

The Missing Link in
Contemporary Relationships



BELIEVERS EASTERN CHURCH

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MISSING LINK
in
contemporary relationships
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*A Brief Discussion on Loyalty—an Indispensable
Element for Unity and Success*

Moran Mor Athanasius Yohan Metropolitan

THE MISSING LINK IN CONTEMPORARY
RELATIONSHIPS

(English)

by

Moran Mor Athanasius Yohan Metropolitan

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INTRODUCTION

In some western countries, obesity is an important cause of premature death, but the latest research has revealed *loneliness* to be an even more important reason for an untimely death! We ask, how can that be? Everyone has a phone in their pocket; they talk constantly and live in a world of communication. Social media is supposed to connect people with anyone they want. Yet, our world has become a lonely place. A black hole of loneliness has sucked up our souls and our humanness.

The family unit is now history. No one actually cares for anyone. The very fabric of life—love, loyalty and kindness—is fast becoming extinct from our society.

Our God is anguished over people that walked away from Him, rejecting His love

and kindness. People, rather, chose to be self-centered and independent, caring only for themselves. Ironically, this has resulted in the death of their soul.

I am concerned about our future and more specifically, the future of God's Holy Church—the people of God. This concern has become the motivation for me to write this booklet. What we are talking about is that missing jewel in our lives—the most important link that gives meaning and hope for all of us as one people: loyalty.

CHAPTER 1

THE IMPORTANCE OF LOYALTY

There is a massive social media blitz being waged against a few individuals, destroying their character in public, using earth-splitting stories, with no regard to whether they are true or not. There is a loss of loyalty and an absolute disregard for someone's life. The world has gone blind to the fact that we are all connected to one another and we must do all we can to protect one another, for we all are living in this rotten world and none of us is perfect.

Loyalty is at the core of our survival as individuals, families, societies, communities, tribes and as nations.

I would venture to say that loyalty is more important than ability, skill, talent, power and wealth.

Even God considers loyalty as the evidence of His creation's response to His love, power and mercy.

One of the significant passages in the Bible where we read of this truth is in Psalm 78, where we have the condensed version of the history of the children of Israel. I recommend that you read this entire Psalm, but for now, note the following verses:

“They would not be like their ancestors—a stubborn and rebellious generation, whose hearts were not loyal to God, whose spirits were not faithful to him.”¹

“Their hearts were not loyal to him; they were not faithful to his covenant.”²

Think about the message contained in these verses. For all the things God did to bless His people, He was sad and grieved for these people He loved so much, because they did not remain loyal to Him.

Let us now try to define loyalty. A thesaurus gives us plenty of synonyms. Here are some of them:

True, dependable, firm, allegiance, faithfulness, fidelity, truthfulness, constancy, integrity, attachment, sincerity, bond, tie, honour, reliability, good faith, conscientious, dependability, commitment, support, zeal, ardor, earnestness, resolution, obedience, duty, honesty, truthfulness, devoted and trustworthy.

There are even more, but for now, this is more than enough. Any meaningful relationship among human beings would never have been possible without *love*; and if love is authentic, it must be saturated with loyalty, without which *love* becomes just an empty word.

To put it another way, loyalty is other-centered deeds and words, even at the cost of laying aside our wishes, goals and wants for the one we are called to serve.

Loyalty or disloyalty is the visible evidence of one's character, of who they are on the inside. There can be no meaningful relationship with God or man without loyalty.

Stephen R. Covey's best-seller book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, was the

result of his research of the history of the United States America, stretching back more than two hundred years. He wanted to find out if there was one single secret that made some leaders great, as a result of which the most powerful nation on earth was created. His journey to uncover the foundation of all greatness and success led to one single word, *character*, which in turn was defined by ‘trust’.

An artist needs a canvas to paint a portrait. In the same way, we must possess the most fundamental, indispensable quality—loyalty—if we are to form long-lasting human relationships and maintain a stable and solid life, a wholesome family, a compassionate society, a righteous nation, and a Holy Church.

Think about this: why do you enter into business with certain people while there may be others offering higher profits or advertising attractive offer? You might say, “I know them. They are trustworthy and only do what is right—I can depend on them, night or day.” What you are essentially saying is that you are loyal to that person as a result

of their loyalty to you—this is the glue that has bonded your relationship.

