

Individuals and Their Place in the Church: Singles, Divorcees and Widows
ReCatechism 5
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- Orthodox Christians tend to put a lot of emphasis on marriage.
- I don't think there is one person, whether you're married now or not... every single one of us has had pressure put on them to get married at some point. And there is no question that marriage is a wonderful blessing, but it doesn't have a monopoly on blessing...it is not the only choice for people...it is not the only way...and it is not the only gift from God. There is another side to life.
- ...and that is, singleness--being single, whether you're divorced, widowed, or just never married. And it's important for us to understand what it means to be single because it has always been a part not only of life in the world in general, but more importantly, being single has played a big role in the life of our church.
- It is a calling that is there for every Christian who wants to remain single forever by choice or who is single now for a season of time. There is no stigma in the eyes of God for those in the church that are single. In fact, it's the opposite. God values you beyond measure. And I think that this is an incredible thing...to be loved and valued by God in such an extraordinary way. So we need to get away from the false and misguided notion that single people are single because they are indecisive, or they are not as good as the rest, or they're selfish, or they're just wasting their time.
- Don't misunderstand. I'm not talking about people who think it's great to stay single so that they can be free to party and hook up with different people (like so many movies today promote).
- I'm talking about God-fearing, morally upright, beautiful Orthodox Christian men and women who live out their daily lives as monuments to what it means to be a Christian. I'm talking about those single people who live in the real world like the rest of us... with responsibilities, and parents and brothers and sisters...who go through joy and disappointment, hope and discouragement, love and loss...but throughout it all remain

faithful to God. It is these singles that I speak about. It is these God-fearing singles who while they are single now, have made God their most valuable partner.

- So what does it mean then to be single? How ought single people to live? I believe that single people (just like married folks) have two choices. You can wallow in your disappointment and think that your life is miserable or you can become consumed by your love for Christ and realize (like all of us must realize) that it is only when we are completely plugged into God, that we will experience abundant, joyful living. And by living for Christ I mean seeing Him and serving Him and being with Him.
- We were created to find our meaning and our life in God, and in turn to live out and experience this life by serving Jesus Christ in the face of other people. It all boils down to this: do we live our lives in relation to other people the same way God does with us? In other words, all of us are sinners and we deserve nothing but punishment and death according to God's righteousness. And yet, God loves us so much, so amazingly much, that he gives us His holy Son to die for us and take the hit on our behalf. Well, God expects—and demands—as much from each and every one of us.
- We are to love all people—whether they are deserving of it or not—the way God loves us. And the beauty of this, is that the moment we start living this way, is the time—the only time—that we will experience true love, true friendship, true life!
- So whether single people will be single for a period in their lives or for the rest of their lives, what matters is what they do with their singleness to bring glory to God.
- We've all heard the saying in marriage “for better or worse,” well the same could be said about singleness...it's for better or worse and what the outcome will be largely depends on how we live. And again, the same could be said for both married people and single people. Marriage can turn out to be horribly miserable or amazingly beautiful. And being single can be a depressing period in our lives or it can be a liberating and exciting time. It all depends on us.
- And besides whether we are married or single, the truth is both these callings are temporary (see Matthew 22:30).

- The point then is not to make one stage of life better or worse than the other, rather what matters is what we do with where God has led us to today. How do we live our lives whether married or single? How do we live to bring glory to God with the way we live our life. This is what matters.
 - So what can a single person do with their lives to glorify God? How can you redirect your priorities away from yourself and turn instead towards God and others?
1. Serve the Poor: 25,000 will die from starvation and all the diseases that come with malnutrition. Not only can you help financially but maybe you can volunteer for a while in a poor country and serve for a couple of weeks in a mission trip. It would be a wonderful way to spend your vacation time by becoming the hands of God in your service to the poor.
 2. Help an Orphan: It is estimated that there are over 143 million orphans in the world. Most of them are forced to live on the streets fending for themselves, working at dumpsites or worse being sold into sexual slavery where many will die from disease by the time their 16. As Orthodox Christians we cannot stand idly by while things like this happen because if we do, then our Christianity is phony (see Letter of James). If you can't afford to adopt a child, then why not get involved with organizations that help orphans and rescue children sold into slavery.
 3. Sick and Suffering: Become a volunteer at a hospital or old age home. Go once a week and give hope to those who have none and may not see another day. There are so many lonely and hurting people who go through days without a kind word from anyone. Why not be a voice for them?
 4. Serve the Church: Talk to your priest and see how you can help in the church. We cannot expect one priest to do everything for us. We are blessed to have a true man of God as a priest here at our church, but he needs our help. There is so much work to do and so few workers to do the work. Why not become a labourer in the vineyard of God.

- You are single. And though we live busy lives in the 21st century, why not use extra time to spend in more prayer, studying the Bible, connecting with the mysteries of our church. Why not spend less money on yourself and more money helping the poor. I know it's not easy to give up our comforts, our dreams and make some radical choices. But the truth is, it is only when we give up everything that we gain the world. St Paul says: "I have learned the secret of being content" (Phil 4:12). And that secret is Jesus Christ. We can entertain ourselves to death and be miserable or we can live for Christ and live joyful lives. This life is like mist...it is very short. And being single is but for a short time, just like marriage is for a short time. Let's try to live for eternity...for Jesus Christ and His kingdom. Remember what St Paul says: those who are married should live like they are not married. This life is fleeting. Everything can be taken away in a snap...money, houses, cars, prestige, health, husband, wife, children.... In the end the most important thing...actually the only thing that matters is this: can we live for Him who is life itself...can we love Him who is love?
- I don't want to over-spiritualize singleness, but the point I've been trying to make is that if you are single, then let's use that time of singleness to serve God without the normal distractions of married life. Also, this is not to say that you should give up on trying to get married or that you should stop looking for a partner and mate in life, but rather as you wait for God's timing regarding your marriage, you use this time to give greater glory to God by living the way Jesus, and St Paul and so many other saints of our church did—fully committed, singular in your mission, courageously taking risks to make the kingdom of God real for people.
- Being single is a gift, and an opportunity, even though at times it might seem like anything but. It can be a very lonely and difficult time. And sometimes we don't understand God's timing on things, but let's trust in Him like St Paul did when he said "let us do all things without complaining" (Phil 2:14). Because then we will experience a peace from God that cannot be had anywhere else. I know that when we go through times of loneliness it's hard to believe what I'm about to say but you will not be able to find true and lasting happiness if you don't first find it in God: "delight yourselves in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart" (Ps 37:4).

- Let's make Jesus Christ our first love. He is the one that can satisfy us, He is the one that can give us perfect love, He is the one that can never let us down. And yes, God did invent marriage, and it is a wonderful blessing, but the point is that even the best marriage will fall short, it will have it's disappointments, and in the end it too will never satisfy you the way God can. So until we make much of God...until we make God our first love, we will never be satisfied. St Isaac the Syrian says, "Thirst after Jesus Christ and He will satisfy you with His love." How beautiful...how true. This has to be our ultimate goal. And until it is, whether we are married or single, makes no difference. It is in Him that we find true romance, true selfless friendship...a true fairy tale love story. The great St John Chrysostom says we should be madly—crazily—in love with Jesus Christ because that's how much He loves. So let all of us, single, divorced, widowed, married...let us lay down everything before God and allow Him to become everything to us, and satisfy every longing, every need in our heart.