

Lecture IV:
Consecration/Marriage/Monasticism
ΠΧΙΝΕΡΑΙΚ ΠΧΙΝΤΩΩΙ †ΩΕΤΩΟΝΑΧΟC

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” (Ephesians 2: 10)

Every human being is intended to have a character of his own, to be what no other is, and to do what no other can do...

A) Consecration

Consecration is a desire to spiritually serve within the world under the auspices of the Church. A consecrated servant is a person who has an in-depth personal relationship with God, whose heart is full of His love, and desires the Goodness of life with the Lord. He must be at a higher spiritual level than those whom he is serving and constant ongoing study is a given.

A consecrated heart is one that is happiest when it is serving others. A consecrated heart precedes a consecrated life. In the Holy Gospel of St. John we read, *“Greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends”* (15:3).

Those desiring consecration must be of pure thoughts, good behavior and habits. Through his life, he displays to those he serves the True way of life. As the Prophet Isaiah spoke, *“O, Zion that bring good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain”* (Isaiah 40:9). This means that whoever teaches others about Heavenly matters has to leave the earthly levels and has to stand on a high mountain. Similarly it can be said that water flows from an upper level to a lower level not the opposite.

The need for consecrated servants today is immediate and is certainly great. *“The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few”* (Matthew 9:37).

A youth may consecrate himself in the service of the Church for one year or for a life time depending on their desires. Consecration is giving full attention to the service needs of the Church under the direction and guidance of the priest and the bishop.

One may be married or celibate depending upon the spiritual calling of the servant. For those seeking a life time of consecration of service within the world celibacy is recommended.

One must depend upon the Church for support during the time of consecration or may work but only what is necessary to support himself. His focus is entirely upon the service. An example may be a youth with an education major who consecrates one year of service following college to teaching at a Coptic school. Another example may be someone who consecrates themselves to the youth ministry, to ministry of the elderly who can no longer travel to the Church, etc. The consecration opportunities are limitless.

B) Marriage

I. Finding a Life-Partner

A person might keep on searching for years for a suitable life-partner, but let us ask each person: what is the basis of your search? Are you looking for a person with integral wholesome character, or you are just interested in a particular character disregarding the others?

- ❖ **Search for Beauty:** A person may search for physical beauty without thinking of what adorns the spirit, running after a temporary emotion not after serious reasoning. Look at the spirit before looking at the body. Search for the spiritual gifts before getting distracted with the physical beauty. Search for the mind, the wisdom before the color, the image and the looks. Before getting preoccupied with the physical beauty, enter the depth of the soul and look for the beauty of the spirit. ***“Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised”*** (Proverbs 31:30). If we perceive beauty to be a gift of God, we do not look for only one gift but look for a person with multiple talents and gifts, specially the gifts of the Holy Spirit the one that bears the fruits of love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, and goodness. (Galatians 5:22-23)
- ❖ **Led by emotions:** Let your mind control your emotions. Do not let your emotions overcome your reason. Not every friend can be a spouse. Ask yourself what made you consider that person a “friend”? Are these reasons and qualities enough to make you consider marrying that person? Sometimes what is acceptable from a friend is not acceptable from a spouse. Think and let your mind leads your emotions to the right decisions. Marry a godly person who would provide you spiritual growth and stability.
- ❖ **Looking for money:** Solomon was the richest man on earth, despite that he wrote ***“For a wisdom is better than rubies and all the things one may desire cannot be compared with her”*** (Proverbs 8:11). Abigail was rich and very beautiful; however her true wealth was in her wisdom. Therefore she was praised for her wisdom before her beauty ***“She was a woman of good understanding and beautiful appearance”*** (1Samuel 25:3). Search for a spouse who is virtuous not who is rich. Solomon said, ***“Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies”*** (Proverbs 31:10). Wisdom may make you money, but money cannot grant you wisdom. ***“The wise woman builds her house. But the foolish pulls it down with her hands”*** (Proverbs 14:1). The wise woman will help you get rich but a rich woman that lacks wisdom will make you lose your spiritual richness.

Factors to take into consideration:

1. Age

Marriage age for a man:

Being at the right age to get married qualifies you for a comfortable wedded life. A man should not rush into getting married before he is well established mentally, emotionally and financially. He should wait till the age when he can bear responsibility. The right age to get married is different from one person to the other depending on the level of education, the type of education, the bringing up of the person, and the nature of his reasoning.

