

the **Voice**
Maronite



FEAST OF SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI

OCTOBER 4



the Maronite Voice

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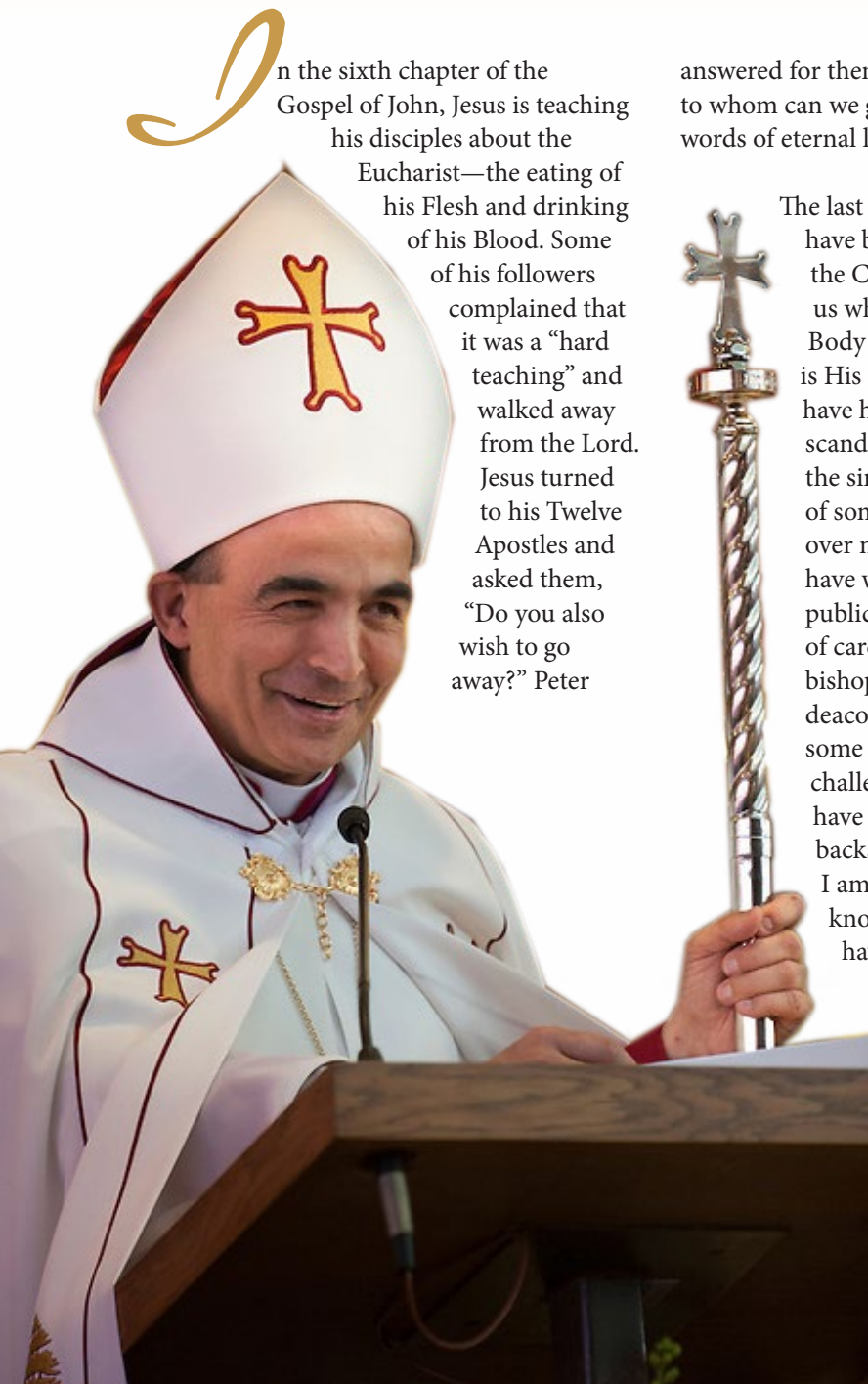
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“Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life.” (JOHN 6:68) *by Bishop A. Elias Zaidan*



In the sixth chapter of the Gospel of John, Jesus is teaching his disciples about the Eucharist—the eating of his Flesh and drinking of his Blood. Some of his followers complained that it was a “hard teaching” and walked away from the Lord. Jesus turned to his Twelve Apostles and asked them, “Do you also wish to go away?” Peter

answered for them saying, “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life.”

The last twenty years have been difficult for the Church and for us who make up the Body of Christ which is His Church. We have had to deal with scandal and shame for the sins and crimes of some of the clergy over many years. We have witnessed the public humiliation of cardinals and bishops, priests and deacons. The faith of some of us has been challenged and some have turned their backs on the Church. I am sure you know people who have rejected the Church just for this reason. Righteous indignation at what has been

exposed is understandable and I, too, share this abhorrence along with many of you. It has weighed heavy on my mind and heart as well.

In the passage I cited at the beginning of this article, the faith of the disciples of Jesus was shaken over his claim that his Body is true food and that his Blood is true drink. Jesus was speaking of eating His Body and Blood. Today, we may fail to see just how difficult a teaching this was for Jesus’ followers because most of us have been raised in the Faith and this belief has been part of our lives for many years. But my purpose in using this Gospel passage is not to comment on the Holy Eucharist, but to reflect with you on St. Peter’s response to Jesus’ question, “Do you also wish to go away?”

I find comfort in the answer given by St. Peter, “Lord, to whom can we go?” This response is as relevant today as it was almost 2,000 years ago. Difficult times requires difficult decisions and difficult choices. We are

living through difficult times and our faith is being challenged by many events. The full impact of all of this is yet to be seen. But we must hold on to our faith. St. Padre Pio of Pietrelcina is often quoted as saying, “The most beautiful act of faith is the one made in darkness, in sacrifice and with extreme effort.” An “act of faith” is about making a decision. Faith is not about how we may feel on any given day, but about choosing to believe and choosing to trust.

The truth is that Jesus *does* have the words of eternal life and these words found in the Gospel of St. John have been preserved and handed down to us through the Church. The Church does not belong to any one of us. It is truly the Lord’s Church. We, the members of Christ’s Church, are certainly sinners who often fail to live up to our call to holiness, but the Church, who is also the “Bride of Christ”, continues to be the channel of divine grace and eternal life for us. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches us that “all salvation comes from Christ the Head through the Church which is His Body.” (n. 846) In other words, without the Church there is no salvation. That is not to say, of course, that only

members of the Church *can* be saved, but it is to say that all that is necessary for our salvation is found in the Church that Christ founded.

St. Peter is absolutely correct, “You have the words of eternal life.” The Church, founded by Christ, is the guarantor of the truth of these words. In our Divine Liturgy for the Dedication and Consecration of the Church Sunday (at the start of our new Church year in November), we say that Jesus “built the Church to be an invincible and secure fortress and a tower of salvation.” (Hoosoyo). As sinful human beings—of whatever rank or station in life—we falter, we fall, we fail. The Church does not.

As a Bishop of the Church, one of my tasks is to encourage the faithful and help all of you to “stay the course” and not to become discouraged, alienated or estranged from the “Rock” that is the Church. As the *Catechism* teaches us, the Church is truly the channel of our salvation. There is no other place to go. This special gift given to the Church is not dependent on the goodness or holiness of any individual, but on the holiness of

the Son of the God. This is not the time to walk away from the Church. It is a time to become more serious about our faith, to be more reverent towards and more observant of our liturgical life, our prayer life and of our love for others. It is time to get involved, to help, to walk the journey of holiness, to reach out to others and invite them back to the Church.

In his first Epistle, the Apostle Peter tells us, “...sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.” (1 Peter 3:15) That is one more thing that you can do. You can always be ready to explain your faith to others; to be ready to share your faith with others—especially within your own families.

So, as we are about to start a new Church Year, I ask you to renew your faith in the words of Jesus, to renew your commitment to His Holy and Apostolic Church and support one another in our Holy Faith. May God guide us and accompany us in this journey. ■

Schedule BISHOP A. ELIAS ZAIDAN

- 18-20 OCTOBER** North Jackson, OH | Our Lady of Lebanon Shrine | Inter-Eparchial Deacon and Subdeacon Retreat
- 21-31 OCTOBER** Personal Time
- 2-3 NOVEMBER** Austin, TX | Our Lady's Church | Capital Campaign Visit
- 9-10 NOVEMBER** Birmingham, AL | St. Elias Church | Capital Campaign Visit
- 11-14 NOVEMBER** Baltimore, MD | USCCB Meetings
- 15-16 NOVEMBER** St. Louis, MO | The Chancery | Eparchial Pastoral and Stewardship Council Meetings
- 17 NOVEMBER** St. Louis, MO | St. Raymond Cathedral | 25th Eparchial Anniversary
- 18-19 NOVEMBER** St. Louis, MO | The Chancery | Presbyteral Council Meetings
- 22-24 NOVEMBER** Fairlawn, OH | Our Lady of the Cedars of Mount Lebanon Church | Capital Campaign Visit
- 30 NOV - 1 DEC** Birmingham, AL | St. Elias Church | Diaconal Ordination of Subdeacons Mark Ferris and James Wehby
- 6-8 DECEMBER** Las Vegas, NV | St. Sharbel Church | Capital Campaign Visit
- 13-15 DECEMBER** Dayton, OH | St. Ignatius of Antioch Church | Pastoral Visit and Consecration of New Church
- 22 DECEMBER** St. Louis, MO | St. Raymond Cathedral
- 25 DECEMBER** Los Angeles, CA | Our Lady of Mt. Lebanon-St. Peter Cathedral | Christmas Liturgies

Saint Francis of Assisi

On 4 October, the Catholic Church celebrates the feast of Saint Francis of Assisi (1182-1226), a man venerated by people of all religions.

