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Manipulative People (Protopresbyter Themistoklis Mourtzanos)

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One of the many difficulties in human relationships, which begins with the way we were brought up, is manipulation. There are people who, consciously or unconsciously, exploit the feelings of others- their goodness, tolerance, desire for a quiet life, their love, in the end- in such a manner that they get their own way. Usually it's a question of direct or indirect blackmail. The direct way is a clear declaration: 'This is what I want and you'd better let me have it. Or else'. The indirect way is a conscious effort 'to get you to agree by any means available until I get what I want'. Begging, whining, threats, long faces, 'I don't love you', 'You don't love me', various forms of withdrawal of communication all make manipulation a condition difficult to handle.



The relationships between husband and wife, like those between parents and children, require emotional understanding, as well as determination and patience. In the first place, they need a plan, and an orientation, as well as the ability to examine any demands that are presented. It follows that any strategy for dealing with human relationships, demands and feelings needs a degree of preparedness, since they often resemble a kind of war or diplomacy! Superficiality, an ad hoc approach, retreat, or even worse 'Do as you like, just leave me in peace', get us nowhere. One demand will simply lead to the next. Given that we live in a culture where the existence of a demand and the requirement that it be granted are taken as rights- and self-evident ones at that (witness consumerism)- manipulation fuels selfishness. People don't have the humility to examine their desires; instead they're so proud that they think they deserve everything.

Careful study of any request is the key point. Usually, manipulative people demand immediate satisfaction for what they want. Since the time of our life is fleeting, it's obvious that any examination of a request can't be put off indefinitely. But immediate decisions don't help, either. Obviously there has to be dialogue with the person who has the power to accede to the request. A full explanation of the nature of the request. Joint counsel. By and large, an immediate 'Yes' or an immediate 'No', don't help. In the Gospel, when people ask Christ for a miracle, we often see Him making them wait. He talks to them and examines their faith. He feels sorry for them. There, however, the requests aren't the demands of spoiled people, but issues of life and death.

We should learn to wait. If we have the strength, we should examine the parameters. We should consent to reasonable requests, but not give in to those which are excessive. What is difficult is to deal with ourselves. A stable set of values is a great help here: knowledge of right and wrong, the desire to give the other person lasting joy, the relaxation, but not abandonment of rules, the sense that we need to enjoy life are all helpful criteria. At the same time, however, we should share the feeling that each person in the relationship is educating the other and this sometimes involves saying 'No'. Although this might prove emotionally exhausting, if someone's being manipulative it can help them see that real love aims at making genuine progress, and isn't directed merely at the here and now. 'No' must mean 'No', however!

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