Marrying age for a woman:

- ❖ The adequate age for marriage: she should be old enough to be able to bear the responsibility of a family and children. For how is it possible for a person who cannot depend on herself to become all of a sudden a wife responsible for her husband, her household and soon responsible for raising children.
- ❖ The right age to bear children: she should not be too young to have her own children or to old to get pregnant which would endanger her life or have a deformed child.
- ❖ The suitable age match between the bride and the bridegroom: A great difference in age will result in him treating her as a daughter or a child instead of his wife. The Holy Bible says ***“A helper comparable to him”*** (Genesis 2:18). As for her she would feel that he is a father to her, not a mate close to her who is capable of feeling and sharing her sentiments. Nor should she be much older than him, for this might create problems later on in their marital life due to psychological and biological reasons.

2. Educational match

- ❖ **The level of education:** A man should not choose someone much higher educated than himself for she might later on show him arrogance and he would feel low self esteem. Nor should he marry someone much less educated than himself for this might later on affect her behavior, and her capabilities in responding to his way of thinking which might lead to many marital problems.
- ❖ **The type of education:** The type of education affects the way a person thinks and behaves. A person with a scientific background is usually organized in his/her thinking, mathematical in analyzing matters, therefore may need precision in dealing with him/her. On the other hand many of those with an art background are very delicate and need to be dealt with in a sensitive manner.
- ❖ **The place of education:** An individual is affected in his thinking not only by the degree and type of education but also by where he/she was educated. One educated in a small village is different from one raised in a metropolitan area. One who completed his/her education in the same place where he/she was born and raised, is different than the one who had to leave home and was exposed to various people from all different places and backgrounds.

3. Social match

Look for a family comparable to your own not for one much higher in its constitution and in its social rank. The family name and rank will not grant you peace and comfort if it is not compatible with your own family. The Holy Bible tells us that when King Saul proposed to David the prophet **“Behold my elder daughter Merab, I will give her to you as a wife” (1Samuel 18:17)**. David did not rejoice with this tempting proposal but he introduced himself to Saul saying **“I am the son of your servant Jesse the Bethlehemite” (1Samuel 17:58)**. He did not overlook his rank and the size of his family and answered wisely **“Who am I? And what is my life, or my father’s family in Israel that I should be the son-in-law to the king? (1Samuel 18:18)** David did not forget also that when God created Eve He said **“It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him” (Genesis 2:18)**. David’s answer to Saul was from his heart for he said to Saul’s servants **“Does it seem to you a light thing to be a king’s son-in-law seeing that I am a poor man and lightly esteemed” (1Samuel 18:23)**

The social match is not limited to how much each family owns but also the way they live, and where they live. The rich who lives in a village is different than the rich who lives in the city. The farmer is different than the one in business and trade.

Do not hasten, or look for one character disregarding the others. Think seriously and pray asking for God’s help and the wisdom of the experienced guidance.

II. The Right Understanding of the Marital Relationship

A spouse could misunderstand the meaning of the marital relationship. A husband might think that being the head of the woman means that he must be obeyed in everything at all times, everywhere and on the account of his wife’s individuality. The wife, on the other hand, may understand being equal to her husband is dealing with him as a rival. She might ask him to agree with her since she is his meet, comparable to him.

The Sacrament of Holy Matrimony is the Holy service in which the bridegroom and the bride are united together and are given the Divine grace which sanctifies their matrimonial union.

The role of each one is adequately stated during the Crowning Ceremony. **“Wives submit to your husbands as to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:22)**. The Holy Bible does not stop at asking the woman to submit to her husband but also gives her a picture of this submission when it says **“as to the Lord”**. It also says, **“The wife must respect her husband” (Ephesians 5:33)**. Therefore the priest, in the Crowning Ceremony, commands the bride saying *‘so you must honor and respect him, do not disagree with him but increase your obedience to him over what was commended many times ... so obey him as our mother Sarah, in love obeyed our father Abraham’*. Sarah obeyed Abraham.

- ❖ She left everyone and everything to obey and follow him when he was asked by God to leave his people.
- ❖ She obeyed him when he asked her to say that she is only his sister.
- ❖ She accompanied him in his many migrations.

The commandment of obeying the husband is a Biblical, and a Church commandment, it is lived through human and Church history.

However, note that in the Crowning Ceremony, before telling the wife to obey her husband the Church **first** commands the bridegroom through the priest saying, *“My blessed son, may the grace of the Holy Spirit strengthen you to take unto yourself your wife, in purity of heart and in sincerity. Do all that is good for her. Have compassion on her and always hasten to do that which will gladden her heart”*.

The Holy Bible tells us **“For the husband is the head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body”** (Ephesians 5: 23). Then continues saying in its message to the husbands **“Husbands love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her”** (Ephesians 5: 25). So if we ask the wife to submit to her husband as to the Lord and that her submission to her husband should be like the submission of the Church to the Lord Jesus Christ, we have to ask the husband what did he offer her first. Did the Church submit to the Lord Jesus Christ first, or He is the one who started by His giving?

