

2026-06-17: The Little Church - Spiritual Life in Marriage

Introduction

- The Spiritual Life is like climbing a mountain.
 - Imagine you are climbing a mountain alone. If you fall, you bear the consequences. If you get discouraged, you have to encourage yourself. If you lose your way, you must find the path again.
 - But if you are married, the story changes. Now you are two people tied by a rope, climbing the mountain. The rope can feel restrictive - I can't move at my own pace, I can't make every decision independently, I have to consider someone else. BUT the rope is for our salvation! If one slips, the other can catch him. If one is tired, the other can encourage him. If one loses sight of the summit, the other can remind him of the goal.
 - Actually, the rope and the other person, make reaching the top more attainable (and more enjoyable).
- Now imagine that you are climbing the mountain, but you only take a step forward every Sunday morning. And maybe even during the week, you fall a couple of steps. Over time (not that much time, either), you realize you are not actually moving forward... one step forward, three steps back. Or imagine that one of the two people keeps trying to climb the mountain and the other one is refusing to move forward.
- For many people, the Church is the only place that they hear the Scripture being read; the Church is the only time that they offer any prayer; the Church is the only time they sing a hymn. The Spiritual Life becomes confined to the Church and her activities.
- What does St John Chrysostom say? After part of his homily where he is giving advice for marriage and family life, he says: "If we regulate our households in this way, we will also be fit to oversee the Church, for indeed the household is a little Church."
- The household is a Little Church.
- The healthy Christian marriage will ask: "How can we bring the life of the Church into every day of our marriage?"

Little Church

If our household is a little Church, then we can look at some characteristics of the Church and see how they apply in our household.

1. The Church is a House of Prayer
2. The Church is a House of Faith
3. The Church is a House of Peace and Forgiveness
4. The Church is a House of Service

5. The Church is a House of Shared Joy and Shared Sorrow

House of Prayer

Don't let your home become the place where you sleep, eat and manage responsibilities. Let it be the house of God. Don't let God be a guest in your house, but let it be His house - a place where He is invited, recognized, spoken to, heard, and experienced.

"My house shall be called a house of prayer." (Matthew 21:13)

Cornelius the Centurion (Acts 10)

- There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, a devout *man* and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always.
- Cornelius "prayed to God always" and his prayers were heard! St Peter came to him - the first Gentiles - and preached to them. And while he was speaking, the Holy Spirit came upon them and then, they were baptized. The Lord answered their prayers.

This is a man whose whole household was saved! Why? Because he was a devout man, and one who feared God with all his household, and who gave alms and prayed to God always. This is not a lesson or topic on prayer, but suffice it to say that just as the Church is (in the words of the Lord Christ) a House of Prayer, so also my Little Church - my home - should be called a house of prayer.

- Praying together - set a specific time based on your schedules
- Praying for one another - don't ever let a prayer go by or a liturgy go by without mentioning your spouse in prayer
- Have a prayer corner - put icons, light a candle, keep your Agpeya there, keep an esharb there.
- Reading the Scripture together - even if each one has his own canon, or his own reading
- Sharing reflections on the Scripture together after reading
 - (Abdelmalek Abdelmalek and his wife)
 - One of our congregants departed last year at a good old age. His wife had departed about 5 years prior. When they were going through his stuff, they found hundreds of handwritten notebooks with contemplations on the Holy Scripture. They found hundreds that had been written by two different hands, and then many that were newer, written by one of the hands. It was so clear that this man and his wife would read the Scripture together, contemplate on it, and keep a log together. And when his wife departed, he continued the practice and kept all of the notebooks. No one from their family knew about it until after they had both departed.
- Teaching children to pray
 - If you have children, pray with them every evening and teach them what to say and how to say it. Read the Scripture with them. Help them to memorize some psalms or some prayer. Help them to learn hymns. This is the true bringing up of our children - not just handing them an iPad to get some alone time. You will benefit from this time just as much as they will.

- And if you have children, but you are lacking in your prayer life or Scripture life, let your children become your motivation. Before you know it, they will be reminding you.
- Make a deal with each other right now - if one of us says "let's go pray" the other one obeys. Make the commitment with each other now, so that when it comes up, it's not a question of whether or not I am in the mood.

The Little Church becomes a house of prayer when prayer is no longer an event - it is the atmosphere and the norm. When you walk into the Church, you find people going to pray - even if there's no meeting or liturgical service. Because it is a house of prayer.

