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THE THEOLOGY OF MARRIAGE AND SEXUALITY

by Fr. George Morelli

The writer of Genesis said of Adam and Eve: “And God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it;’ Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh” (Genesis 1:28; 2:24). St. Paul wrote in Hebrews: “Let marriage be held in honor among all...” (Hebrews 13:4).

St. John Chrysostom typified the Orthodox Church Fathers: “From the beginning God has been revealed as the fashioner, by his providence, of this union of man and woman, and He has spoken of the two as one: ‘male and female He created them’” (Homily XX on Ephesians 5:22-33). “Union” in Greek is *syzygias*, a term uniformly used by the Church Fathers to mean yoked in wedlock and the married state.

In a blessed marriage in the Orthodox Church, the couple is ordained as the leaders of their domestic church, crowned to be the king and queen of their domicile and granted grace for the “fair education of children” as the Orthodox wedding service proclaims. In Christian marriage, authentic and true love seeks to replicate the type of self-sacrifice Christ revealed to us when He became man and dwelt among us (and which is still expressed today in Christ’s faithfulness to His Church). Self-sacrificial love conforms to the Great Commandment to love our neighbor more highly than ourselves. In so doing we also love and honor God (Matthew 25:36-40, 1 John 4:19-21).

In the marital relationship two individuals become “one flesh;” a term that means that two individuals work in concert to become one in mind and heart. They are joined together in love in a way that replicates the Three Persons of the Trinity relation of love to each other.

Becoming “one flesh” in a blessed marriage is an act of *agape*, a selfless giving of one to the other; a self-emptying (Greek: *kenosis*) in a manner like Christ when He took on human flesh and assumed human nature. This theme

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is affirmed in the Orthodox marriage service as well. The “crowning” of the couple actually references martyrdom, that is, giving one’s life for the other. As a martyr gives his life for Christ, so must the spouse be willing to give his life to his wife (and the wife to her husband), and in so doing fulfill the law of Christ which is to love the neighbor as yourself...

Self-centered marriage is a marriage in name only. After the Fall we are predisposed to self-centered choices directed by the passions (lusts) rather than choices based on *agape*... The passions spring from the heart of the person. Jesus told us: “For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a man” (Mark 7:21-23).

St. Paul wrote “While we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death” (Romans 5:7). The work of the passions can take place either before marriage or after the marital union takes place. In either case they lead to a choice of singularity or self-satisfaction over a righteous, joined union....

Ideally the marital couple will make a “spiritual desert” for themselves, removing them from the “enticements” so prevalent in modern life. Spiritual death occurs when these thoughts are self-centered.

For example, [the] demon of lust the Church Fathers told us, can take over our lives. Modern society facilitates this malady. Sex is broadcast everywhere for almost every use: art, fashion, music, news, pornography (especially the Internet), and the sale of almost any product from automobiles to computers... The Church Fathers knew about such enticements a thousand years ago. St. Isaac of Syria wrote: “Passions are brought either by images or by sensations devoid of images and by memory, which at first is unaccompanied by passionate movements or thoughts, but which later produces excitement.” One way to deal with these passions, continued St. Isaac: “...their thought must become attached to nothing except their own soul.”

One has to make a choice between Christ and demons... Vigilance and discernment are major virtues to be acquired by those seeking Christ indwelling in them and desiring to overcome the power of passions... Ideally the marital couple will make a “spiritual desert” for themselves, removing them from the “enticements” so prevalent in modern life. Spiritual death occurs when these thoughts are self-centered....

FROM THE DESK OF DEACON ALEXANDER

A few weeks ago, an opportunity arose to closely examine Matthew 25 in our OCF *Practical Christianity* series on government and politics in advance of this month’s historic presidential election (don’t forget to vote!). After taking some time to reflect again on the true meaning of the passage, I came to the conclusion that without a willful commitment to specifically take care of the least of Christ’s brethren among us (the poor, the sick, and the imprisoned), none of the “good” things I do—whether it is voting, parenting, participating in the divine services, or leading parish ministries—will matter at all when our Lord comes in His glory to judge the world. It is terrifying to think how easy it really is to sincerely believe one is doing “mighty deeds” in Christ’s name, and yet still hear Him say on that fearful day, “Depart from Me; I never knew you” (Matthew 7:22-23).

That is why we are increasing the amount of opportunities for you to get involved in **Matthew 25** at Holy Trinity. In addition to asking each of our existing fellowships to plan at least one major event in conjunction with this important ministry during the course of the year, we are also encouraging your participation in *two* food drives to coincide with Thanksgiving and Christmas. This will be in addition to our annual St. Nicholas Gift Tree to support needy families in our area.