The Lord Jesus Christ is the one who initiated giving

- ❖ He gave a wondrous love: He took the image of a bondservant and became like us in everything, except in our sins, to restore to us the divine image, to purify us from all sins.
- ❖ He gave a wondrous condescend: He came down to us, to raise us to Him. He that has an unlimited love and unlimited divinity became limited by the flesh.
- ❖ He bestowed Himself: He gave Himself to His Church and offered Himself to the death of the flesh in order that His Church lives by the Spirit. He died for her in this world to give her eternal life in the world to come.
- ❖ He loved His bride and His love did not depend on her worthiness. Therefore despite her treason by asking to free Barabas and crucify Him, He asked the father on her behalf on the Cross saying **“Father forgive them for they do not know what they do”** (Luke 23:34).

The expression “The man is head of the woman” puts on the man a responsibility and not an honor. As head of your wife, and as husband, look at what the Lord Christ gave? And under what circumstances He was giving? Have love that withstands, a love that confers, a forgiving love. Only then you will notice her submissive love for you. Plant a tree of love in your wife’s heart; she will produce the fruit of submission. As the head of the wife, the husband relationship should be as the relationship between the head and the body. It is true that the body submits to the head that through its electrical signals, every cell in the body moves submitting to it. But if we observe the head we find many factors:

- 1) The head is high above the body. So the husband should be eminent in his spirituality, and his intellect above all the members of his family including his wife.
- 2) The head is the center of feelings and intelligence. The husband should be sensible not only to himself but to the feelings of the others and their needs especially his wife.
- 3) The head is the entrance to the needs of the body. From it the air enters the lungs, the food and the water goes to the body through it. In the same manner the husband should be the source of fullness and satisfaction at home. Not the fullness in the flesh only, but mainly in the spiritual and emotional fullness.
- 4) In the head there are the eyes. The husband should have the spiritual foresight. He should have the definite sight, and anticipate and remedy the shortness of his foresight in some matters so that he does not entrap the body (the wife) in problems.
- 5) In the head are the ears to listen, not only the tongue for speaking. Therefore the husband should be swift to listen; so that he will become an effective heard voice obeyed by his wife.
- 6) In the head are the thoughts and the leadership to all the body. The husband should be an intelligent and wise leader to his household.

If you start with a generous love you will reap a submissive love from your wife. If you are the head of your household and of your wife, do not forget that you are part of the Church's body. You should be a firm and submissive member to her only true head Who is our Savior Jesus Christ through Whom we live and exist as the body to the head.

If you are led by the Lord Jesus Christ and His commandments you will be head and leader to your wife and she will be submissive to the Lord Jesus Christ Who is in you and will unite with you.

If the wife wants to be honored in her home, and be trusted by her husband and praised by her children, she should listen to what the wise Solomon the king says ***“Who can find a virtuous woman? For her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband safely trusts in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life. She seek wool, and flax, and works willingly with her hands...her candle does not go out by night.... she opens her mouth with wisdom and in her tongue is the law of kindness”*** (Proverbs 31:10-26). Solomon says about such a woman ***“Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates”*** (Proverbs 31:31).

B) The Church in your House

In its Appearance:

St. Paul wrote ***“Greet Priscilla and Aquila... Greet the church that is in their house”*** (Romans 16:3,5) and also ***“Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea and Nymphas, and the church that is in his house”*** (Colossians 4:15).

What is the meaning of the Church that “is in his or their house”? At the time of the Apostles, many made their homes into churches as a place where the believers could meet for prayer. The first Church was in the home of Mary the mother of St. Mark, the Apostle (Acts 12:12). Other churches were the houses of Aquila and Priscilla, Nymphas and Lydia, the seller of purple (Acts 16).

The meaning of the verse might be manifested in your life if you apply this verse literally. When you enter any house and see its rooms, you can quickly learn about the people living in that house: their hobbies, their religion (and often the denomination they belong to) through viewing the hangings on the walls.

What would we find hanging on the walls of a Christian person? Where is the Church that is in your house?

The Coptic Church places much emphasis on icons and on decorating its walls with them, not merely for decorative purposes, but for spiritual benefit as well.

- ❖ The presence of icons in the Church reveals the heavenly to us on earth. We see in the Church the icons of the angels of God and His saints. They lift our thoughts upward to meditate on their lives, and their teachings. We begin to pray, asking for their intercessions and their help. Our hearts are lifted above materialistic things, to witness to the heavenly through them.
- ❖ The icons and the pictures are an open Holy Bible, easy to read and without a specific language for reading and writing. The language of color is understood by the educated and the illiterate alike and people of different languages share in their understanding without need of a translator.
- ❖ The explicit icons represent an open history book, especially in the case of the Coptic art which is deep in its measures, simple in its strokes, and where every color and every line play an important role in revealing the spiritual characters and historical significance of the subject in the icon.

