draw nearer to Christ, and each struggle and temptation as an opportunity, through all of the disciplines the Church offers us, rather than a time of struggle/temptation/challenge, may help us to engage in and with all that we encounter during this blessed season of pilgrimage to Pascha with a renewed mindset.

In the words of Elder Thaddeus, which echo “reframing,” as quoted in *Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives*: “Our life depends on the kind of thoughts we nurture. If our thoughts are peaceful, calm, meek, and kind, then that is what our life is like. If our attention is turned to the circumstances in which we live, we are drawn into a whirlpool of thoughts and can have neither peace nor tranquility.”

May God grant that we all enter Great Lent with “peaceful, calm, meek, and kind” thoughts, seeing everything in our circumstances as opportunities for growing in love for Christ and one another.