There is no middle ground here. You are either loyal or disloyal.

As Metropolitan of Believers Eastern Church, with over three million members spread throughout the world, what is the one thing that I, as spiritual father of my church, look for in my episcopas, priests, deacon fathers, missionaries and congregations? The one thing I look for, above all else, is true loyalty to our orthodox faith and the Holy Church.

Loyalty is indispensable while building a godly church.

For the sake of illustrating this point, suppose that I am dealing with two different priests. The first has earned multiple PhDs, is able and skilled in all disciplines, is an inspiring leader. The other is not as educated, and by temperament is like St Timothy—weak, timid, lacking leadership skills. Who do you suggest that I choose to handle major responsibilities in our church? Without much

thought, I would pick the latter priest, as St Paul picked St Timothy, calling him “my true son in the faith.”³ But the onlookers say, “this is a stupid choice; it is ungodly and politically motivated.” For they refuse to realise the truth; they fail to see what I see in the weak and timid priest—absolute loyalty to the church and the superiors that God placed over him; qualities the former priest lacked.

St Teresa is a familiar example. She gave up all worldly prospects and became a nun in the order of the Sisters of Loreto in Dublin. The young Teresa, with her new name—she was born Anjezë Gonxhe—came to Calcutta, India to serve the church. She was assigned to teach at Saint Mary’s High School for Girls, a school run by the Loreto Sisters Convent. But things didn’t go as well as she dreamed. Her heart pained for the poor and broken masses living in the slums of Calcutta. Teresa wanted to give herself fully to serve the poor, but the priest, bishops and mother-in-charge of the convent thought otherwise. She would have to suffer many more years with indescribable pain and

longing for official sanction from the Holy Father in the Vatican to have her dream fulfilled, of establishing the Missionaries of Charity as an order of the Catholic Church.

During this long trial of waiting, she tirelessly carried out all the work assigned to her.

The mother superior encouraged her to resign and leave the convent, to carry out what Teresa felt she was being called for. She refused, reminding the mother superior and others of her vow to spend her entire life with the Carmelite order. She would not choose to leave, to break her pledge, to fulfil her dream. Then there were plenty of outsiders telling her to give up her church, the Holy Father, and the vow she made, and come away, offering endless opportunities to turn her dream to reality.

But through all this, she was absolutely loyal to the Holy Father, her church, the vow she made and the Lord Jesus.

Now, we know the rest of the story: she did get the Pope to grant her the permission to found the Missionaries of Charity and under St Teresa's leadership, they grew to be one

of the most powerful social and religious movements in history. Today, they have a presence in almost every nation of the world.

St Teresa lived to see her contributions acknowledged in her adopted home country and abroad, receiving the Nobel Peace prize in 1979. She came to be known the world over as the “Angel of Calcutta” and “Saint of the Poor.” It gladdens my heart that Saint Teresa of Calcutta now sits with Jesus in heaven.

Notice who we are talking about, a high example of true and holy loyalty lived out in our time. She has shown us it is possible. Beautiful! My Lord Jesus, my Holy Father, my church—she pledged her life to be loyal no matter what. &

¹ Psalm 78:8 (NIV); ² Psalm 78:37 (NIV); ³ 1 Timothy 1:2 (NIV)

CHAPTER 2

REFLECTIONS OF LOYALTY

My goal is to portray a biblical world of loyalty. My deep concern is for the Holy Church and how the Lord Jesus Christ, as the head of the church, commanded us to obey the new order that He brought: to love one another. This is His blueprint for bringing healing and reconciliation to a broken world, by restoring our union with God and with our fellow man.

Love, as God meant it, is only possible if we understand the practical implications of loyalty, without which 'love' will remain, in essence, a non-word; a word not recognised and without meaning. The noun must become a verb if it is to transform our lives into something better, something glorious. &

CHAPTER 3

TRUSTWORTHINESS

If we are loyal to an individual, or to an entity—such as our church—and its authority figures, we will be militant in maintaining confidence in the authority of their office, even if it causes us personal pain and hurt. We choose to do so because of our loyalty to them, even when they make mistakes or fail. We do our part in defending their reputation and their cause the best way we can. Think about the example of St Joseph and St Mary, the parents of our Saviour.¹ St Joseph could have defended his reputation by denying her and having her stoned to death. But he was blessed with God's worldview and remained loyal to her.