The icons in our homes are the best visual instruments depicting the sacred relation between the people in that home and those portrayed in the paintings.

In its Essence:

a)- Oneness

The most important characteristic of the Church reflected in the Christian home, is the oneness of the assembly of believers. Worshipers in the church represent one united body; each person represents a live, active member, living not only for himself but also for the entire assembly of believers.

In the Church, singularity disappears for the sake of the community and the oneness of the whole church. The Lord Jesus Christ talks to His heavenly Father saying *“And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that the world may believe that they may be one just as We are one”* (John 17:22).

The Church prays for this unity during the Divine Liturgy ‘The oneness of heart for love may it originate within us.’ All the believers share in one sacrifice, and unite together as one body with one head, the Lord Jesus Christ.

St. Paul says, *“He is the head of the body, the Church”* (Colossians 1:18). In his first Epistle to the Corinthians he says, *“But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ”* (1 Corinthians 11:3) *and to the Ephesians, “Christ is the head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body”* (Eph 5:23).

In wondrous oneness we find the head “Christ” gives Himself for the body that is the Church. Salvation did not occur only in the past, but is extended, continuous and effective in every Divine Liturgy. In the rituals of the Divine Liturgy we see the Lord Jesus Christ in His Incarnation, His crucifixion, His death for our sake, and His Glorious Resurrection and ours with Him by partaking in the Holy Communion.

b)- LOVE

The Church is viewed as a beautiful icon depicting the deep love that binds all its members together with the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the Divine Liturgy we hear a symphony of love orchestrated by everyone in the church including the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. On the altar the Lord Jesus Christ gives Himself. With love the priest prays for all. He prays for the living and the dead, the virgins, the married and the widows. He prays for those present and the travelers, for the healthy and the sick, for the rich and the poor, for the waters, and the air of heaven, the fruits of the earth, the seeds, the herbs and the plants of the field. He prays even for those who have no one to remember them for the people and the rulers. Truly it is a symphony of love and with love all the congregation participates in praying for one another and serving one another. This is the one Church in the Lord Jesus Christ.

During the Crowning Ceremony we pray asking God to bless the couple with the bond of love. The priest prays saying, “Make them have undispersed love for each other through their unity” and goes on praying “Grant Your servants, who shall wear them, the protection of the Angel of Safety and the bond of love”. Also during the ceremony we read excerpts of the letter of St. Paul to the Ephesians that shows the mutual love between the spouses.

c)- PRAYER

One of the most important duties of the Church is to give special attention to prayer. It is crucial that the Church plant in our hearts the love of communicating with God through prayer. The Church tries to make our homes, houses of prayers. Our homes become churches, where we dwell with God and God dwells there with us.

Prayer is not restricted to a certain place, time or situation. St. Basil says concerning prayer “Clinging to God at all times in our life so life becomes one prayer without interruption” Because of its importance a

person cannot neglect prayer, for in it is our life. St. John Chrysostom says, “Who does not pray to God is dead in spirit and has no life in him”. To show the importance of prayer he also says, “Prayer is a great weapon- a treasure that never ends – richness that never falls – a calm port – calmness without agitation” In our wars against the devil we need to arm ourselves with prayer. It binds us to God, and from His unlimited power we gain a power that bolsters our limited abilities.

✦ The Importance of Family Prayer

In a Christian home it is better that all the members of the family pray a common prayer together.

Although individual prayer is essential, we should emphasize on the importance of husband and wife stand before the Lord together in prayer.

- ❖ In praying together, God is among us as the Lord Jesus Christ promised, “*For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.*” (Mt 18:20).
- ❖ Praying together revitalizes the lazy one who would not have prayed on his or her own.
- ❖ In Praying together everyone benefits from the prayers of the one who is warm in spirit, who heats up our own prayers with his or her spiritual zeal, and because of whom, all of our prayers will be accepted for the enthusiasm coming from his or her warm heart.
- ❖ Praying together binds us together in a holy meeting, and unifies us with our Lord Jesus Christ.
- ❖ Praying together organizes our relationship with God, to specific times and special and appropriate places for prayer.

Due to the importance of prayer, we ought to consecrate a special place for prayers in our house. When we plan our home, we must remember to prepare a place for worship. If we are interested in furnishing a living room or a guestroom, decorating it with fine art and commemorative pictures, we might as well prepare a room to receive the best of our guests, and welcome the Creator of all humanity. When we furnish a room for prayer, we must choose for it a quiet place in the house and decorate it with pictures or icons that make the invisible come upon us: God and His angels.