Creation was a common theme in the preaching of Saint Francis. God is praised for creation and by creation. Saint Francis taught that the world was created by God as beautiful, but that sinfulness had corrupted it. He believed that all creatures should praise God, a theme often taken up in the Psalms:

Praise the LORD from the earth, all great sea creatures and ocean depths, lightning and hail, snow and clouds, powerful wind fulfilling His word, mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, wild animals and all cattle, crawling creatures and flying birds. (PSALM 148:7-10)

As creatures of God ourselves, we enjoy creation and join in the praise of it. As stewards, it is our duty to protect the environment. On November 29, 1979, Saint John Paul II declared Saint Francis the Patron Saint of Ecology.

His well-known poem, "Canticle of the Sun," was written in late 1224 in his own Umbrian Italian dialect, perhaps the first bit of literature to be written in Italian.

Praise of the Creatures (Canticle of the Sun)

Most High, all powerful, good Lord,
Yours are the praises, the glory, the honor,
and all blessing.

To You alone, Most High, do they belong,
and no man is worthy to mention Your name.

Be praised, my Lord, through all your creatures,
especially through my lord Brother Sun,
who brings the day; and you give light through him.
And he is beautiful and radiant in all his splendour!
Of you, Most High, he bears the likeness.

Schedule BISHOP GREGORY J. MANSOUR

- 18-20 OCTOBER** North Jackson, OH | Our Lady of Lebanon Shrine | Inter-Eparchial Deacon and Subdeacon Retreat
27 OCTOBER Sleepy Hollow, NY | St. John Paul II Church and Manhattan Mission
29 OCTOBER Petersham, MA | Most Holy Trinity Monastery | Installation of Abbot Patrick
2-3 NOVEMBER Brooklyn, NY | Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral
8 NOVEMBER Washington, DC | Our Lady of Lebanon Seminary | Diaconal Ordination of Subdeacon Adib Salameh
10-14 NOVEMBER Baltimore, MD | USCCB Meetings
17 NOVEMBER St. Louis, MO | St. Raymond Cathedral | 25th Anniversary of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon
24 NOVEMBER Brooklyn, NY | Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral | 75th Anniversary of First Liturgy at the Cathedral
25 NOV - 3 DEC Family Visit, Michigan
7-8 DECEMBER Williamsville, NY | St. John Maron Church | Pastoral Visit
12 DECEMBER Petersham, MA | Most Holy Trinity Monastery | Ordination of Bro. Bernardo to Holy Priesthood
13-15 DECEMBER Torrington, CT | St. Maron Church | MYO/MYA Retreat
16-21 DECEMBER Parish Visits | Christmas Novena
22 DECEMBER Brooklyn, NY | Manhattan Mission
24-25 DECEMBER Brooklyn, NY | Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral | Christmas Liturgies
29 DECEMBER Miami, FL | Our Lady of Lebanon Church | Pastoral and Family Visit

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon
and the stars, in heaven you formed them
clear and precious and beautiful.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind,
and through the air, cloudy and serene,
and every kind of weather through which
You give sustenance to Your creatures.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water,
which is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire,
through whom you light the night and he is beautiful
and playful and robust and strong.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Mother Earth,
who sustains us and governs us and who produces
varied fruits with coloured flowers and herbs

Praised be You, my Lord,
through those who give pardon for Your love,
and bear infirmity and tribulation.

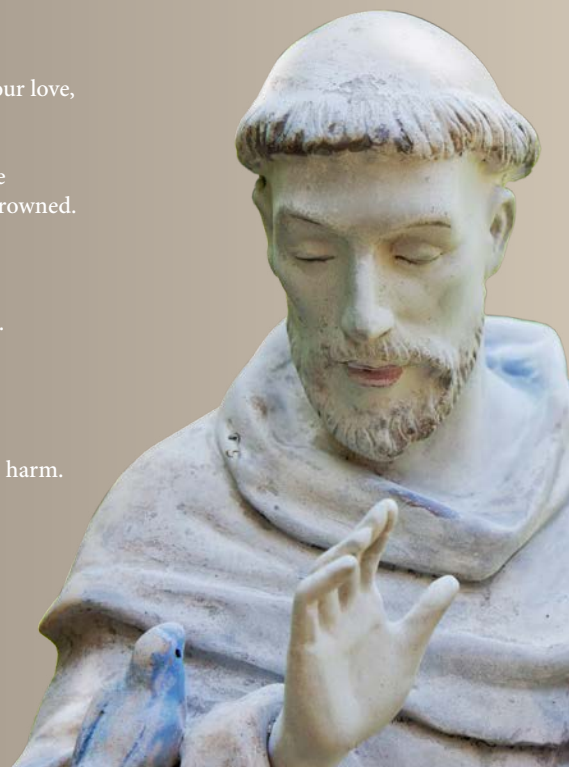
Blessed are those who endure in peace
for by You, Most High, they shall be crowned.

Praised be You, my Lord,
through our Sister Bodily Death,
from whom no living man can escape.

Woe to those who die in mortal sin.
Blessed are those whom death will
find in Your most holy will,
for the second death shall do them no harm.

Praise and bless my Lord,
and give Him thanks
and serve Him with great humility.

—SAINT FRANCIS




Mary the Evangelist

by Fr. David A. Fisher

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, "Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" LUKE 1:41-43

The Theological Significance of the Virgin Mary

 Mariology is the title given to the theological discipline concerning the *Holy Theotokos*, Mary the Virgin Mother of Our Lord Jesus. Mary never ceases to enlighten us about the gift of salvation that is given to the world in her Son and Savior, Jesus the Christ. In the same way, her life was a constant affirmation of what the power of faith in Christ can accomplish in a human life. The theological reflections of Mariology give us moral, dogmatic, and spiritual insight into the great gift of salvation bestowed on us by the Father, through his Son and Holy Spirit.

The spiritual devotion given to the *Holy Virgin*, along with the doctrinal and theological reflections on Mary, also reveal to us the beauty of the ancient Church. The Council of Ephesus in 431 declared the Catholic belief that Mary is the *Theotokos*, the *Mother of God*. Devotion to Mary as the Mother of God and acknowledgment of her perpetual virginity remained a common element in the faith of the Catholic, Oriental Orthodox and Orthodox Churches despite the other disagreements over other aspects of Church belief.

Mary is *the* symbol of human single-mindedness at the service of God. The Church never ceases to gain

strength from those words of Mary in response to the Angel Gabriel, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." (LUKE 1:38) These words of Mary are spoken for the Church, and with the Church, that the People of God will have total trust (faith), and total devotion towards God our Father.

The theology of the Syriac Fathers was often expressed in poetic form and Mary was often the person used by them to express the beauty of God's creation and its redemption in Christ. St. Ephrem the Syrian, the "Harp of the Holy Spirit," is possibly the greatest example of the poet-theologians of the Syriac tradition. Due to his verses on the interior beauty of the Holy Virgin, many theologians have come to see him as the first expositor of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception:

The eye is clear if united to the sun. By its light it conquers armies. It shines with its light, gleams with its brilliance, is adorned by its beauty.

As though on an eye, the light dwelt in Mary and purified her spirit; it cleansed her thoughts, sanctified her conscience and perfected her virginity.



The Icon of the Theotokos "Unburnt Bush" of the Old Testament. 19th, Polissya, Ukraine. The Museum of Ukrainian home icons, Radomysl Castle, Ukraine

The river in which He was baptized conceived Him symbolically. The moist womb of the water conceived Him in purity, bore Him in splendor and made Him ascend in glory.

In the chaste womb of the river recognize the Daughter of man, who conceived without knowing man and gave birth without the seed of man. By grace she formed the Lord of grace.

Light in the river, splendor in the tomb. He skipped over the mountain, shone in the maternal womb, was resplendent in His rising, was radiant as He rose to the heavens. ("Hymn on the Church," 26:1-5: *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*, 199:87-88).

St. Ephrem beautifully writes of how Eve led Adam to clothe himself in the stain of sin, while Mary brings to him the clothes of salvation which is Christ himself. Adam therefore becomes a type of the Church, clothed in redemption.

Adam had been naked and fair, but his diligent wife labored and made for him a garment covered with stains. The Garden, seeing him thus vile, drove him forth.

Through Mary, Adam had another robe which adorned the thief (Luke 23:43); and when he became resplendent at Christ's promise, the Garden, looking on, embraced him in Adam's place. ("Hymn on Paradise," 4:5 *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*, 137:69)

We see the same poetic beauty in the Liturgies of the Syriac Churches today, and even in translation this dynamic aspect is retained:

"O holy Virgin Mary, O Beautiful Lily and Fragrant Rose, the fragrance of your holiness has filled the whole universe. Pray for us that we may become the sweet fragrance of Christ that spreads throughout the world." (*Book of Offering, According to the Rite of the Antiochene Syriac Maronite Church*, 458)

The Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth

After her holy Annunciation in which the Angel Gabriel revealed to her that she would be the Mother of the Savior of the World, Mary goes to see her older cousin Elizabeth; the *Visitation*:

Mary then travelled the nearly hundred miles from Nazareth to the little town in the hills of Judea where Zachary and Elizabeth lived. According to tradition this town was Ain Karim, which then was five miles from Jerusalem, but is today incorporated in that city's municipal boundaries. ("Blessed Are You Among Women," Melkite Eparchy of Newton, 2016)

Saint Paul reminds us in his first epistle to the Corinthians that Jesus fulfills the plan of salvation "...according to the Scriptures." (1 Corinthians 15:3) It was revealed to the New Testament Church and further elaborated upon in the thought of the Fathers, that the Jewish Scriptures/Old Testament was about the Messiah who was to come, Jesus, the Word made Flesh. Therefore, as the Church sees the "types" of Christ in the Old Testament, it also sees "types" of the Holy Virgin. One of the most powerful images of the *Theotokos* in the Jewish Scriptures is found in Second Samuel:

Then David and all the people who were with him set out... to bring up from there the ark of God, ... and he said, "How can the ark of the Lord come to me?"... The ark of the Lord remained in the house of Obed-edom the Gittite for three months, ...David went to bring up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom into the City of David with joy... Then David came dancing before the Lord with abandon, girt with a linen ephod. David and all the house of Israel were bringing up the ark of the Lord with shouts of joy and sound of horn. (2 SAMUEL 6:2-15)

Mary is the New Ark of the New and Eternal Covenant, whom she carried in her womb.