Read the four gospels and see the Lord Jesus, how loyal He was to His disciples, defending them and protecting them as His own

brothers. Even when He always knew Judas would betray Him, He never revealed this to anyone. Jesus loved them all until the end, including Judas. This is true loyalty.

If someone is loyal to you, they will never betray you in secret.

In the First Testament of the Bible, we see the covenant of friendship between David and Jonathan. We witness a powerful instance of loyalty, unto death, even as Jonathan's father, King Saul was seeking to kill David.²

The virtue and beauty of loyalty is one's ability to keep confidence. &

¹ St Matthew 1:19; ² 1 Samuel 20

CHAPTER 4

DEFENDING

Gossiping, criticising through words or at times through silence, is proof of one's lack of loyalty. In a group discussion, when an individual begins to present someone in a bad light, particularly if they are absent, if you are loyal, you will defend that person.

We read in the New Testament how Jesus defended the disciples when the Pharisees criticised them.¹

St Paul, before he became a Christian, was the arch enemy of Christians. Now, having met Christ and having his life transformed as a result,² he wanted to be part of the local church. But no one would believe Saul and accept him. It was St Barnabas who took him under his wing and offered all the support he needed and defended Saul—he was a loyal friend.³

Later in life, St Paul was dealing with a young slave who had run away from his master. By God's providence, St Paul was able to lead this slave to Christ. St Paul then wrote to the master from whom the slave escaped, and supported the slave by asking the master to forgive and accept the young man as a brother in the Lord. In fact, almost the entirety of St Paul's letter to the master, Philemon, which is included in the New Testament, is devoted to this beautiful story of loyalty.

Your loyal friends will never lower themselves to the level of those that gossip about you.

Your loyal friends will defend you in your absence. ❧

¹ St Mark 2:23–28; ² Acts 9:1–6; ³ Acts 9:26–28

CHAPTER 5

SEEING THE FOREST

If we are loyal, it is imperative that we learn to see the complete picture when we deal with individuals or with problems in the church. It is said we often miss the forest for the trees. What this means is that we get so caught up with minute details of a problem that we fail to see the situation as a whole.

Learn to see the big picture before making a judgment.

St Paul, amidst his troubles in prison, says to the church in Philippi that all the terrible things that happened to him only helped in the furtherance of the gospel.¹ A few verses later, where he talks about people who were engaged in the kind of preaching that would only worsen his problems, St Paul's response was, "What does it matter? The important

thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached.”²

This tells us that if we are loyal, then we should not burn the house down because there is a rat inside. Even as God accomplishes so much through His Holy Church, we need to accept that there will be human failures—as it was from the beginning and always will be.

I feel sad when I hear about a faithful worker, a missionary wanting to quit the church because of problems they face in their local situation. When Jesus told the multitude of disciples that followed Him, that unless they eat His flesh and drink His blood, they would have no part in Him,³ the majority got offended and walked away. Jesus then asks the remaining twelve if they too would leave Him, to which Peter said, “Lord, to whom shall we go, You have the words of eternal life.”⁴ St Peter saw something beyond space and time, and chose to remain loyal to his master.

This is also what we read of Abraham, a friend of God. Although he was extremely rich and had it all, he lived in tents, always

on the move, for he looked beyond the present and saw a city made by the hand of God.⁵ And so, Abraham remained loyal to his God till the end. Even when God asked him to give up his only son whom he loved, Abraham was willing to submit in obedience. God saw this and responded, saying, “Now I know you fear God.”⁶

Never forget your loyalty will be tested when you least expect it. ❧

¹ Philippians 1:12; ² Philippians 1:18 (NIV); ³ St John 6:53; ⁴ St John 6:68;

⁵ Hebrews 11:10; ⁶ Genesis 22:12

CHAPTER 6

GRATITUDE

I mentioned this earlier, that even God Almighty gets sad when His own people that He loved and cared for become disloyal to Him.

How often we forget the good things we have received from others and are prone to criticise and betray them due to misunderstandings or when our expectations are not fulfilled. I pray that you will always remember the blessings you have received from a friend, or from your church.

I recommend that you sit down and think long and hard to recall as many people as possible who did something for you. Think of your parents, teachers, friends, priests, neighbours and so on, and then write down all the good things you received from them

in words and deeds. Think of ways to thank them for the part they played in your life. You will be surprised and amazed by how your attitude and feelings change. Do it for kindness' sake. Be grateful. Be loyal.