IV. The Matrimonial Love

a)- **Love of the husband for his wife:**

The husband is urged to love his wife; “**Husbands, love your wives**” (Ephesians 5:25) emphasizing on this kind of love by saying, “**As Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her**” (Ephesians 5:25). It is a giving love, one that gives before it takes, love that gives until death, love that gives even if the receiver is unworthy. The Lord Jesus Christ gave Himself for the Church at the time when the crowd refused Him in spite of His love, and demanded His crucifixion and death when He was trying to give them life. This is a love that gives, even during suffering, for the Lord Jesus Christ gave Himself on the Holy Cross, and appealed to the Father on behalf of His crucifiers whom He loved in spite of their hardship, “**Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do**” (Luke 23:34). He gave them love at the time of betrayal not affected by who or what was around Him.

St. Paul clarifies the nature of the love of husbands to their wives, taking into consideration the weakness of their nature. “**Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, give honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered**” (1 Pet 3:7). **Therefore love your wife with gentleness, without cruelty, obeying the Bible that says “Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter towards them”** (Colossians 3:19).

During the Crowning Ceremony the Church commands the husband “Do all that is good for her. Have compassion on her and always hasten to do that which will gladden her heart. Take care of her as her parents did” St. Paul places a standard on this love: “**So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies**” (Ephesians 5:28).

By the Marriage Sacrament the two become one. This understanding was known to humanity since Adam, for we hear him saying about Eve ***“This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of Man”*** (Genesis 2:23).

Not only does the husband have to love his wife, but love her more than anybody else including his parents. We read in Genesis, ***“Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife and they shall be one flesh”*** (Genesis 2:24). In the Crowning Ceremony we say, ***“For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh”*** (Mt 9 & Mk 10).

The husband should love his wife, give himself for her and be patient with her. He should show her not only his feelings of love but also his acts of love; ***“Let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth”*** (1 John 3:18). If man is the head of the woman and the woman becomes his body he ought to know that the body cannot function without the head. The head gives everything to the body... food, water, air, and the electrical signals sent by the brain that activate the whole body. So it is not shameful for the husband to share with his wife the responsibilities of the house especially when the wife actively shares by working outside of the home to generate more income. With love the spouses share in establishing their house.

b)-Love of the Wife for her Husband:

If the man is asked to love his wife and give himself for her, she in turn has to love him:

1- The submissive love: St. Paul says, ***“Wives submit to your own husbands”*** (Ephesians 5:22) emphasizing on this kind of submission when he says, ***“As to the Lord”***. He continues saying, ***“For the husband is the head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church, and He is the Savior of the body”*** (Ephesians 5:23). In the letter to Colossians he says, ***“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord”*** and in his letter to Titus ***“To be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands that the word of God may not be blasphemed”*** (Titus 2:5). St Paul stresses on the degree of submission by saying ***“Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything”*** (Ephesians 5:24).

To obey this commandment, the wife submits to her husband in everything. When in disagreement on a certain issue she has to forget her abilities, and qualifications. She has to submit to her husband in order to execute the commandment of the Holy Bible that was commanded to her at the wedding ***“so you must honor and respect him, do not disagree with him ... because God the most High commanded you to submit to him and obey him as Sarah in love obeyed our father Abraham, and used to address him ‘my lord’”***. These words are not reflection of a man but inspiration of the Holy Spirit to St. Peter. He addressed women asking them to be ***“submissive to their own husbands as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror”*** (1 Peter 3:5-6).

Wives should submit to their husbands; however it is not shameful for the husband to submit sometimes to his wife’s ideas with sensibility. In the crowning ceremony the couple are commended ***“You ought to truly know each other and submit to one another”***. The Holy Bible stresses this understanding ***“There is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus”*** (Galatians 3:28). ***“Neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord. For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things of God”*** (1 Corinthians 11:11).

On the power over the body the Holy Bible says ***“The wife has not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband has not power of his own body, but the wife, defraud not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and***

come together again” (1 Corinthians 7:4-5). We notice that the church laws prohibit a married man from monastic life, unless he has the approval of his wife, and the priest who denies his wife, for celibacy against her will, is discharged.

2- A helper love: A wife should not only be submissive to her husband, but also ought to help him out of love. In the Holy Book of Genesis, one of the main reasons why Eve was created is to be a helper to Adam: ***“And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper meet for him”*** (Genesis 2:18). In the Crowning Ceremony we pray saying {He gave the woman as a helper and strength to him}. We speak to God {You gave him a help meet, You made her from him to be his wife, partner and helper}, and in the entreaty we pray {Who created woman from Adam’s rib and did grant that she should be his helpmate}.

In the first Matrimonial Prayer we say {O God Who is eternal and everlasting, Who created man from the earth, and gave him a woman out of his side and accommodated her for him as his helpmate}. In the second matrimonial prayer we say {O Father our God who formed all nature, who formed man from earth and made for him a helpmate from the rib}. Therefore a wife should understand that if God has distinguished her with abilities and gifts that He did not give to her husband it is not for her to boast about them but to be his helpmate. In the Holy Bible we find that God gave the woman what he did not give the man, so she served her husband using these talents.