Completing the theological reflection of this passage from Samuel; David is a "type" of Jesus, bringing in his person the dynamic presence of God among his *chosen people*, who are a "type" or "image" of the Church.

The Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth is also the awakening of grace in the life of Saint John the Forerunner; the one who will be called the Baptizer is baptized by his Lord while in the womb of Elizabeth, his mother. Saint Ambrose of Milan in his treatise on the Gospel of Luke, describes the encounter:

Notice the contrast and the choice of words. Elizabeth is the first to hear Mary's voice, but John is the first to be aware of grace. She hears with the ears of the body, but he leaps for joy at the meaning of the mystery. She is aware of Mary's presence, but he is aware of the Lord's: a woman aware of a woman's presence, the Forerunner aware of the pledge of our salvation. The women speak of the grace they have received while the children are active in secret, unfolding the mystery of love with the help of their mothers, who prophesy by the spirit of their sons. "The child leaps in the womb; the mother is filled with the Holy Spirit, but not before her son. Once the son has been filled with the Holy Spirit, he fills his mother with the same Spirit. John leaps for joy, and the spirit of Mary rejoices in her turn. (St. Ambrose, *Commentary on Luke*)

In many ways the Visitation represents the bridge from the Old Law to the New Law in Christ, from the Old Testament to the New Testament, from the sacrifice of the Temple to the sacrifice of Christ, from the Church of the Israelites to The One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.

Mary the Evangelist

An Evangelist is one who proclaims and shares the *Good News* of salvation in Christ. The Church has especially given this title to the *Four Evangelists: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John*. The Church itself is always evangelical in the sense of calling all men and women to itself; to become members of the community of faith, which is the Church. The first “evangelist” of the New and Final Covenant is the Holy Virgin Mary.

In being chosen to be the Mother of the Messiah, she who is full of grace is the example of faith (total trust), “And Mary said, ‘Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.’” (Luke 1:38) Mary as evangelist, calls others to this same faith in her Son, as seen at the Wedding at Cana when she addresses those who are confused and unsure by saying to them, “Do whatever he tells you.” (JOHN 2:5)

Mary is the greatest of evangelists, for she alone gives birth to the object of faith, Jesus. She whose heart was pierced as if by a sword witnessed the crucifixion of her Son and Lord, and with his *Holy Apostles* received the gift of the Spirit of Truth from the Father at Pentecost. It was certainly she who gave insights into the life of Jesus to the first disciples, insights that only she would have known, so that the New Testament Church could fulfill its mission as the *Evangelizing Church*. As Saint Ambrose wrote:

Let Mary’s soul be in each of you to proclaim the greatness of the Lord. Let her spirit be in each to rejoice in the Lord. Christ has only one mother in the flesh, but we all bring forth Christ in faith. Every soul receives the Word of God if only it keeps chaste, remaining pure and free from sin, its modesty undefiled. The soul that succeeds



in this proclaims the greatness of the Lord, just as Mary’s soul magnified the Lord and her spirit rejoiced in God her Savior. (St. Ambrose, *Commentary on Luke*)

The Church, like Mary, never ceases to point towards the Savior of the world, Jesus Christ. She is the grace-filled example, of how the grace-filled People of God must share their faith with others who do not yet know Christ, or who have lost total trust in the God who loves them. Mary as evangelist shows us that the strongest proclamation of faith is by the example of how one lives. How has Mary over the centuries drawn so many peoples, races, and cultures to faith in her Son; by the example of her life of faith, “Mary said, ‘Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.’” (LUKE 1:38) ■

Father Fisher, a priest of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon, is a regular contributor to The Maronite Voice.

The Cross in the Light of Jesus Christ: **Theology of the Cross in the Maronite Book of Offering**

by Fr. Armando Elkhoury, ThD

The Cross is a heinous instrument of execution. Why, then, do Maronites and other Christians venerate it? The Cross adorns our necks, for example, and we hang it in our homes, churches, workplaces, etc. At various liturgies, we adore the Cross by kissing and bowing to it. We refer to it as the Cross of splendor, wonder, and glory, and the Church celebrates the feast of the Glorious Cross each year, on 14 September.

The cross, in and of itself, depicts total defeat and horrendous death. Paradoxically, the Cross of Jesus Christ symbolizes victory and life. Why? Precisely because of who Jesus the Nazarene is: he is the Messiah, the Son of God, the Crucified One. So, in the light of Jesus Christ, let us explore a couple of theological themes about the Cross found in the Maronite *Book of Offering*.

1. Life-Giving Tree of Life

God created Adam and Eve and made the Garden of Eden their home. Since they transgressed God's commandment, God expelled them from it. Consequently, the Garden of Eden became inaccessible to them and their descendants (GENESIS 2-3).

In Maronite theology, the return to the Garden of Eden represents salvation. With his cross, Jesus Christ saved and raised us "to heaven's heights from this world of sin and death to the joys of paradise" (BO, 658). So, the Cross is an instrument of salvation, and the Lord uses it as a key to open the

gates of Paradise, namely the Garden of Eden, and bring humanity back to it: "Your Cross, O Lord, is the key to Paradise and unlocks its gates for us" (BO, 612). Once the Cross opens the gate to the Garden of Eden, humanity has, as stated above, unrestricted access to "the joys of Paradise" (BO, 658). The expression "joys of Paradise" refers to the delightful fruit of the Tree of Life.

When God expelled Adam and Eve from the Garden, he stationed "the cherubim and the fiery revolving sword east of the Garden of Eden, to guard the way to the Tree of Life" (Genesis 3:29). Since the Cross opened wide the gate of the Garden of Eden, the cherubim left the Tree of Life unattended and returned to his angelic company. So, mankind can now tread on the way that leads them to the Tree of Life.

The Tree of Life in the Old Testament symbolizes the Cross in Maronite theology: "O Holy Cross, Tree of Life, you were planted in the Garden of Eden and have become the wood of salvation for all those on earth" (BO, 620). The connection between the Tree of Life and the Cross is so strong that Maronite theology teaches that the actual Cross of the Lord "was taken from the Tree of Eden" (BO, 606).

As the Tree of Life, the Cross bears life-giving Fruit that grants life to those who eat it. Our mother Eve ate from the fruit leading to death (GENESIS 3:1-7). We, however, pluck and eat the Fruit of the Tree of Life, the life-giving Cross, and live (BO, 641).



2. Source of the Church's Glorious Mysteries

In Maronite liturgical theology, the Cross, as the Tree of Life, is the source of the glorious Mysteries of the Church. The Cross bears the Church's "glorious Mysteries" (BO, 661) and gives "salvation to the world" (BO, 661). This image derives its significance from the water and blood that flowed from the side of Jesus Christ as the soldier pierced his side with a lance (JOHN 19:34).

Just as water and blood gushed from the side of Jesus, so heavenly gifts flow from the victorious Cross of Jesus (BO, 621). The heavenly gifts refer to the Mysteries of the Church: "Wood of the Cross, you bear the Mysteries of our divine Redeemer. O Holy Cross, with your sign all the Mysteries of the Church are made perfect" (BO, 640)! The Mysteries of the Church denote Baptism, Chrismation, the Eucharist, the oils of Chrismation and Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, and Penance: "By the Cross priests are ordained for the Church of Jesus Christ. By the Cross they have the power to give us the Mysteries. By the Cross we are baptized and are cleansed of all our sins. By the Cross the oils are blessed that we may be sanctified" (BO, 618). The Church also proclaims: "Glory to you, O Christ our God, you are the true vine and, in your great indescribable love, you were pressed upon the Cross, producing new wine which quenches the thirst of the Church and all people" (BO, 181). The Cross is

the instrument by which the new wine is produced; this new wine refers to the Eucharist (John 19:34).

Conclusion

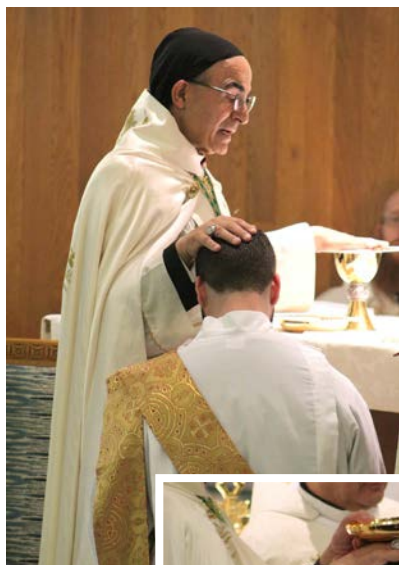
The Cross is synonymous with Christ: "O Holy Cross, Arm of the Almighty, you were sent to protect his people" (BO, 630)! In this quote, the expression "Holy Cross" denotes the Son, whom the Father sent into the world "because of his love for us" (BO, 777). When we bow down to the Cross and kiss it, we are bowing down to and kissing the One it truly represents, namely, Jesus Christ our Lord and God. When we elevate the Cross to such a high honor, we do not exalt a piece of wood or metal and turn it into an idol, not even if it were the true and actual Cross. Far be it! We, however, honor, venerate, adore, and worship the Son of God, whom the Cross symbolizes.