Every day, thank God for His mercy and remember people that helped you in any way—thank them if you already have not. ❧

CHAPTER 7

SURRENDER

One of the classic stories of the beauty of loyalty shines forth from the book of Ruth in the First Testament.

This historic event is set around 1,000 BC. Due to a famine in Bethlehem, a family of four makes a trip to Moab, which was forbidden by God. The two older boys got married to girls from Moab. God also forbade Jewish people from marrying Gentiles. The story goes on to say how the deaths of the father and the two sons left the mother, Naomi, alone. After more than ten years in Moab, Naomi decides to return to her hometown—Bethlehem—but tells her two widowed daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah, to return to their homes and start new lives rather than join her on the journey. While Orpah complies with Naomi's request,

Ruth refuses to leave Naomi and reaffirms her commitment to her, saying that only death can separate her from Naomi.¹

Here is loyalty in its purest form. Ruth was willing to submit to and serve Naomi till the end of her days, even though staying back in Moab, her birthplace, held the promise of a better life.

There is another example from the life of Joshua, who was known as the ‘servant’ of Moses.² Joshua had numerous chances to promote himself and take over as leader of Israel; yet, he never joined the ranks of the opposition to promote himself. It is no wonder God chose Joshua to lead His people following the death of Moses.³ Joshua was rewarded for his loyalty to his community, to his leader and to God.

On the other hand, we have the story of Absalom, the son of King David, who plotted to kill his own father so he could become king. He was a brilliant and able politician—yet his disloyalty became the noose around his neck that ended his life.⁴

True success is achieved through the love and loyalty of your friends—these are true friends. &

¹ Ruth 1:16–17; ² Numbers 11:28; ³ Joshua 1:1; ⁴ 2 Samuel 18

CHAPTER 8

EMBRACE SUFFERING

Who wants to embrace suffering—emotionally, mentally or physically? No one in their right mind wishes for it. Yet, if there is loyalty, there is suffering. It is the same with love: you cannot love someone without paying the price of suffering. Is this not what Jesus, the Son of God, had to do to remain loyal and obedient to His father?

St Paul tells his disciple Timothy to suffer with him for the sake of Christ.¹ When all of St Paul's friends walked away to safety, Timothy chose to stick with his mentor till the end. Loyalty is tested in the face of troubles. The friends of the prodigal son all walked away and left him in the pig's pen when he had no more money left to continue their lavish lifestyle. This is not loyalty. Loyalty is our willingness to share in

the suffering, pain and loss with the one we serve. Think about the countless martyrs for the Christian faith in the early centuries who willingly offered their very lives for the Holy Church and its bridegroom, our Lord.

Adversity and suffering are the true tests of loyalty. &

¹2 Timothy 1:8

CHAPTER 9

OTHERS

T rue loyalty is not based upon ‘me’, but based on the other person or the community, the tribe and the church that we are a part of.

You often see someone criticising and opposing the leaders of the church because their opinions are not accepted or have not been given credit for. Many start to murmur and become enemies from within the camp. There is evidence of this happening in the lives of the people of God under the leadership of Moses.¹

In fact, when we read the story of Joseph’s life,² we see that he was accused and misunderstood by the very family he loved and served with all his heart. In the end, he was thrown in prison for thirteen years—yet you never hear him say one unkind word

against his family, or even against Potiphar. He remained loyal. Contrast this with the age we live in—everywhere, even for trivial matters, people sue each other or use social media to cause as much damage as they can.

Loyalty is the jewel missing from contemporary society, regardless of whether Christian or not.

David, for all the good he did for King Saul, was sought by Saul, who wanted to kill him out of jealousy. Even in the face of this, David remained loyal to the king. Even after the death of King Saul, David's response shows his heart of love and loyalty to the one he promised to serve.³

Selfish, self-centered people pretend to be loyal, but they are not. ❧

¹Numbers 13, 14; ²Genesis 37; ³2 Samuel 1

CHAPTER 10

SELFLESS SERVICE

I am sure you have heard people say things like, “I am a loyal servant of my company; they take care of me so well.” “I am loyal to that family because they brought me up,” etc. The same people, who professed undying loyalty, changed overnight when they were not granted their share of the inheritance, or when someone else was promoted over them! It is obvious that their loyalty was always based solely on the benefit or status they enjoyed—a selfish and subjective loyalty. This is not real loyalty.