Abigail the wise, wife of Napal the foolish, talked to David blaming her husband’s mistake to herself saying ***“Upon me, my lord, upon me let this iniquity be”*** (1 Samuel 25:24). As though faulty, but actually with no fault, ***“forgive the trespass of your handmaid”*** (1 Samuel 25:28). Compensating for the arrogance of her husband by her humbleness, she fell at David’s feet (1Samuel 25:24). In her humble speech she repeated words of humility {master – your servant- your slave}. With generosity she dealt with her husband’s miserliness and ***“Took two hundred loaves, and two bottles of wine, and five sheep ready dressed, and five measures of parched corn, and an hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs”*** (1Samuel 25:18) and gave them to David’s men.

Every wife should strive to help her husband and not to be a burden on him. Help him spiritually and financially in raising their children. Make the right decisions in meekness and humbleness, and to support him in finding his own salvation, not to inhibit or hinder his path to eternal life.

The Holy Book of Proverbs talks about a virtuous woman whose price is far above rubies: ***“She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life”*** (Proverbs 31:12). ***“She is like the merchants’ ships; she bring her food from afar”*** (Proverbs 31:14) ***“eat not the bread of idleness”*** (Proverbs 31:27). Therefore the Holy Bible says about her ***“Give her of the fruit of the hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates”*** (Proverbs 31:31). Spouses have to behave in mutual love through their love to God. Let their love to each other reflect their love for God not be a hindrance to the love of God. This is the kind of love that the Church teaches her children

Each spouse should love God more than any thing in the world. Look at Zechariah who loved his wife and did not desert her though she did not give him children. He did not depart from God despite the bitter temptation and the shame they had to sustain because of her infertility. The Holy Bible describes them saying ***“And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless”*** (Luke 1:6).

It is amazing how many spiritual servants start their marriage by the spirit but continue with the only flesh. They start their life pleasing God and finished it pleasing each other at the expense of their relationship with God and the salvation of their own souls.

Keep the Church in your house through the oneness and the love between you and your life-partner.

C) Monasticism

Monastic life had its origins in Egypt with St. Anthony the Great. It arose in response to the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, ***“If you would be perfect, go sell what you possess and give to the poor and you will have treasure in Heaven; and come, follow Me”*** (Matthew 19:21).

In the Apostolic Age as today, many faithful believers practiced the ascetic way of life seeking perfection of the Holy Gospel. They prevented themselves from every earthly pleasure preferring to live in virginity and devote all their time to worshipping, as a spiritual preparation for the Heavenly Wedding Feast.

The choice of monastic life is for those who do not desire marriage, who prefer to be in constant worship unobstructed by the world with those of similar desires and same gender.

Monastic life typically encompasses an austere life in the desert far from the world of earthly comforts. It is a life of continual repentance, a life of continually seeking perfection of the inner qualities inside of man. This may take the monk his lifetime to accomplish. The most dangerous thought process for a monk is to believe he has reached a state of total completeness.

Three vows are taken by those entering into monasticism: poverty, obedience, and virginity. Along with taking these vows a funeral prayer will be prayed symbolizing the monks' death to the world and new life of worship in the Lord Jesus Christ. The new monk is laid to rest on the ground and covered with the altar veil to further symbolize his death to the world.

The following is a fictional story written by His Holiness Pope Shenouda III describing the monk's death to the world, even desiring a private cell or position in the church should not be a desire attributed to those seeking monasticism as this story portrays...

Father Anastasi

He Father Anastasi was stunned when he awoke and felt as though there was a handkerchief on his face. When he lifted up his hand in order to remove it, something suddenly fell. On running his hand over what had fallen, he discovered that it was a Cross.

Darkness was everywhere. This surprised Father Anastasi greatly, as he remembered that the window of his cell was open when he had gone to bed, and that moonlight penetrated the whole place, illuminating the room with light.

And what about this strange smell? He tried to find out its secret but could not. It was like the smell of the dead. After some time had passed, his eyes became accustomed to the dark, so he looked carefully, wishing that he would be able to see. It was then that he shuddered with fear and fright, and his whole being was disturbed. He covered his eyes with his hands, hoping to wipe out the sight.

But when he lifted his hands, he found the view unchanged: bones heaped in corners and bodies lying around him on the floor. Each of these bodies was dressed in white tunics with a handkerchief on its face and a Cross in its hand. There was no doubt that he was in a monastery's cemetery. It was then that a strange thought came to his mind. He tried to drive it away, but in vain.

Unconsciously, he looked at himself. When he did so, he found that he himself was dressed in a white tuniah. The part of his beard that he could see was all white, although as far as he could remember, he only had a few white hairs. He realized the astounding truth, he was in a cemetery.

