

A Day in the Life of a Family in a Pandemic



Pemptousia, Orthodoxia News Agency stress need to unite our voices, strengthen presence of Orthodox world amid pandemic

The editors and staff of both the online magazine Pemptousia, which focuses on Orthodoxy, scholarly research and culture, as well as the Orthodoxia News Agency have become aware of the crucial need for all of us to unite our voices and to strengthen the presence of the Orthodox world, especially now amid this ominous pandemic.

Moreover, the International Association of Digital Media and Orthodox Pastoral Care is participating, along with its members, associates, researchers, lecturers and clerics, in this initiative with Pemptousia and the Orthodoxia News Agency.

Today we present an article by Fr. Bassam Nassif, Member of the Association Board of the International Association of Digital Media and Orthodox Pastoral Care (DMOPC)

As the Covid-19 pandemic spread, family life has taken a pretty dramatic turn from the normal, particularly with the on-going concern about infection, illness and possibly death. Given that the current situation will remain in place for a long time, societies have generally committed to taking preventive measures and the previous way of life is currently on hold. Very few individuals venture out, work and school are suspended, social gatherings are curtailed, and these precautions have forced family members to stay at home. Indeed, many people have lost their jobs, while others are trying to work from home. As for students, many educational institutions are delivering their instructions through online learning. Students are no longer able to be in the physical presence of their teachers and schoolmates, and they are unable to interact with them face-to-face. Even church services have been impacted. The faithful are obligated to take strict precautions when attending church, and many have opted instead to pray from home during this time. Social gatherings have become undesired or even forbidden due to the necessity of social distancing, which does not encourage effective communication nor does it strengthen human relationships. This change in daily living is stressful for families and individuals, especially those who are facing economic crisis, job loss, and the inability to travel or connect with other people.

Certainly, each family is unique in terms of its structure, relationship, and living situation. However, what general guidelines can we follow during this time in order to cultivate hope in our soul and safeguard our family?

First, this isolation from others and the increased time with family provides learning opportunities. While we may have been forced to be distanced from others, we have, in fact, been offered the opportunity to be closer with our immediate family members. It is time for increased communication between husbands and wives, and between parents and children. This new opportunity to be with each other may not have been available in the past due to the pressures of daily life, such as long working hours, studies, and social commitments. Now, we can focus our attention to the people around us at home, listening to their words, understanding their needs and desires, and sensing their inner pain and struggles, while trying to have

empathy and offering them support. It is a good time for husbands and wives to express their affection for each other and to learn about their primary love language. It is also a time for parents to fill their children with love and affection, as Saint Paisios the Athonite stresses. A good time for communication and exchange of ideas may be during lunch or after dinner. We must open the door for family members to express their fear or anxiety. Sometimes, during conversations, we sense anger or other undesired emotions in the tone of our loved ones, but this anger could be nothing more than an emotional expression of the deep discomfort from our current situation, a desire to be loved more, or tension from work or study. Family solidarity is essential in these difficult times because it contributes greatly to a deep understanding of one another and it helps to support and alleviate each other from the feelings associated with our current harsh reality. A good level of communications can prevent anger and anxiety from becoming deeply rooted leading to psychological disorders. Indeed, it is necessary to remind each other of the good things we have, and to be thankful to the Lord for the beautiful gifts and moments we have experienced in our life. Being thankful helps change our negative perspective and feelings toward our current situation. While we may not understand everything that is happening around us, we can still share with our loved ones our daily thoughts and experiences. Active listening and communicating with each other is a sign of our effective presence and a token of love that we freely give to our family.

Second, regarding the management of children's affairs, Saint John Chrysostom advises the necessity of finding some kind of a rhythm at home, a daily routine that caters to the needs of all family members. Parents can work together with their children to prepare a daily schedule which can include times for studying, sharing meals together, praying, reading, and may also include doing chores and enjoying some entertainment or play time. The daily active interaction between parents and children at home helps to channel the children's energy and to maintain their psychological and spiritual health. Daily routine and frequent communication with the children can also prevent them from falling into the traps of virtual social communication, which can increase their sense of isolation from their family and heighten their anxiety. In addition, parents may discover new talents in their children and they can direct them to develop these talents. Moreover, any delegated task can be a teachable moment, such as household tasks, repair tasks, car maintenance tasks, gardening tasks or even a walk in nature. All of the things they learn will prepare them for living on their own and being independent at some point later in life. It will also teach them new skills and built their confidence and self-esteem.

Third, the goal of Christian life is holiness through the acquisition of the Holy Spirit,

according to Saint Seraphim of Sarov. In our daily challenges, we ask, how much faith do we have? We can test the depth of our faith by measuring the extent of our trust in the Lord. Is Jesus Christ, the Crucified and Risen Savior, my Lord and my God? Our faith is reflected in our daily behavior and our spoken words. Reconciling with each other and helping one another, despite the difficult living conditions we are facing, is another sign of our dependence on the Lord. Personal prayers are also powerful in our home and daily life. We ought to focus on prayer, reading the Bible, reflecting on the lives of the saints, and examining other spiritual readings. We must also build into our days some quiet time where we can experience an opportunity to discover ourselves and the Kingdom of God within us. As we empty ourselves, putting our worries and anxieties before the Lord, He sends His Divine grace to enlighten our mind with good thoughts and hope, as He said: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light (Matt. 11:28-30). Certainly, it is a new and difficult period, but as Christians, we see this time as "a time for the Lord to work." Let us strive with discernment, and according to our abilities, to acknowledge our human weakness and limitation, asking God, along with the Theotokos and all the saints, to help us live this present life in a manner pleasing to Him and always guided by His grace. Amen.

BIOGRAPHY

Fr. Bassam Nassif is a parish priest in the Antiochian Orthodox Church. He is also the Assistant Professor of Pastoral Theology and Marital Counseling at the St. John of Damascus Institute of Theology, University of Balamand and the Faculty of Humanities, Notre Dame University, Louaizé, Lebanon. Fr. Bassam has been teaching for the last ten years pastoral, social and family care in both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Also, he is the currently the coordinator of the Kalima Online Theology program of the Institute of Theology and the supervisor of the Field Education program for the Bachelor of Theology students in Balamand. He serves on several academic and administrative committees in the University of Balamand. His doctoral dissertation focused on the pastoral care of the family in a changing postmodern world. Thus, Fr. Nassif aims to deal with contemporary challenges facing the Orthodox Church. As a speaker in several international conferences and forums in America and Europe, Rev. Dr. Nassif is concerned with integrating the pastoral theology of the Orthodox Church with the research and experience of the human sciences, leading to the formation of a therapeutic pastoral care approach. Building on scientific research and on the rich legacy of the

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