For Thanksgiving, we will be teaming up with Strawberry Fields, a private nonprofit agency committed to providing quality services for individuals with developmental disabilities and with mental illness in Centre County. Strawberry Fields has asked Holy Trinity provide donations for non-perishable Thanksgiving items to go along with turkeys that will be provided by an existing individual donor. We are collecting everything from stuffing to mashed potato mix to canned cranberries. Anything that goes with Thanksgiving dinner is welcome. Donations will be accepted through Sunday, November 23.

For Christmas we will be working with Strawberry Fields again, but this time doing the opposite: Holy Trinity will be providing the turkeys (or chickens) and another individual or group will provide the non-perishables. As always, *Matthew 25* always accepts monetary donations as well.

With a heart of service and by rising to these occasions to accept our responsibility to feed, clothe and take in those less fortunate than ourselves, we can more confidently pray we can avoid “everlasting punishment” and join the “righteous into eternal life.”

NOVEMBER SCHEDULES

Coffee Hour

November 2 — Anissa Ilie, Ann and Corene Swisher
November 9 — Karen Cattell and Melody Thompson
November 16 — Anne-Therese Pelikan and Lina Eid-Saleeby
November 23 — Russian Ladies
November 30 — Julianne Vaughan and Elaine Stewart

Greeters

November 2 — Melody Thompson and Mark Fedkin
November 9 — Anne and David Swisher
November 16 — Beth Roberts and Ed Miranda
November 23 — Mark and Leslyn Radomsky
November 30 — Melody Thompson and Mark Fedkin

HOLY DAYS AND FASTS DURING NOVEMBER

Synaxis of Archangel Michael

Vespers, November 7, 7:00pm
Liturgy, November 8, 9:00am

The Entry of the Most-Holy Theotokos into the Temple

Vespers, November 20, 7:00pm
Liturgy, November 21, 9:00am

Nativity Fast—Begins Nov. 15

*Omit meat and dairy (all days),
and fish (Wednesdays and Fridays).*

OCF EXPANDS WEEKLY FELLOWSHIP AND PRAYER

Beginning this month, the Orthodox Christian Fellowship (OCF) at Penn State will be expanding its outreach to college students by adding two additional weekly events. The first is the “PSU Dinner,” which will be held Tuesdays at 6pm in Redifer Commons (South Halls). Every week, these informal dinners will give students a get to know their colleagues better while enjoying the variety of food options offered there. To end the school week and begin the weekend in prayer, OCF will also be adding weekly Akathists to their schedule. These beautiful hymns will be chanted in 115 Osmond, conveniently located across from the HUB.

SUNDAY SCHOOL UPDATE

The **INTERMEDIATE CLASS** is finishing up its Confession class. They have written a script for a short play they are going to perform for parents and rest of the Sunday School on what they have learned. The date will be announced soon. The **HIGH SCHOOL CLASS** is working its way through the Old Testament. In November students will be starting the book of Leviticus.

Pastorally and clinically I have found four factors are especially insidious in undermining marital relationships: mind-reading, reciprocity, entitlement, and constant urging (colloquially known as “nagging”).

- **Mind-reading** is the unrealistic cognition that one’s partner should be able to know what the one is thinking, feeling or desiring. (All individuals perceive the world differently; it is the individual's responsibility to communicate to their spouse what their wants and needs are.)
- **Reciprocity** is the unrealistic expectation that if one does something for someone they have the right to expect a return even though the other may not be privy to this “unilateral contract.” Spouses should clearly state what they want from the other and attempt to come to a common agreement.
- **Entitlement** occurs when the spouse feels they deserve love, companionship, happiness, honesty, obedience, etc. Entitlement works hand in hand with expectations. When an event occurs in which one family member does not feel that others lived up to what was expected of them, feelings of anger and being used result.
- **Constant urging** is the unrealistic expectation that if one urges (nags) one’s partner enough, he will comply with what is wanted. Often the opposite is produced, people stonewall when feeling coerced. It is better to get individuals to voluntarily comply with requests on their own.

These psychological interventions can be enlivened by the Holy Spirit: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us have no self-conceit, no provoking of one another, no envy of one another” (Galatians 5:22-26)....

In a world that is broken and disordered, problems will occur. If we respond by fighting the good fight as St. Paul said, and exert ourselves as St. Peter of Damaskos said, then we are growing near to God. From the brokenness in marriage a “new creation” can emerge. “Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to Himself” (2 Corinthians 5: 17-18).

The V. Rev. Fr. George Morelli Ph.D. is a licensed Clinical Psychologist and Marriage and Family Therapist, and Assistant Pastor of St. George’s Antiochian Orthodox Church in San Diego, California. This article was reprinted by permission from OrthodoxyToday.org.