What had happened? Had he really died and God raised him from death? Had the monks thought him to be dead and buried him by mistake? He did not know. He, however had to face one clear fact, that he was dead in the eyes of people. He also learned another fact, and that was that he had no way out of this situation. How could people face a man that they themselves buried? Neither their nerves nor minds could hear that.

Thus, he had to spend the rest of his life inside the cemetery, but this was a new experience for him. How could he live like that? The first day was very hard for him. The smell was odious, rotten; he could not stand it, but he said to himself: "I am supposed to have left the luxuries of the world and I have to live a life like this."

He remembered the story of St. Arsenius who would leave the water in the tub to rot, and then he would say to himself that his rottenness would compensate for the sweet scents that he used to enjoy in the emperor's palace. Father Anastasi became used to the situation. He became used to living among the bones and bearing the stench.

One problem was left: the food. How would he eat? He did not have any kind of food in the cemetery. It was not possible to bring food from the monastery and keep it. Instead, he went out every night in the dark, about midnight, and ate either some vegetables and fruits from the garden in the monastery, some left-over in a dish that the cook might have forgotten to wash, or just a piece of bread with a little salt. That was sufficient. After that, he would fast for the rest of the day, until midnight and the following day came. He did not eat in the daylight for many years. In fact, he did not see the sun for many years.

It goes without saying that in the cemetery, Father Anastasi had neither utensils nor dishes. This reminded him of how he had kept in his cell tens of kitchen utensils and different types of food. Now, he had none of these. He lived with absolutely nothing in his cell. At this point, Father Anastasi felt ashamed, for while he was a monk, he used to keep things, which seemed to be necessary to him at the time, whereas now, it was practically proven that he could live without them.

This also reminded him of other equipment, which he used to keep for himself at that time, such as: stationary, furniture, pictures, clothes, coverings, and many other things. His conscious severely convicted him for this, as he wondered: "What was the meaning of poverty, which he had vowed on the day he was consecrated? Where was the virtue of freedom from worldly possessions?"

He started thinking of the question of 'necessities' and 'luxuries.' This was undoubtedly a relative matter, which depended upon the person's devotion and his evaluation of his needs. It was now possible for Father Anastasi to live a life full of devotion in the monastery, not owning anything at all, even a private cell. Now, he lived in the cemetery, which he could not consider his private cell, which no one would enter, without his permission. He could open it and lock it as he wished; using a key that only he could carry.

Now, he had no control over the place in which he lived. If they brought in a newcomer, he could not object, or even utter a word. As soon as he heard the sorrowful chimes of the monastery bell, he hurried to his place, as a dead person, lying in the same way and covering his face with a handkerchief, so that if they opened the door to bury the newly dead, they would find everything just as they had left it.

Father Anastasi owned absolutely nothing, not even books. How, then would he spend his time? This made him realize how mistaken he previously was. Earlier, his aim was to fill his mind with information; he read tens of books so that he would be a living encyclopedia. He sometimes had no time to meditate on what he read, but now he no longer had any books, so he started to ruminare the information stored in his memory and meditate upon it.

Sometimes he spent several days meditating on one verse, delving into its depths, the Holy Spirit revealing to him strange secrets, to the extent that he would cry out in joy with David: "I have seen the consummation of all perfection, your commandment is exceedingly broad." He discovered that earlier, he had lived on empty shells of superficial knowledge. When the need for reading pressed him, he went in the dark to the Church silently read a little, and then returned.

Father Anastasi lived in total seclusion and quiet. Of course, he visited no one and no one visited him. He also lived in total silence, talking to no one. It happened once that some monks were talking by the cemetery. He heard their voices, but made no comments. Whether the information was true or false, or whether it was complete or incomplete, he had no right to interfere. It was none of his business. He was dead. Once, he overheard some monks talking about the deceased fathers. Then, they mentioned his name. Some of the monks praised his him and others criticized, while he remained silent. He neither thanked the former nor argued with the latter. He was dead.

One day, Father Anastasi fell ill. Of course, no doctor came to see him. He had no treatment, no nutrition, and no tonics. He endured silently and quietly. He did not even hear a comforting word, as no one came to see him. Sometimes he could not even cry in pain when he heard someone outside the cemetery. He remained thus until he was cured.

It once happened that while he was walking by night, two monks saw him, one fled in fear, and the other mistook him for one of the earlier saints, so he knelt down and asked his blessing. He did not argue but rather complied. He put his hand over the monk's head and blessed him, and then he fled back to the cemetery. The news spread in the whole monastery that a saint had appeared to some monks. Consequently, Father Anastasi was confined to the cemetery for several days. He neither ate nor drank.

