



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of
the Southern United States

The Monthly Message
to the Fathers, the Priests

November 2022

Between Priesthood & Family

Introduction

As the title indicates, we need to understand the role of a priest within two types of families:

1. his own small inner family
2. his big broader family, the congregation

Since this matter is an important one, it will be dealt with as two separate topics in two separate articles.

1. The Priest and His Small Inner Family

“But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Timothy 5:8).

St. Paul's words are directed to all believers. how much more are they directed to a priest, the core of whose service is to shepherd and take care of God's people with whom He has entrusted. God's people include the church

congregation as well as a priest's own family. The type of care includes:

- **Caring Comprehensively**

Priesthood does not mean neglect of a priest's own family. It may seem common place that once ordained, a priest gets too much preoccupied with his priesthood services and loses touch with his wife and children leaving all the household responsibilities to the wife alone sparing himself only to interfere when big problems arise. Such policy in service is not acceptable. St. Paul teaches the proper way of distribution of responsibilities.

“Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, 'Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing.’” (Acts 15:36).

The words, “...*how they are doing*” establishes an important principal which is the need for a priest to be close to his own small family and to check regularly on them making them feel that they are part of his responsibility as a shepherd of a wider flock and that he is consciously fully aware of their needs not just by the way. St. Paul's words “*how they are doing*” convicts those priests who are totally oblivious of their wives and children. A priest's responsibilities extend to include following up with his wife and children to discover their different needs and problems which could very well be beyond food and

nutrition but extends to the emotions and psychological needs from which they might suffer alone if the father is not aware of them. St. Paul would not allow time to pass without checking on those to whom he had one day reached out.

“But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire” (1 Thessalonians 2:17).

2. Supplying Needs

'Needs' include all types of needs. Our Lord Jesus Christ verified those needs in His parable about the faithful servant and the evil servant.

“And the Lord said, 'Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food [a]in due season? 43 Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has. But if that servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and be drunk, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers. And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according

to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.” (Luke 12:42-48).

A priest's family, like all other families, have the same needs. Therefore, just as a priest has promised God to give his entire self to shepherding His flock, it is necessary that he does not forget the needs of his family. At the beginning of their service, the apostles, having been totally devoted and immersed in it, there arose complaint against them.

“Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution” (Acts 6:1).

Priests should be alert to their families' needs before their complaints take them by surprise. It might be the case that service compels a priest to be away from his family and so the family feels deprived of his presence among them. This seems especially conspicuous during holidays when church activities multiply. However, with the grace of God, a priest has to try to fill this void assuring his wife and children of his presence in their life and in his household. In addition, wherever and whenever possible, involving the family in the various service activities will give them the

joy of participation with their father in service. In the end, a priest is a husband to his wife and a father to his own children and not just to the congregation.

3. Providing an Outstanding Example

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

By these words, our Lord Jesus Christ emphasized good behavior and the impact therein through becoming an example to be followed. A priest has to be careful to shine not just before his congregation but also before his family when he is with them, away from the eyes of the public. To the public a priest is the exemplary 'father'. That exemplary father should be the same within closed doors with his wife and children. A priest's behavior at home is the best homily that requires no preparation. All it requires is spiritual endeavor, a truthful heart and personal integrity. A priest who fails to be a loudly read epistle embracing these qualities will reap the bitterness of causing his inner family to stumble, *“...But to his sons-in-law he seemed to be joking”* (Genesis 19:14).

To his family, such a priest will become another model seen in the scribes and Pharisees and described by our Lord, *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but*

inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness” (Matthew 23:27-28).

Behind closed doors, a priest is definitely required to present the same love, piety, prayerfulness, love for abstinence and longsuffering. In this way, his family will become convinced of their father's ministry and have faith in it and in him and as a role model learn from him how to live a life of purity and consecration.

“Philip said to Him, 'Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us.' Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves.” (John 14:8-11).

It is true that actions speak louder than words. That is why our Lord Jesus Christ praised those who did and taught through their deeds.

“Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:19).