St Paul talked about a close co-worker named Demas. We first read in Philemon, Demas, my fellow worker greets you.¹ Some six years later, under the shadow of martyrdom, St Paul wrote his last letter to his spiritual son

Timothy, and says “Demas, having loved this present world, left me.”²

As long as Demas was getting what he wanted—benefits, honour—he was a loyal friend to St Paul. But when he saw that there were no more benefits to be gained from St Paul, he simply abandoned him. This is not loyalty.

True loyalty is when one says, “I am willing to forgo material benefits to serve the one the Lord has placed over me.”

On the surface, the older brother in the Gospel according to St Luke Chapter 15 seems like a deeply committed, loyal, hardworking and obedient son; but later, when his younger brother returns after wasting his life—the elder brother gets mad with their father, complaining about not receiving good food and honour. This shows the inside workings of the man. All those years of hard work were motivated by a secret desire to get something for himself, and not because of love or loyalty toward his father.

Balaam the prophet, in the First Testament, is another individual who did not remain

loyal. In return for the material benefits he received, he betrayed the people of God.³

What money or material benefit did the apostles receive for laying down their very lives for their master? It is worth reading 2 Corinthians to learn of St Paul's loyalty to the Holy Church and Christ despite of all the suffering, loss, and hard work—all for the sake of love, loyalty and service.

When your loyalty is controlled by personal greed, it is proof that your character is flawed. ❧

¹ Philemon 1:23–24 paraphrased; ² 2 Timothy 4:10 paraphrased;

³ Numbers 22:23, 31, 25:1–3

CHAPTER 11

BEING A SERVANT

Another reflection of loyalty is our willingness to carry out any task asked of us with joy. No job is too low or too less in serving the church.¹

I remember meeting two Catholic priests, both of whom had earned PhDs, taking care of a printing press belonging to their church to make money to provide for an orphanage.

King David said that he would be extremely grateful and glad if God had instead called him to be the doorkeeper (attendant) of His house.²

What about you? Are you one who will join with St Paul in saying, “I am a slave”³ of Christ and His church? Many so-called workers of the church treat their assignment as a secular job—glad to do the job for the

salary or benefits. God is looking for people who see their call to serve as a privilege.⁴

We love our pet dogs and have no hesitation in calling them ‘man’s best friend’ for one reason: their undying loyalty and service, no matter what. ❧

¹ Romans 12; ² Psalm 84:10; ³ Romans 1:1 ⁴ 2 Corinthians 4:1

CHAPTER 12

INTEGRITY

Jesus said, one cannot serve God and money at the same time.¹ Loyalty is tested more in the area of handling God's money than in most other things.

We read the story of Elisha the Prophet and his servant, Gehazi, in the First Testament.² Naaman, the rich and powerful army commander who was sick with leprosy comes to Elisha to get healed. The prophet of God refuses to take any reward for his ministry. But the prophet's servant goes after Naaman and receives his money, and Gehazi was cursed to become a leper like Naaman.

What was the problem? It is not as if he stole the money. But he knew that his master, Elisha would not take any money, and he should have remained loyal to his master's way of life.

True loyalty is being faithful in matters regarding money; being a faithful steward even when you have the freedom to use the funds and opportunity you have been entrusted with as you wish.

If you are loyal to Christ and His Holy Church, you will be faithful with every penny and be very diligent in taking care of God's property.

One who is not faithful in little things will not be a loyal friend in times of trouble. 

¹ St Matthew 6:24b paraphrased; ² 2 Kings 5

CHAPTER 13

OBEDIENCE

One of the most moving scenes I have watched was the consecration of a young woman who was committing her life to be a nun in her church. The entire service is available on YouTube. Following the entire story, it becomes obvious that not only does she come from a very rich family, but she had also just finished with postgraduate studies. Her life-long dream was to serve her church, like St Teresa. A nun sees herself as Christ's bride, committed wholly to Him and to His church.