Finally, the Maronite Church venerates the One whom the Cross represents, that is, Jesus Christ, the Son of God because he is the life-giving Tree of Life and the source of the Church's Glorious Mysteries. The cross draws its meaning from Jesus Christ who defeated death and rose victoriously. Why do we, Maronites, along with other Christians, venerate the Cross? Because the Cross means Jesus Christ who is "the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end" (REVELATION 22:13), and everything in between! ■

Rev. Armando Elkhoury is Vice Rector of Our Lady of Lebanon Seminary

Deacon Ordination

Peter Zogbi of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon was elevated from Subdeacon to Deacon at Saint Sharbel Church in Portland, Oregon



On 1 September 2019, Peter Zogbi of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon was elevated from the order of subdeacon to the order of deacon at Saint Sharbel Church in Portland, Oregon, by Bishop Elias Zaidan. Saint Sharbel Church has celebrated numerous ordinations in recent years, and this ordination was a joyful one.



Bishop Elias, assisted by Fr. Christopher Fabre, pastor of St. Sharbel, celebrated the ordination surrounded by his clergy. Deacon Peter was presented by Msgr. Peter Fahed Azar, Rector of Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Seminary in Washington, DC. Deacon Peter's sponsor was Father Prior Jonathan Decker, of the Maronite Monks of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph in Castle Rock, Washington. In attendance were: Fathers Anthony Joseph, John Michael, and Brian Thompson, Deacons Tony Karam and Wadih Kaldawi, and Subdeacons Raphael and Daniel. A number of Deacon Peter's classmates from Our Lady of Lebanon Seminary also attended the pontifical liturgy. God willing, Deacon Peter will be ordained to the priesthood for the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon next summer.



Saint Sharbel Church also celebrated an investiture into the Equestrian Order of Saint Sylvester. Najat Rask, a longtime parishioner of Saint Sharbel's, was granted the honor of Dame of the Pontifical Equestrian Order of Saint Sylvester, Pope and Martyr. This Order recognizes Catholic laity active in the life of the Church, especially through their professional lives and in the arts. Najat's late husband, Dr. Tom



Task, received Knighthood in the same Order before his recent passing.

MARONITE FOUNDATION— HELPING CHRISTIANS KEEP THEIR VOICE.

It is of the utmost urgency that Lebanese Christians hold on to their voice in Lebanon or it will be lost forever.

Founded by a Patriarchal decree in 2008, the Maronite Foundation in the World assists Maronites abroad to establish their legal status in Lebanon and participate in the country's public life if they so choose.

Why is this so important? The emigration of Christians from Lebanon has disturbed the delicate religious balance that makes Lebanon a unique pluralistic country in the Middle East. The Maronite Foundation in the World has been tasked to reinstate this balance by registering qualified Maronites and Lebanese Christians living in the United States and around the world.

By registering yourselves and your family, you are helping ensure democracy continues in Lebanon and it remains the country of your ancestors for your children and your children's children.

Everyone is busy. That's why we've streamlined the process and hired staff across the country to assist applicants. You can find out if you qualify in only three minutes by visiting www.maronitefoundation.org.

Please contact our Regional Directors with any questions and/or assistance. We are here to help you.

NAJIB RACHED, OH | nrached@maronitefoundation.org
JOSEPHINE SFEIR, WASHINGTON DC | jsfeir@maronitefoundation.org
ROULA JAMHOURI, CA | rjamhuri@maronitefoundation.org

As Maronites living in the United States, please help us preserve and protect the country we love and hold dear to our hearts—Lebanon.



WORKER IN THE VINEYARD

Cathy George

St. Anthony Maronite Church, Glen Allen, VA

by Suzanne Tavani

When asked to recall her first memories of St. Anthony Church, Cathy George says without hesitation, “Everything! Everything was church, every memory is church. My mother worked part-time for the church, and my dad was on the Parish Council. My lifelong friends are friends I made as a child at St. Anthony. We spent a great deal of time together as members of St. Anthony youth organizations, we worked together at the parish Recreation Center, and I even met my husband at St. Anthony.” The answer shouldn’t be a surprise when coming from someone whose maternal grandfather is counted as one of the founders of the Glen Allen parish. Cathy fondly remembers that she, along with her four siblings and their friends, were always involved in church activities.

However, it was an invitation at age seventeen from then-pastor, Msgr. Beshara Salwan, to volunteer as a Catechist which led to not only her 36-year career as a Theology teacher at her alma mater, St. Gertrude High School, but also helped nurture her deep conviction of the importance of religious education which has since left an

indelible mark on the St. Anthony community.

Cathy also credits both her parents and former pastor, Monsignor George Sebaali, for supporting her interest in religious education. She emphasizes, “If a child doesn’t have religious education, they fall away. Students often have difficulty finding meaning and purpose in their lives. Religious education helps children understand their calling and that they can contribute to their community. They learn that they are sacred, and they are here to share love and to grow. They need to know that God guides us through our journey in life—good and bad, and that religion is being connected to something other than themselves. They are worthy of respect and are blessed by God. They don’t have to be the same, but they need to be connected to something.”

Strengthened by this philosophy Cathy, along with a cadre of fellow catechists, has nurtured and solidified the parish’s religious education program for the children of parishioners from pre-school through high school. Using the Faith of the Mountain series, the religious education program meets

weekly after liturgy from September through the second week of May. The high school students meet every other week. Topics in the series include the Trinity, the Holy Mysteries, our Church family, the Commandments, Maronite Liturgy, the Bible, the Creed, Church history, and world religions. Cathy is particularly proud that some of her first students are now themselves catechists at St. Anthony instructing and guiding a new generation of Maronites. These dedicated catechists also reviewed and edited the 2010 edition of the Faith of the Mountain.

In addition to her fierce advocacy for religious education, Cathy’s involvement extends to a wide variety of projects at St. Anthony. However, she is quick to point out that the parish is blessed to have the multi-generational involvement of not only her own family members, but also of her husband’s family, and the many other legacy families who still number as parishioners.

As a church family, they host the Richmond region’s Annual Lebanese Food Festival. The

IN A SNAPSHOT

BORN	Richmond, Virginia
PARENTS	Jackie and Edward Shibley
EDUCATION	Grade School: St. Benedict Catholic School High School: Saint Gertrude High School College: Virginia Commonwealth University, B.A., Religious Studies
SIBLINGS	Five
SPOUSE	Joseph George (also a member of the parish)
GRANDCHILDREN	Five
OCCUPATION	Teacher for 36 years (retired), Saint Gertrude High School
MOST MEMORABLE MOMENT	Some of her first students are now catechists with her at St. Anthony

PARISH INVOLVEMENT

- Catechist (1971 - Present)
- VIRTUS Facilitator, St. Anthony and Saint Gertrude in the Diocese of Richmond (2004 - Present)
- Chair, Parish Council (2005 - Present)
- Director, Religious Education (2007 - Present)
- Administrator, Scholarship Committee (2009 - Present)
- Scholarship Moderator (2009 - Present)



festival, which attracts over 30,000 visitors each May to the 14-acre complex in suburban Richmond, includes a pavilion, a social hall and a pool, which adds to the fun experience.

Cathy emphasizes, “Our parish is important to us because it’s part of our heart. We can’t leave. Most of us grew up here and witnessed how Msgr. Salwan’s vision of the development of a church and recreational complex on these 14-acres came to life. Many of us married from within the St. Anthony community, and our children and grandchildren are now active members of the parish.”

She adds, “The greatest legacy we could leave our community is for the next generation to value and build upon the mission started by our grandparents’ generation and those who came before us.” ■

We bid a grateful farewell to Suzanne Tavani, who has prepared the beautiful articles about the Workers in God’s Vineyard. She will be devoting a great deal of time and attention to the 2021 NAM Convention in Philadelphia.

St. Joseph Church Centennial Celebration

Olean, New York *by Father Anthony Salim and Antoinette Zeina*



On 6-8 October 2019, St. Joseph Maronite Parish of Olean, New York, celebrated its centennial celebration. The parish was not the only one celebrating a milestone: its pastor, Father Anthony Salim, will be retiring after 46 years of ministry.

The story of St. Joseph is like all Maronite parishes in this country—a story of migrants. Lebanese immigrants from the Bzibdeen and Zahle fled from political turmoil and economic hardship and came to the United States to build a new life. With many other immigrants settling in New York State, they moved along the historic Erie Canal route, where eventually, many found themselves in Olean. These families included tailors, purveyors of dry goods, grocers, trades people, and shopkeepers.

As the population grew, the Maronite faithful of Olean wanted a church of their own. Until then, they gathered weekly at St. Mary of the Angels Church for Divine Liturgy and held special devotions to the Blessed Mother and St. Joseph. For that reason, they dedicated their new parish to St. Joseph. In 1919, they laid the cornerstone of St. Joseph Church at the corner of 4th and Reed Streets.

From 1954 to 1980, the parish operated an elementary school, one of the few Maronite parish schools in the United States. In February 1965, a fire damaged the church. In August 2011, three weeks after Father Salim arrived in Olean, a tragic fire caused by old and faulty electrical wiring, burnt the parish to the ground.

“Surviving that fire after my arrival—it could have destroyed our parish,” Father Anthony said. “The fact that we are all still together is such a blessing. Both go hand in hand.”

With the help of God, generous donations and insurance money, the parish was able to purchase the former Transfiguration Oratory in North Olean, which the parish renovated and expanded. The church dedication was celebrated four years later. Going from .8 acres to their beautiful 2.3 acres has allowed for many parish events to be held on the grounds, including the centennial festivities.

Today, St. Joseph Church stands as a small community with great faith. The parish of 150 families is made up of mostly fourth generation Lebanese and Syrians, many of

whom can trace their ancestors back to the origins of the church. Father Anthony, who was appointed pastor of the parish in 2011, makes it a point to make sure parishioners feel fulfilled in their faith and their Lebanese heritage. Today, the parish’s emphasis on this collaboration reflects the importance of keeping people together and traditions alive.