House of Faith

"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved - you and your household." (Acts 16:31)

- Make prayerful decisions
 - Not panic, not self-reliance, not financial or social pressure, not urgency
 - Trust the Lord with my personal life, my marriage, my spouse, my children, my home, my education, my career, my finances, my friendships, etc.
- God is working in difficult seasons
- Obedience to the commandment, rather than reacting to emotions

Abraham left the land of the Chaldeans, not knowing where he was going... just with faith.

A funny example: Vacationing...

- Vacation from what? From God? From the Church? From my Spiritual Canon?
 - The House of Faith will wake up for their spiritual canon while on vacation.
 - The House of Faith will fast on Wed and Fri during their vacation
 - The House of Faith will not choose to go on a cruise during a fasting period!
 - The House of Faith will not miss Sunday Liturgy while on vacation!
 - I have heard from people that they went to Egypt for a month and when you ask which churches or monasteries did you go to... "I didn't have time."
- No, let my Little Church be a House of Faith, and a House that makes all decisions - major or minor - with prayer, and with God in mind.

House of Peace & Forgiveness

There is nothing you can do that the Church will not offer you forgiveness for. That means in the form of the sacrament of repentance & confession - that you come to the Church in order to receive forgiveness. The Body and Blood of Christ are given for salvation, remission of sins and eternal life to those who partake of Him. The whole economy of salvation and the sacramental life is based on the fact that we are forgiven. So how about my Little Church?

"Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."
(Ephesians 4:32)

“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.” (Colossians 3:15)

- Peace is not preserved by avoiding conflict - but by resolving conflict quickly in love.
- Don't keep score
- Don't hold a grudge
- Accepting that there can be misunderstanding or miscommunication in marriage
- Restraint instead of retaliation
- Protect unity more than being right or "winning the argument."
- Give the benefit of the doubt
- Give many chances - even if he didn't take out the trash the last four times... maybe the fifth time is the charm.
- Forgive
 - Some myths...
 - Forgiveness means I am condoning the bad behavior... no.
 - Forgiveness means I am giving up my right to be hurt... no.
 - Forgiveness is one chance only... no.
 - Forgiveness is for the other person... no.

Remember when Joseph the Carpenter found out that St Mary was pregnant? "Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly." (Matthew 1:19) - See how he was a man of peace! He wasn't looking to have a conflict! He was looking to keep the peace. And here the Lord sent him an angel to tell him that this is all a misunderstanding... she did not do anything wrong, but rather this is the work of God. Recognizing the voice of God, he woke up and took to him his betrothed wife.

Sometimes we close off our minds to the idea that there might be a misunderstanding, or that I might be wrong, or that maybe there's something I don't understand. Instead, I assume, I ascribe intention, I refuse dialogue, I reject any possibility that I might be wrong. But this is not peace! Peace requires humility.

Remember Abraham and Lot (Genesis 13)

Abraham's servants and Lot's servants were fighting... so Abraham looked at Lot and said "Let there be no strife between you and me..." (Genesis 13:8-9). And he told him if you go left, I will go right. If you go right, I will go left. The whole land is in front of you. Abraham, for the sake of peace, was willing to compromise. Even though he is Abraham! He is the older one! He is the one with all the riches. He is the patriarch! But peace requires humility.

House of Service

"Through love, serve one another." (Galatians 5:13)

There's a story of a church in Upper Egypt that was located within a Christian cemetery. The city allowed them to move the graves and as they are moving the coffins, they come across two that are very heavy. Usually coffins of people who have been dead for a long time, their body has

decayed and what is left is bones - so the coffins become light. But these two were heavy. So they called the priest and he opened the coffins and they found the bodies of the two were preserved - a man and his wife. They had been buried for 25 years, but their bodies look as if they were buried an hour ago. The priest wanted to know their story and he went around the whole village asking about them until he learned and pieced together their story.

The wife was one day struck with paralysis in one side of her body and could no longer move around, or feed herself. So the husband started to serve her. He would carry her, feed her, take her out, etc. For 15 years he served her. And from everything he was doing, he got diabetes - and of course he's not taking care of himself, only caring for her... and he went blind. So he got so upset and went to pray and said "Lord, you know my wife is paralyzed, you know we don't have children to serve us. I was the one who was taking care of her! Now who will take care of us?? And not only that, how could you deprive me of the blessing of serving her??" And as he is saying these words, he feels his wife's hand on his shoulder, patting him! "You're up??" She said "I'm all better now... my legs and my arms and everything. Now it's my turn to serve you." And for 10 years, she served him faithfully.

25 years of serving each other and the Lord rewards them by preserving their bodies and then revealing their story

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/reel/2087580212022559>

What about in the regular daily life?