During the ceremony, she takes her vows facing the altar, with a church full of people behind her, adorned in the most beautiful wedding dress. Her vow was along these lines:

I have chosen to renounce my will, my plans and ambitions, and I choose to obey my Lord Jesus Christ by submitting to and obeying my superiours!¹

If one is loyal, there is obedience without question or delay. We adapt our own wishes to be more in line with the goals of those we are called to serve. This is absolutely important when it comes to fulfilling the call of Christ to His Holy Church—to charge the world to be reconciled to God. Any form of rebellion against the authority God placed over us destroys the love and unity of His church.²

Loyalty manifests in the heart as an attitude of joyful obedience; for we know, to obey our superiours is to obey Christ Himself. I know the story of a priest who is also an accomplished scholar. Once, he was approached to deliver a lecture on the Christian worldview in this ever-changing society that places no stock in God or His values. This priest, being placed in a high position in his archdiocese, could have easily made a decision on-the-spot. Instead, his

response was simply, “Please let me ask the Father!” He would not say yes without the consent of his bishop.

Are you one like this? Yes, you may have the freedom to choose, but you live with the awareness that you are under an authority and you are not ashamed to let others know of this fact.

Genuine loyalty enables one to discern the wishes of those who have been placed over them.

In 2 Kings 2, we read the narrative of the prophet Elijah and his servant Elisha. The master tells the servant, “You stay here, don’t go after me.” But Elisha senses the spirit of his master and responds, “Please, I will not leave you, I will follow you.” And when he does so, the blessing he received from God for his uncompromising loyalty is beautiful to read.

A loyal person is also dependable. They will keep the promise they made to their superiors and to the Holy Church. Loyalty enables them to share in the burden of

responsibility. A loyal person is not one who makes excuses for not doing their assignments. Many times, the reason for a delay in obedience is an unwillingness on our part to reject distractions that have come to be a part of the *convergence culture* we live in. If you are loyal to authority, your availability to serve will take top priority in your schedule.

Often it is personal and selfish ambition, an obsession about the future, that makes one preoccupied with personal gain. This is equally true for those serving in the church, either in a parish or in larger capacities.

Jesus suffered throughout His earthly life because of His loyalty to His Father and to those that He loved. ❧

¹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kFs_hnn2Xdg; ² St John 13:34–35, St John 17:20–23

CHAPTER 14

RESPECT AND HONESTY

Respecting the authority placed over us is an integral part of loyalty—giving due honour to those placed by God over us. It is important that we conscientiously work for them, knowing God gives us protection and helps us to become more like Christ.¹

Abraham made countless sacrifices—leaving his home, enduring painful tests and finally, being found willing to sacrifice his own beloved son. But God stopped him and said to Abraham, “Now I know you fear God.”²

Being loyal also means total honesty and transparency in all manner of communication. Hide nothing from the one you serve. Walk in the light, especially as we build His Holy Church. Our body language and the words we use show our loyalty or the lack of it.

Blood is thicker than water, they say, but
loyalty makes a family. &

¹ Romans 13:1; ² Genesis 22:12b

CHAPTER 15

TAKING RISKS

Taking risks is an indispensable part of loyalty. The disciples of Christ gave their very lives in loyalty to their Master. Self-centered people, seeking something for themselves, whether money, power, position or honour, cannot be truly loyal to the church with a sincere heart. The hired shepherd is not loyal to the sheep. It is the owner who will give up his life to protect the sheep. St Paul said about young Timothy, all seek their own. Only Timothy remains faithful in seeking the things of Christ.¹

This is loyalty, uncluttered and unpolluted.

Matthew, a tax collector, was happy in his job, leading a comfortable life and earning enough for himself. He took a risk when he

gave it all up the instant Jesus said, “Follow me.”²

Do not expect unquestioning loyalty from those who refuse to take risks. ❧

¹ Philippians 2:21 paraphrased; ² St Matthew 9:9

CHAPTER 16

SUMMARY POINTS

One: The glue that holds a family, community or church together is unconditional love, which remains incomplete without loyalty. Therefore, give due priority to building loyalty in all relationships. Avoid all forms of distraction and gossip that destroys love and loyalty. And remember that loyalty is a two-way street.

Two: There can be no loyalty without gratitude—for the blessings we receive from God as well as from others. Daily, recall the good we have been blessed with, and avoid being destroyed like the children of Israel who forgot to give thanks. Live with gratitude.