What is known as the “The Cadillac Dinner” is one of the parish’s longest running fundraisers to date. For 50 years, parishioners and members of the Olean community look forward to the annual dinner where traditionally a Cadillac car was raffled off. Around twenty years ago, when Cadillacs became even more expensive, a cash reward became the main prize; the name has remained. In addition, the church opens its doors to the community with other events such as a spaghetti dinner as well as a fish dinner during the Lenten season.

“We are always busy trying to plan events and keep us afloat,” Father Anthony said. “But more importantly, to bring people together. For many of our events, people wait all year round to come.”



Yet, the largest fundraiser the church holds annually is one of the most anticipated events in all of Olean. The Mahrajan (Arabic for “festival”), which started as a small parish picnic for parishioners in the late 1930s, is a chance for parishioners to work, eat, and dance together, and serves as their biggest fundraiser of the year. However, the impact of the Mahrajan, which can bring together around 1,000 people, certainly expands beyond just parish families. As the congregation grew, and people started marrying out of the Lebanese heritage, St. Joseph’s officials opened the festival to the public in the 1970s.

“The parish festivals in this city are really a nice way to get together, visit together, share good food together,” Fr. Anthony said.

Looking back on a century, there are no doubts of the sense of family and their commitment to their faith. Altar boys and lectors participate in the Divine Liturgy weekly and in clubs and the Order of Saint Sharbel. Weekly religious education and a Bible study contribute to religious activities of the parish.

In 2018, Father Salim and committees began planning in earnest for the parish Centennial. The weekend events included a reunion of former students from St. Joseph and Transfiguration Schools. Over 100 people attended the joyous celebration. Bishop Gregory Mansour presided over the Divine Liturgy. Following liturgy, a Lebanese dinner prepared by the parishioners was held in the parish hall. During the dinner program, Elizabeth Ash and Isabel Hamed (parish sacristans) were awarded the 2019 Silver Massabki Award.

Father Salim’s October retirement was also acknowledged at the parish celebration. Father Anthony, ready for the next chapter of life, thanked everyone for always being supportive and loving during his time of ministry. “The question now is what is my life going to be now as a person and as a priest. I want to continue to serve in a limited form of ministry. But I call the shots now. You get to sit back and relax and think about where you have been and where you are going.” Taking time to reconnect with family in his hometown of Saint Paul, Minnesota is a priority.

Father Salim will leave the parish in the good hands of Father Tony Mouanes, who will initiate the next one hundred years of parish life. ■

New Abbot Elected

The monks of Most Holy Trinity Monastery in Petersham, Massachusetts, opened their General Assembly on 24 September. The General Assembly, held every six years, comprises all the perpetually professed monks and is the highest decision-making authority in the monastery. Because of its importance, the eparchial bishop or his delegate is to preside at it. Chorbishop John D. Faris was invited by the monks to serve as the canonical adviser.

On the evening before the opening of the General Assembly, Bishop Gregory met with all the monks to reflect upon the notions of “gratitude” and “generosity.” He explained that generosity flowed from gratitude: when we are grateful, we are more generous. The bishop then asked the monks to express what they were grateful for with regard to their monastic way of life, their abbot, and typicon. What followed was an edifying expression of the appreciation the monks had for their way of life and gratitude for the loving spiritual father that the abbot had been for each of them. They all expressed a deep respect for the typicon and the values it embodied.

The typicon (statutes) provide that the first order of business of the General Assembly is to decide whether to elect an abbot. The current abbot, Father William Driscoll, is the founder of the community and has served as abbot for more than forty years. The General Assembly voted that it was time to elect an abbot who would benefit from the experience that Father William could share with him. Father Patrick Kokorian, 44, was elected the second abbot. Later that evening both Father William and Bishop Gregory blessed the new abbot. Additionally, four councilors were elected to assist Abbot Patrick. ■



(Left to Right) Abbot Emeritus William Driscoll, Abbot Patrick Kokorian and Bishop Gregory Mansour after Divine Liturgy.

Newly elected Abbot Patrick Kokorian with Abbot Emeritus William Driscoll, Bishop Gregory Mansour, Chorbishop John Faris and the monks of Most Holy Trinity Monastery pose for a picture in their church during their General Assembly.



The Order of Saint Sharbel New Members

ANNUAL

TINA KLAEB | *Our Lady of Mt. Lebanon, Los Angeles, CA*

JULIA MICHAEL | *Saint Teresa of Calcutta Maronite Mission, Conway, PA*

PERPETUAL

ANDRE BEJJANI | *Our Lady of Mt. Lebanon, Los Angeles, CA*

JOSE FERNANDEZ | *St. George Maronite Catholic Church, San Antonio, TX*

MARIE SUSIE GUSTIN, PH.D. | *St. Katharine Drexel Parish/ St. Maurice Church, New Britain, CT*

TOUFIC KHALIFE | *St. George Maronite Catholic Church, San Antonio, TX*

LAWRENCE AND CANDYCE MANSOUR | *St. George Maronite Catholic Church, San Antonio, TX*

ANTOINE RACHED | *St. Maron Church, Cleveland, OH*

The Order of Saint Sharbel is an organization of lay people and clergy who have pledged their spiritual strength and financial support for Our Lady of Lebanon Seminary and the retired Maronite clergy of the Maronite Eparchies in the USA.

For more information about the Order ask your Pastor, visit

www.orderstsharbel.org or write to:

Eparchy of Saint Maron | 109 Remsen Street | Brooklyn, NY 11201 or
Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon | 1021 South 10th Street | St. Louis, MO 63104

Brother John Samaha, S.M.

We mourn the passing of Brother John Samaha, S.M., a frequent contributor to *The Maronite Voice*.

Brother John passed away on 27 September 2019. The fourth and youngest child of Lebanese immigrant parents, John and Anna Samaha, Brother John was born 5 December 1930 and raised in San Francisco.

Brother John entered the Marianist Novitiate in Beacon, New York in August of 1948, professed first vows on 23 August 1949 and perpetual vows 15 August 1953.



He earned a bachelor's degree from the Marianists' University of Dayton and a master's degree from The Catholic University of America.

In his active apostolic years he taught in Catholic schools in California, Washington and Lebanon; served in diocesan education offices in San Francisco and Oakland; and served on the formation team for the Marianists' Pacific Province.

In retirement, at Villa St. Joseph and later at the Marianist Center he was a prolific writer for various Catholic periodicals; addressed various meetings; and assisted in projects for The Marian Library/International Marian Research Institute at the University of Dayton, the Mariological Society of America, and the Eastern Catholic Churches. ■

The Rosary – The Luminous Mysteries

by Fr. Gary George

The world is in desperate need of our prayers to be converted, and the Rosary is a simple, but inordinately powerful form of prayer. The relationships of Jesus to the Church are shrouded within the Mysteries of the Rosary—offering a way to grasp how each mystery sheds its light on our souls. It affords us a way to unite with Jesus and Mary, through meditating on the mysteries of their life.

In the Luminous Mysteries, we begin with the Baptism of our Lord as an invitation to reflect on the mystery of the union of nature and creation. Nature being the very life of Jesus, who enters into the water from which to bring forth the beginning of a new life through creation. Water, which is a part of creation, now has a divine purpose—creating within us a new man destined for eternal life. In nature, the faithful are compelled to seek God, because nature speaks and fights for life, for living; not emptiness and death.

The Miracle at Cana in Galilee shows once again how nature and creation are joined together. Humanity and divinity are joined. Our biological bodies are joined with God's divine nature: where water, symbolizing our humanity, is joined with the wine of his divinity, and the two become one in nature in the marriage feast.

The Proclamation of the Kingdom of Heaven is an invitation to partake in the life of repentance and embrace the mission of the apostles. We begin to feel the power of the great sacrament of confession and penance. It is an invitation to experience the very reason for Jesus' mission to call us back to the Father through repentance.



The Transfiguration is an invitation to meditate on the lives of Peter, James and John, and their friendship with Jesus. It is the mystery of Light where everything becomes clear, yet they were lost on the mountain because they were looking for the ordinary when Jesus was showing them his true brilliance and leading them to the extraordinary.

The Eucharist is an invitation to enter the life of Jesus and the disciples after the resurrection. It is an invitation to not only follow him and do what he did, but a deep and profound invitation to be transformed into being like him in all things.

Commitment and discipline of praying the Rosary is a way to respond to these invitations. It is saying yes to him in all of life's circumstances. Even though we may not fully grasp the depth and extent of his wondrous mysteries, we believe in the gift of faith. We cannot compel a person to believe, but faith is the foundation on which everything flows. It elevates our pain and suffering and offers meaning and purpose. Faith makes prayer more sensitive and performs acts of mercy. ■

Rev. Gary George CSsR, is Director of Youth and Vocations in the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon

Working at the Car Wash – Yeah!