- Meet each other's needs without being asked
 - "What would make her day easier right now?"
- The house is the responsibility of BOTH
 - There is no mine or yours... not even "these are my dishes, those are your dishes..."
 - "My laundry, your laundry" - not even "Clean your room, I'll clean mine."
 - Not "my chores" and "your chores" but sharing in all things
- Do the small things immediately - if it takes less than 2 min, just do it!
- "Wash each other's feet" in daily life
 - The Lord gave us the perfect example of washing feet. Always remember that He washed the feet of Judas, knowing that Judas had betrayed Him and was planning to sell Him the same evening.
 - Sometimes "washing the feet" or "serving each other" has a condition and we say "well he didn't do this" or "well she isn't doing that." - Remember the Lord.
- 80% and 20%

Sidenote: Remember that the Church is not just inward facing, but She also extends Her arms out to others. And here I want to mention that if your Little Church is a House of Service, it will not just serve you and your family, but it will serve others as well.

Story of Anba Abraam and the family who wanted another son. Anba Abraam told them "you will have a son this year - but see that extra room in your house? Make it into a room for the poor."

House of Shared Joy & Sorrow

"Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep." (Romans 12:15)

In the church, we have a baptism or a wedding and everyone comes wearing bright colors and everyone is excited and very happy and ready to share in the joy of the couple who is getting married, or the person who is being baptized.

In the same church, maybe even on the same day, we have a funeral and everyone comes wearing less-bright colors and they are somber and ready to share in the sorrow of the family of the reposed.

My Little Church should be the same. When my wife is sorrowful, there is no way that I will be joyful - but rather, I will share in her sorrow. And when my wife is celebrating, I should celebrate with her. Sometimes I depend more on my "feelings." And if my feelings don't match those of my spouse, I feel emotionally distant. But that is not the Christian marriage. That is not the Little Church! The Little Church is one where I share in joy and sorrow.

The Lord Jesus, Himself, did this! When He went to the tomb of Lazarus, we read that Jesus saw Mary weeping and the Jews who came with her weeping, "He groaned in the spirit and was troubled." then "Jesus wept." Although He knows that Lazarus will rise... yet He shared in their sorrow. On the other hand, the Lord shared in the joy of the Wedding of Cana! So He did both.

Also this shared joy and sorrow is not only with my spouse and children! But just like the Church extends her arms outward, so can my Little Church... when someone is sorrowful, I can invite him into my Little Church, comfort him, prepare a meal for him, etc. Or I can send something to him from my Little Church. In this way, my home is like the Church that shares in someone's sorrow.

When someone is celebrating a success, I can invite him into my Little Church and celebrate his accomplishment.

St John Chrysostom gives one warning to this, though: "If you are inclined to entertain and give dinner parties, there should be nothing immodest or excessive about them. And if you should find some poor, saintly man who just by stepping into your house would bring God's blessing upon you, invite him." (p. 62)

This is important because as soon as I invite immodesty into my Little Church; as soon as I allow sin or drunkenness or revelries to enter my Little Church, it ceases to be a Church.

Other Examples

- House of Thanksgiving
 - Give thanks to God for each other
 - Give thanks for what God has provided for you - instead of looking enviously at other homes, other cars, other money, etc.
 - Be thankful for your children, instead of comparing them with those outside your home

- Expressing appreciation to each other
- House of Sacrifice
 - Sacrifice for one another
- House of Growth & Discipleship
 - Growth in virtue
 - Overcoming sin
- House of Patience
 - Fr Bishoi Kamel story - waited in the jail for 8 hours.
- House of Mercy
 - Be merciful to one another
- House of Love
 - This is the umbrella that covers all other points
- House of Holiness
 - When you are walking into St George church, there's a nice wooden sign on top of the church door that says what?
 - "Holiness adorns your house, O Lord, forever." (Psalm 93:5)

Conclusion

When my house is a Little Church, then just as the Church has produced saints, so also my house will produce saints. And just as the Church is a light in the world, so also my house and all its members will be lights in the world. Just as the Church is the presence of God, so also my house will be the presence of God. The goal of marriage is not coexistence or happiness, but salvation.

“The love of husband and wife is the force that welds society together. Men will take up arms and even sacrifice their lives for the sake of this love. Because when harmony prevails, the children are raised well, the household is kept in order, and neighbors, friends and relatives praise the result. Great benefits, both for families and states, are thus produced. When it is otherwise, however, everything is thrown into confusion and turned upside-down. Everything is in disarray.”

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