Three: The many synonyms of loyalty—faithfulness, integrity, sincerity, dependability,

obedience—convey the attributes of this indispensable character trait. Seek to develop a heart and mind of godliness, without which it is impossible to live a wholesome life.

Four: God has given us plenty of inspirational examples of people who have demonstrated a life of loyalty through biblical characters and contemporary figures such as St Teresa. Take the time to read up on such lives that show us the way and help us to find motivation.

Five: Loyalty demands we maintain confidentiality, to the point of suffering for it. An example of this is priests who receive confession, who never reveal the secrets that they are entrusted with, no matter the incentive or threat. Examine yourself and see if you are loyal enough, protecting those whom you serve.

Six: Many times, people turn disloyal or critical because of a lack of information about the problems or situations they are dealing with. Be diligent. Learn the full story before passing judgment on people or

churches. It is said, “To know all, is to forgive all.”

Seven: “They forgot what He had done, the wonders He had shown them.”¹ God complains about His people, whom He loved and blessed, because they forgot His grace and mercy and began to complain and murmur. It hurts the heart of God. What about you? By nature, we are self-centered, rebellious creatures. Make it a daily practice to spend time to recall God’s mercy and thank Him—which also means we are thankful to others in our lives, remaining humble in God’s mercy.

Eight: Life begets life. Reading stories of godly examples of loyalty in the Bible will help us imitate the saints that went before us. This can influence our attitude, decisions, behaviour and ultimately our character. Make it a habit to read the lives of such people given in His Word. Passages that talk about King David’s loyal friends, Abraham’s servants, followers of the prophets, Ruth, Esther and St Timothy are a few good examples.

Nine: C.S Lewis said it well:

To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket—safe, dark, motionless, airless—it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable... The only place outside Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is Hell.²

I say this again; there is no genuine love³ without a foundation in faithfulness and loyalty. And so, be willing to pay the price of pain and suffering for being loyal to those you are called to serve in the church. Today, thousands die as martyrs from the churches in Egypt, Christian communities that have survived for close to two thousand years. Their absolute loyalty to the Holy Church in

the face of such oppression should serve as a beacon for us.

Ten: One of the biggest hindrances in maintaining loyalty is self-centeredness. We are tested by the suffering we often face for being loyal, as it was in the life of Joseph.⁴ Be aware that these tests are part of God's design to make us better. Be willing to submit and remain loyal under God's providence.

Eleven: True loyalty cannot be traded as material things. Be your own judge and make sure your inner self of godliness is the basis for your words and deeds. Do not let money or external benefits damage your love or loyalty to your family, friends, institutions or the church.

Twelve: Our willingness to serve in any role for the benefits of people we are called to minister, especially the church, is a key sign of our love and loyalty. Be willing to step back, serve in humility and do what is asked of you by the authority above you. King David preferred to be a doorkeeper in the house of God over anything the world could offer.⁵

Thirteen: It is imperative that you choose to give up the ‘self’—giving up or laying down your own will, wishes and ambitions—if you have an earnest desire to serve the Holy Church. I urge you to make the choice to embrace the cross. Jesus told us, “Whoever does not carry their cross and follow Me cannot be My disciple.”⁶ Watch the video online of the consecration service of the young women from New York to grasp a better understanding of this truth.

Fourteen: Making the vow of obedience, and expressing a willingness to submit to and obey the authorities God places over us is a clear, visible proof of our loyalty to God and His church. Learn and develop reverence and respect for the authority over you—remember that this authority is sanctioned by God. Read our church publication, *Touching Godliness*, for a deeper understanding of this subject.

Fifteen: If you are loyal to God and His church, there will be times when you are called to take risks, without which you will be unable to maintain a consistent life of loyalty.

Do not run away from your responsibilities, even when risks are involved. King David's friends went to fetch water from a well in the enemy's camp because of the loyalty they had for their master—this was a source of courage. See what David did when he saw this.⁷ Esther risked her very life as a result of her loyalty to the people of God.⁸ Be ever strong and courageous. ❧

¹ Psalm 78:11 (NIV); ² C.S. Lewis; *The Four Loves*; New York Harper, 1960, p. 112; ³ 1 Corinthians 13; ⁴ Genesis 39; ⁵ Psalm 84:10; ⁶ St Luke 14:27 (NIV); ⁷ 2 Samuel 23:15–17; ⁸ Esther 4:16