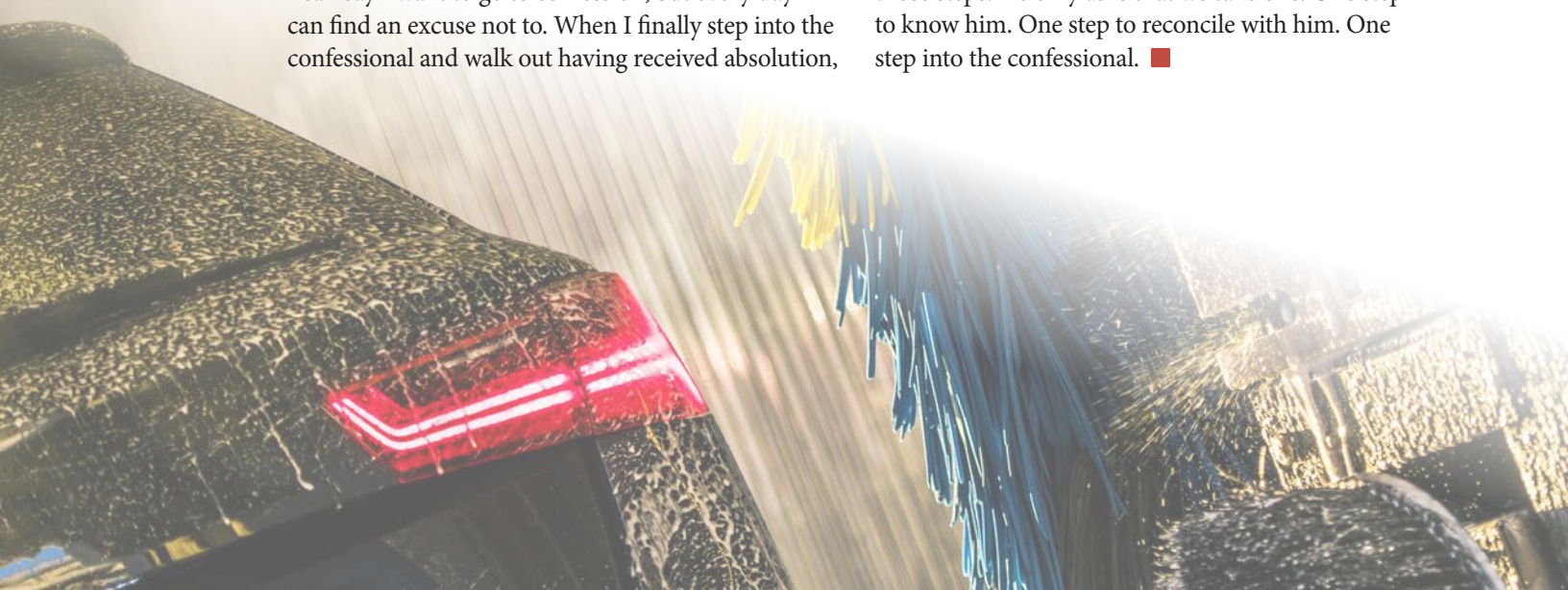
by Christian Hbaiter – Seminarian for the Eparchy of St. Maron

This past spring in D.C., the pollen season was very bad. My black Jeep was covered in yellow. I told the other seminarians repeatedly that I needed to get a car wash. My windshield had spots of sap on it and having anything on my windshield irks me! Though I could still see out my windshield, just knowing there was something on it made it very distracting, and I couldn't ignore that it was there. Every day, I said that I would go get a car wash and weeks went by and I still had not. The funny thing is that on my way back to the seminary every day, I had to pass a carwash. The entrance and exit of the carwash were on the main road. I didn't even have to go off route or out of my way. It couldn't have been more convenient! I just needed to allow myself five extra minutes. Yet it took me weeks to do it. When I finally did, my Jeep was black again and my windshield was spotless. I felt this relief knowing that though I had been able to see through the windshield fine even with the spots of sap, that my vehicle was finally clean.

Doesn't confession work the same way? Knowing that I have sinned, I can still go through my days without concern. But there is something lurking in the back of my mind that still bothers me. Every day, I can say I want to go to confession, but every day I can find an excuse not to. When I finally step into the confessional and walk out having received absolution,

it is as though I have walked myself through the car wash. Everything is erased. Everything is made pure. Everything is forgiven. Everything is made new; I am made new. Often, we wait to go to confession because we feel like we don't have that many sins to confess yet. We haven't done anything 'that bad' that needs confession. But what we won't realize is that the longer I wait to take my car to the car wash, the dirtier it becomes. The longer I wait to confess my sins, the more I sin. Sin doesn't like alone time! It thrives on company. Sin just drags along more sin. Who likes to drive around in a dirty car!?

God gave His only son, Jesus, to conquer death in order to reconcile Himself to the world. Every time we sin, our view of God becomes distorted and this distortion gets larger the more we continue to sin, causing us to miss the authentic view of God. This God loves us unconditionally, regardless of how many times we mess up, regardless of how many times we fall into the temptation of sin, regardless of how many times we need to go to confession, regardless of how many times we have become distracted from visiting the confessional. There are 1,000 steps between us and God. Our loving God is willing to take 999 of those steps. He only asks that we take one. One step to know him. One step to reconcile with him. One step into the confessional. ■



Parish News

AUSTIN, TEXAS

Open House in Honor of St. Sharbel's Feast Day | Our Lady's Maronite Church

by Msgr. Don Sawyer

An advertisement on Relevant Radio and in the local newspaper, *Catholic Spirit*, got the word out to Catholics of Central Texas that Our Lady's was having an open house on Saint Sharbel's Feast Day!

The church opened at 6:00 a.m. and people from all over came and prayed in front of a large icon of St. Sharbel and his relics. The day concluded with a Liturgy, celebrated by our pastor Msgr. Don Sawyer, and was concelebrated by Fr. Jonathan Raia, vocation director of the Diocese of Austin. There was standing room only for the crowd that attended, with the majority being first-time visitors!



The terrific Liturgy concluded when everyone present was anointed with oil from St. Sharbel's tomb and were all given holy cards in English and Spanish and cotton swabs with oil from his tomb! ■

BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

10th Annual Benefit Dinner | Eparchy of Saint Maron

The 10th Annual Benefit Dinner in Manhattan for the Eparchy of Saint Maron took place on Thursday, 3 October at the New York Athletic Club overlooking Central Park. Highlights of the evening included:

- ✓ Recognition of **Tony Loubnan, Antoun Sehnaoui, and Salma Besheer Vahdat**. Family members offered tributes and Bishop Gregory Mansour presented each honoree with a special gift.
- ✓ The presence of Timothy Cardinal Dolan and several Latin and Maronite priests from the area.
- ✓ Parishioners from all four New York area Maronite communities—Saint John Paul II Parish in Sleepy Hollow, Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral in Brooklyn, the Maronite Mission in Manhattan and Saint Sharbel Parish in Somerset, NJ, as well as from parishes in Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Maine.

Proceeds from the Benefit Dinner are used for seminarians, small parishes, and fund the ministries of the Eparchy. Donations are being accepted through 15 November for the Dinner. To donate, go to <https://www.stmaron.org/donate-1>, or mail a check to: Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn, 109 Remsen Street, Brooklyn, NY 11201.

Photos from the event can be found online at the Eparchy's website (www.stmaron.org). ■

UNIONTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA

Silver Massabki Award | St. George Church

Marion Barkett Broskey was presented with the prestigious Silver Massabki Award by His Excellency, Bishop Gregory Mansour, during his Pastoral Visit at St. George Church. Marion, a faithful, kind, dedicated, and lifelong parishioner of St. George, has humbly and willingly contributed her time, talents, and treasures to serve her church for over 60 years. ■

(left to right): Bishop Mansour, Marion Broskey, Father Habib



NORTH JACKSON, OHIO

Assumption Pilgrimage 2019 | Basilica and National Shrine of Our Lady of Lebanon

The warm humid weather did not deter the many pilgrims who came to honor the Mother of God for the 54th Annual Assumption Pilgrimage. Three days of celebration were filled with Liturgies of the Roman, Byzantine, and Maronite rites with a special emphasis on the Liturgy for the sick and suffering on the actual feast day. The Basilica Church was at capacity for the Liturgy and Anointing of the Sick. The evening Liturgy was followed by a beautifully reverent procession onto the road and culminated at the base of the newly renovated tower. The sun set and the new limestone reflected in the candlelight as Our Lady of Lebanon stood majestically atop the tower as she has for 54

years. The “*Ya Oum Allah*” and blessing with the icon was followed by a glorious display of fireworks honoring Our Lady. Many joined us for the three days in the Cedars Hall for wonderful Lebanese food prepared by volunteers from the neighboring parishes of Youngstown, Akron, Cleveland, New Castle, Pittsburgh, and even as far away as Fall River. God bless all who helped and all who came to visit Our Lady’s Shrine! ■



SEMINARY NEWS

Our Lady of Lebanon Seminary Once Again Opens Its Doors

As students around the country kick off a new academic year, so do our seminarians in Washington, DC. After a short retreat upon returning to the seminary, our seminarians have returned to their studies at Catholic University of America, alongside their Maronite Formation at the seminary. This semester, Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Seminary is home to 11 seminarians, six for the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn and five for the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles. Please keep these seminarians, along with their rector, Monsignor Peter Azar, and vice-rector, Fr. Armando El Khoury, in your prayers. And, as always, please continue to pray for an increase in vocations to the priesthood and religious life! ■



Parish News

DAYTON, OHIO

St. Ignatius of Antioch Maronite Church Has a Larger New Home

by Fr. Alex Harb

After years of hoping for a larger church and hall, St. Ignatius of Antioch Maronite Church in Dayton, OH, has recently purchased a former Lutheran church with a 250-seat sanctuary, stain glass, pipe organ, a large hall, and classrooms, located on a nearly 5-acre plot. The first liturgy was celebrated on 4 August. Parishioners

rejoiced at the purchase and have settled comfortably into our new home. The parish has big hopes for the campus as a place for spiritual growth, evangelization, outreach, and social gatherings. ■



FALL RIVER, MASSACHUSETTS

Scholarships | St. Anthony of the Desert Church

On July 6, 2019, after the Divine Liturgy, Monsignor James Root and the parish family of St. Anthony of the Desert Church awarded scholarships of \$500 each to three graduating high school seniors. The scholarships are given each year in memory of Chorbishop Norman J. Ferris, Mary Ann Hallal, and Loretta George. This is the 17th year for the scholarship program. ■

Pictured Front (left to right): (Sydney Filipe, daughter of Marco and Rachael Filipe)—Sydney received the Loretta George Memorial Scholarship. She will be attending the University of New Haven and majoring in Forensic Psychology. (Nicholas Howayeck, son of Gary and Renee Howayeck)—Nicholas received the Mary Ann Hallal Memorial Scholarship. He will be attending UMASS Amherst and majoring in International Relations. (Marissa Dawn Carney, daughter of John Carney and Sharon Carney Andrews)—Marissa received the Chorbishop Norman Ferris Memorial Scholarship. She will be attending Bristol Community College and majoring in Psychology. Committeewomen—Sandy Grimo and Shannon Martin



(Back): Altar Server Cameron Filipe, Subdeacon Abid Salameh, Monsignor James Root, Deacon Brian Dunn, Altar Server Andro Khawand, and Committeeman Karl Hetzler

ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

2019 First Communicants | St. Raymond Cathedral

On Sunday, 5 May 2019, St. Raymond Cathedral celebrated with the nine children that made their First Holy Communion. We offer many blessings to the children and hope the Sacrament of the Eucharist will always be a center point of focus in their lives as they journey onward with Christ.