Father Anastasi lived in total isolation from the world and from people. Earlier, he used to write letters to many people and he received their replies. But now, he was dead. Thus, he was far from any source of news whether in the form of letters, magazines, newspapers, or the like. The news of the world and the Church did not reach him. Not even the news of the monastery reached him. As time passed, he also forgot the bad news.

Earlier, Father Anastasi felt that the monastery needed him and that he was one of its pillars, an important person with various responsibilities. Now, he discovered that with or without him, the monastery was always the same, so was the Church. Sometimes there were vacant positions or responsibilities, but no one nominated him for them, as he was dead. He did not even think of such matters and he did not hear about them.

As nothing occupied Father Anastasi except God, he lived the life of incessant prayer. Earlier he spent many nights in reading, writing, translating, composing, copying manuscripts; things that did not have to do with his soul. But now, he could not read and write at night, as there were neither books nor light. Thus, he spent the whole night in prayer. He remembered St. Isaac's saying: "The night was made especially for prayer." He greatly grew in prayer, until his whole life became a prayer. Nothing occupied his thoughts except God. With the passing of time, old memories of the world faded away as he had nothing new to add to them. Thus, his subconscious was cleansed from all the worldly news, memories, and concerns.

Consequently, he no longer strayed in his prayers. He started to achieve cleanliness of the heart and of thoughts; freedom in all union with the One.

Father Anastasi was freed from all evil thought. Only one thought still attacked him. He said to himself: “Now that I have known real monasticism and experienced total death to the world and union with God, what would prevent me from going to the monastery and leading the same kind of life?” He was encouraged to have this thought by the fact that he had lived so long in the cemetery that people had forgotten him. He saw many of his earlier colleagues buried in the cemetery with him. Most of the monks were newcomers who would not know him. The rest of his colleagues were very few, and they would not expect to see him. Even if they did, they would not recognize him as his appearance had totally changed due to age and asceticism.

Father Anastasi tried to drive this thought away, saying to himself: “What is the point if people see me? I had always longed to live in seclusion, away from people, and be devoted only to God. Now I have everything I had wished for, so why should I think of changing my situation?” But the thought attacked him once more saying, “You did this because you had no other choice. How wonderful would it be to do it out of your own will!” He fought these thoughts for quite a long time.

One night warring thoughts attacked Father Anastasi severely, so he knelt and poured his feelings before the Lord in prayers, saying: “May you be praised for all Your Goodness to me. You are very merciful and tender to me. You have treated me as I have not deserved, giving me a life of seclusion. You have freed me from everything else and united me to You. However, I feel that I have undergone this discipline involuntary. Now I want to live it out of my own free will, out of love for You. This is a thought, a desire. It might be good or bad, but in any case, I put it before You because I cannot hide anything from You. Your will be done.”

Father Anastasi fell asleep, his white beard soaked with tears. He was not aware how long he had slept, whether for an hour or an age. All that he realized was the violent sound of a ringing bell. It was the Midnight Bell that he was accustomed to hearing every night in the cemetery. Father Anastasi opened his eyes; he was amazed. He said to himself: “What is this that I see?” He felt dizzy and fell asleep once more. He woke up again at the sound of another bell; perhaps it was the bell of Morning Prayers.

On opening his eyes, Father Anastasi saw the original view again. His surprise grew. Before him was an open window through which moonlight came in and illuminated the whole place. When he looked at himself, he found that he was dressed in black. When he looked at the place around him, he found that it was like the old cell in which he lived. He placed his hand on his head to start to think. Finally, he realized the secret. Was what had happened actually a dream? He was not sure, but he realized the purpose behind it.

From that time, Father Anastasi’s life changed completely. He started a life of seclusion and asceticism to which he had been accustomed for tens of years. He started practicing the incessant prayer as he used to do in the cemetery. When he had to leave the cell for matters related to the monastic community, he walked silently, looking neither to the left nor to the right. The monks knew him for his silence, his slim body, his courtesy, his humility, and his head, which was permanently bowed to the ground. From time to time, he lifted his head a little and tilted it slightly in order to release some tears that veiled his eyes and prevented him from seeing what lay ahead.

*The word ‘Anastasi’ means resurrection.

The daily expressions of monasticism for the life of the monk are, “*I do forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead*” (Philippians 3:13).

Monasticism centers upon worship where **Consecration** centers upon service.

* This lecture synopsis is adapted from ‘The Christian Family’ by H.G. Bishop Paula, ‘The Coptic Orthodox Church as an Ascetic Church’ by Fr. Tadros Malaty, Mighty Arrows Magazine; ‘Father Anastasi’ by H.H. Pope Shenouda III, pg. 2-5, and ‘The Coptic Orthodox Church of Egypt’ by Fr. Matthias Farid Wahba.

† † † † † † † † † † † †