First Communicants:

Georgie Bouhasin, Ernie Corzine, Christiana Hamad, Jane Hurley, Marielle Kevorkian, Anthony Parra, Noah Payne, Pete Rask, Robert Rask ■



UNIONTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA

“Blue Mass”

by Dr. Mabel George Howard

On 7 September 2019, St. George Maronite Church parishioners in Uniontown, Pennsylvania, paid tribute to the men and women of their community who serve and protect the citizens. A “Blue Mass” was celebrated by Fr. Habib, to say “thank you” to our local first responders including firefighters, police officers, EMS personnel, 911 operators, rescue teams, and the military.

The first responders, dressed in uniform with full regalia, attended and participated in the liturgy. Fr. Habib emphasized the importance of our first responders as he extended a special blessing to them. The “Blue Mass” pays tribute to those who have fallen in the line of duty and those currently serving their communities. These men and women demonstrate courage and risk their safety for others in difficult times. We are grateful for these caring souls who strive to keep our communities safe. Following the Liturgy, the first responders and their family members enjoyed a dinner prepared by the ladies of St. George. There was a wonderful feeling of camaraderie among everyone. St. George Church is proud of our first responders, compassionate and caring individuals who work to keep our communities safe. ■



Parish News

CLINTON TOWNSHIP, MICHIGAN

Patronal Feast Day | St. Sharbel Maronite Catholic Church

by Valerie Tamer Menassa

The Feast of our Patron, St. Sharbel, was a joyous four-day celebration that took place at St. Sharbel Maronite Church in Clinton Township, Michigan, from 19-22 July. Several priests of different rites celebrated Liturgies throughout the days while hundreds of faith-filled people gathered each night in prayer seeking the intercession of St. Sharbel, the Healing Saint!

We also had the honor of hosting the first-class relics of St. Sharbel, which were made available for veneration throughout the day. Parishioners, friends, family, and visitors from far and near made their way to our church to bring their heartfelt petitions to Saint Sharbel. They participated in the Healing Liturgies, spent quiet time in prayer before our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, and venerated the relics of Saint Sharbel.

So many wonderful and hard-working individuals helped with the preparations, set up, and execution of activities during the four days of festivities. The spirit of St. Sharbel was truly alive to all who came! May the Lord God continue to bless the efforts of St. Sharbel Parishioners! ■



Raymond Nader Visits St. Sharbel Church

by Valerie Tamer Menassa

On 8 September 2019, the Feast of the Nativity of Mary, the community of St. Sharbel Church in Clinton Township, Michigan, welcomed a man of deep faith, Mr. Raymond Nader. Raymond came from Lebanon to give a testimony about the importance of being a true disciple of Our Savior Jesus Christ. He shared his story about his childhood and how he grew deeper in faith. He also talked about the transformational spiritual phase of his life when St. Sharbel's hand touched him and left a visible mark on his left upper arm.



Raymond emphasized the importance of the Sacred Scriptures and the Eucharist in our own spiritual transformation, and the Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in the ongoing messages from St. Sharbel to him. He spoke of how incredible and personal God's love for each of us is, that we have been given a unique and special fingerprint by God. Because of His immense love for us, His will is for us to become saints, with our final destination being with Him in His kingdom for all eternity.

Raymond talked about the significant impact we offer to others when we truly live what we learn from Our Lord Jesus. In fact, he stated that he is called to do God's will in all he does in life. He is a son, a spouse, a father, an engineer, a co-founder of St. Sharbel Family prayer group (along with Mrs. Nohad El-Shami), and a board member of *Noursat/Telemiere* (the largest Catholic channel in the Middle East).

Chorbishop Alfred Badawi, Pastor of St. Sharbel Church, thanked Raymond for his great faith and for the inspirational testimony he offered after the 9:30 and 11:30 a.m. Liturgies. Parishioners and visitors from sister churches were deeply touched by his love and devotion to Our Savior Jesus Christ. Praise and Glory Be to God always! ■

EL PASO, TEXAS

Consecration of St. Sharbel Maronite Church

by Maral Najarian

Sunday, 11 August 2019, marked a very historic day for the Maronite community of El Paso, TX. For the first time in the history of this city, the Maronite community had their permanent home, St. Sharbel Church, consecrated by The Most Reverend Bishop Elias Zaidan of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles. He gave a powerful sermon posing the question, "Are we for Christ or against Him?" He also explained to the faithful, in detail, the meaning of the rich consecration ritual, including knocking on the doors of the church and blessing the walls with holy oil.

Priests who attended the Divine Liturgy included Fr. Milad Yaghi, Episcopal Secretary, Fr. Robert Mosher of the Mission Society of St. Columban, and St. Sharbel Pastor, Fr. Ronald Eid, who came to El Paso to shepherd this community in 2016. At that time, the Maronite mission parish was sharing a church with the Holy Family Catholic Parish in El Paso, which they had been doing for about a decade. However, the Maronite community of El Paso is much older than that. This community has had a presence in El Paso for decades, and they have moved from several mission parishes over the years.

Although a large portion of these parishioners are Lebanese-American, who have been Maronite their whole life, the parish encompasses diverse Catholics from different backgrounds, languages, rites, states and countries, including neighboring Mexico, who have become an integral part of this parish community. In fact, St. Sharbel has such a large following in Mexico that many of his devotees travel across the border to make a pilgrimage to this new Maronite parish. They can often be found praying with St. Sharbel's relics and asking with great confidence for special favors from the "Miracle Worker". These relics are beautifully displayed by the altar for veneration in a reliquary shaped like a Cedar of Lebanon.

The Maronite community of El Paso, TX, is beyond grateful to God for its new church and have been so welcoming to anyone who wishes to become a friend of their beloved St. Sharbel. What is in the near future for this parish? They await a life-size bronze statue of the Maronite Monk, which Fr. Ronald has commissioned an artisan from Lebanon to sculpt. It will stand proud in front of the façade of the church, calling all devotees to trust in the intercession of the "Miracle Worker" hermit. ■



Parish News

DENVER, COLORADO

St. Rafka Church | Ecumenical Prayer Breakfast

St. Rafka Church celebrated its 5th Annual Colorado Ecumenical Prayer Breakfast presented by the Apostolate of Our Lady of Hope. Bishop Michael J. Sheridan, Auxiliary Bishop Jorge Rodriguez, Father Brad Noonan (pastor of St. Francis of Assisi parish—host), Father Andre Mahanna, and many other Christian, Jewish, and Muslim leaders, along with the many concerned people of faith and good will, gathered to learn how we can help preserve the rights of persecuted Christians throughout the world.

The Prayer Breakfast weekend began Friday evening with the celebration of the Liturgy at the beautiful parish of St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church. Chorbishop Sharbel Maroun was the main celebrant and homilist; the Mass was concelebrated by Fr. Brad Noonan, Knights of Columbus State of Colorado Chaplain, Fr. John Sterns, Fr. Andre Mahanna, and the master of ceremonies, Msgr. Giovanni Fusco, Secretary General of the Apostolic Union of Clergy in Rome. Fr. Andre Mahanna and the choir provided exquisite hymns.

Salih Hidayar of East Turkistan (now under China) gave a moving account of the persecution the Uyghur personally experience in concentration camps this very day. Participants also viewed the movie trailer for *Christians In the Mirror* to shed light on the plight of the persecuted who are oppressed for their faith. Mr. Patrick Carberry, producer, spoke briefly regarding his personal testimony and desire to become involved in bringing attention to our persecuted Christian brothers and sisters.

The Prayer Breakfast began in silence with a candle-lit procession of the ecumenical spiritual leaders who sang the Paschal Troparion. The prayer service was presided by the Most Reverend Bishop Michael J. Sheridan, Bishop of Diocese of Colorado Springs. Co-Presiders included: The Most Reverend Bishop Jorge Rodriguez, Auxiliary Bishop, Representative of Most Reverend Samuel Aquila, Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Denver Colorado, the Most Reverend Chorbishop Sharbel Maroun, Vicar for Clergy, Representative of Most Reverend Elias A. Zaidan, Bishop of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles. ■



UTICA, NEW YORK

“Taste of Lebanon” Food and Entertainment Festival Continues to Grow | St. Louis Gonzaga Church

by Elias Zeina

For nine years, Saint Louis Gonzaga Church – Utica, NY – has hosted one of the best Middle Eastern food and entertainment festivals in the Mohawk Valley. Thousands of community members and travelers from neighboring communities celebrated Lebanese culture and age-old traditions at this year’s event. A wide selection of Lebanese favorites were offered such as hummus, tabbouleh, kibbeh, grape leaves, and baklawa to name a few. Weeks before the event, parishioners spent many hours preparing these delicious specialties. In addition to delicious Lebanese food, festival-goers enjoyed live music, local dance group performances, and Lebanese cooking demonstrations. Year over year, the event continues to grow and helps to support important church programs. This event would not have been possible without the planning committee, many volunteers, generous sponsors, and festival-goers. We invite parishioners from Maronite churches across the country to celebrate with us next year! ■



PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA

“Lebanese-American Days” in Pittsburgh

by Mrs. Marie Sadaka and Dr. Mabel George Howard

On 27 August 2019, the City Council of Pittsburgh presented a Proclamation to Fr. Rudolph Wakim, pastor of Our Lady of Victory Maronite Church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. This proclamation commended the parishioners of Our Lady of Victory and the Lebanese-American community members for their commitment to family, faith, and service to the Pittsburgh City residents. The proclamation, presented by Councilwoman Theresa Kail-Smith, parishioner of Our Lady of Victory, declared 6-8 September to be “Lebanese-American Days” in the City of Pittsburgh.

Lebanese-American citizens are recognized for helping to make a positive difference in the Pittsburgh community through: their warm hospitality, authentic Lebanese cuisine and culinary achievements, music (the Maronite Lebanese-American community were one of the founding members of the Pittsburgh Folk Festival), and distinguished accomplishments in the arts, business, education, entertainment, government, medicine, journalism, religion, science, and the military. The Lebanese-Americans of Pittsburgh are very proud and honored to celebrate their rich heritage and traditions. ■



(Left to Right): Councilwoman Theresa Kail-Smith, Father Wakim, Michele Underwood, Marie Kassouf, Marie Sadaka, Mary Romah, Nick Romah, Bill Eassie

Parish News

HOUSTON, TEXAS

A Month Full of Blessings | Our Lady of the Cedars

by Susie Hage

Our Lady of the Cedars had a wonderful and busy start to our summer! May was filled with many wonderful events including the celebration of the beginning of the Marian month, with a Divine Liturgy and procession, followed by our semiannual Village Night, which brought thousands of visitors to our parish to enjoy great food and entertainment provided by our generous parishioners and community members.

The following weekend, we were honored and blessed to have Bishop Elias Zaidan celebrate two wonderful events. Saturday, 11 May, we celebrated First Holy Communion for 20 of our children. We know that this memory and his loving words will be carried in their hearts for a lifetime.

The next day, three men, Said Tannous, Chuck Abou Jaoude, and Nicolas Nammour, who have been actively dedicated to the growth of our parish, were ordained subdeacons by Bishop Elias. Said Tannous was among the first parishioners of Our Lady of the Cedars. He is always ready and willing to help and is constantly giving of his time, talent, and treasure. He truly has made Our Lady of the Cedars his second home. Chuck Abou Jaoude attended seminary in Lebanon during his childhood with the intention of becoming a priest. When he fled Lebanon because of the war, he lived in Chicago



in a rectory among the priests. Chuck has been a devoted and faithful parishioner and is always ready to answer the call to serve. Dr. Nicholas Nammour moved to Houston 13 years ago and immediately became a member of our parish and has also served for many years on the parish pastoral council, serving both as a member and as president for several years. He is always quick to respond to any requests our priests ask of him. Our parish is truly blessed to have watched these men grow in their faith and commitment to God and the Church and to be ordained subdeacons. Our Lady of the Cedars now has seven subdeacons, five of whom are actively ministering in our parish!

May wrapped up with the presentation of the Massabki Award to not one, but two, amazing couples this year! We congratulate Roger and Charlotte Abou Nassif and Zack and Jenny Raffoul. Both of these beautiful couples are a true example of service and dedication to their faith and to our community. ■

DETROIT, MICHIGAN
St. Maron Church

Annual Church Picnic

St. Maron Church in Detroit hosted its annual picnic on 18 August. Over 250 people attended the event, enjoying each other's company, food, and music. May Almighty God keep blessing our family!



Bible School

St. Maron Church in Detroit had their first Vacation Bible School. It was a great opportunity for our children to have fun while learning about Jesus and our Maronite heritage. The kids learned some Arabic words, hymns, and how to dance the dabke.



Honoring Raymond Mabarak

The Order of St. Gregory the Great, is an honor bestowed upon Catholic men and women in recognition of their personal service to their church through their labors, their support of the Holy See, and the examples they set in their communities and their country.

Raymond Mabarak, who was born in Detroit in 1922, has served in the Army Air Corps and National Guard. He is a staunch supporter of his Maronite faith and an active member of St. Maron Church. He served on the Parish Council for many years and was assistant chairman of the Founder's Committee. He became the coordinator for the Order of St. Sharbel for the metro Detroit parishes. Raymond was awarded the Silver Massabki Medal by Bishop Robert Shaheen. On 7 July, Bishop Elias Zaidan inducted Raymond into the Order of St. Gregory the Great, given by Pope Francis for his outstanding commitment and dedication to St. Maron in Detroit and to the Maronite Church in the United States. ■



Eucharist: Source and Summit of the Christian Life

by Bishop Gregory J. Mansour

The Second Vatican Council describes the Eucharist “source and summit of the Christian life” (Lumen Gentium 11; Catechism of the Catholic Church 1322). Every time that I celebrate the Divine Liturgy, I feel our Lord’s presence. Whenever I visit a parish, I am drawn first to the tabernacle. I want to meet there our Lord Jesus, hidden in the form of Eucharistic bread. From the time of the Emmaus disciples, until today, we have come “to know him in the breaking of the bread” (Luke 24:35, Acts 2:42). The Eucharist is indeed “the source and summit of the Christian life.”

The early Christians found a way to keep a small portion of the Eucharist for both distribution to the sick and for reverence; Justin Martyr and Tertullian, in the second and third century, refer to this in their writings. The Council of Nicea in 325 acknowledges that the Eucharistic bread was reserved in churches and monasteries. Saint Basil, in the fourth century, speaks of the Eucharistic bread in three parts: one part he consumed, the second part he gave to the monks, and the third part he placed in a dove-shaped container suspended over the altar. Our own Maronite Synod of Mount Lebanon in 1736 echoes this same practice.

In fact, every Catholic and Orthodox Church has a tabernacle in the center of the sanctuary to reserve the Eucharistic bread; and in all Catholic Churches, near that tabernacle, we find a lit candle to signify our Lord’s mysterious presence there. Adolf Hitler was heard saying that he hoped he could extinguish these candles; one can only suppose that he did not want any power above his own. On the other hand, Archbishop Zayek, our first Maronite Bishop in the United States used to say that his life, and the lives of all who serve Christ, are like those vigil candles pointing to the presence of Christ, and in that service slowly being consumed like a vigil candle in the sanctuary of the Church.

The real presence of Jesus in the Eucharistic Bread was believed by the Church from the beginning. It is no coincidence that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the “House of Bread.” This, according to Church Fathers,

was a foreshadowing of his own self-giving at the Last Supper in the form of bread blessed and broken, and the next day at the Cross.

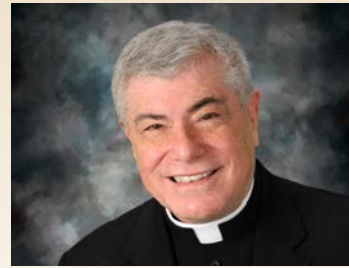
The Gospel of John, in chapter 6, refers to Jesus as the “new manna,” the “Bread that comes down from the heaven,” and the “Bread of Life.” Saint Paul warns the Corinthians not to partake of the bread unless they first recognize therein the body of the Lord (Cor 11:29). From Saint Ephrem in the fourth century to Saint Sharbel in the previous century all the saints have recognized our Lord’s true presence in the Eucharistic Bread.

When I was young, whenever we passed a Church, my mother would tell us to make the sign of the cross. Only later would I come to understand it was because our Lord is truly present there, hidden in the tabernacle. I am grateful to her, my first catechism teacher, and to those many witnesses who passed on to us a love for Christ’s hidden presence in the Church.

I still treasure every Divine Liturgy, and I begin every parish visit with a prayer to Christ to the Blessed Sacrament. Among my most memorable visits was the Gaza Strip where Christ is still adored in the tabernacle at the small chapel of the Catholic School there. Another memorable visit was on a mission trip for Catholic Relief Services to El Salvador, and to the tabernacle behind the altar where Saint Archbishop Oscar Romero was gunned down as he celebrated Mass. Another affirmation of God’s continuing presence in the Eucharist was visiting the hermitage chapel where Saint Sharbel prayed, and where he suffered a stroke during the solemn elevation of the Host.

To all these witnesses, I say thank you for giving us a taste of Christ’s broken yet real presence. Whenever we celebrate Divine Liturgy, or visit a tabernacle, we know our Lord Jesus is truly and humbly present in the Eucharist, the “source and summit of the Christian Life.” May Christ be adored at every altar and at every tabernacle in the world. ■

From the Editor



Saturday Confession



On one Saturday afternoon, I was sitting in the chapel in line to go to confession—yes, priests go to confession. I know the rules of the parish: those wanting to go to confession sit in the back row of pews, one seat apart in line for the confession. I was not dressed in a clerical shirt, but was wearing a rather ragged blue shirt.

This was not a normal Saturday. Ordinarily, everyone just sits in silence, praying or perhaps simply waiting. On this Saturday, I found the three penitents ahead of me engaged in conversation about a variety of topics: why Protestants do not pray for the dead, how the podium in Catholic Churches finds its origins in the Jewish synagogue, how one priest had disappointed a young lady who approached him for spiritual help, and what a good homilist Father Dan was (he makes you think). It is sometimes good for us priests to hear the unguarded opinions of others.

After a short time, it was my turn to go to confession. The priest was Father Bob, a senior priest whose personality overflows with God's mercy and joy. I sat down, routinely identified myself as a priest, and began, "Bless me, Father..." Father Bob interrupted, "Stop! I want to say something first."

Startled, I became silent. Father Bob told me that confession is not mechanical: from all eternity, God had a plan that he and I would be in that confessional together, just to be shown God's love and mercy. God wants to put his arm around us, to tell us that he loves us, forgives us, heals us. It is a beautiful experience for both the priest who shares God's mercy and for the penitent who receives God's mercy. (I am not expressing it as well as Father Bob did.) And then, Father Bob told me that it was my turn to speak.

I was changed. "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned..."

You may want to ponder Father Bob's words to me before you go to confession the next time.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John D. Faris".

Chorbishop John D. Faris

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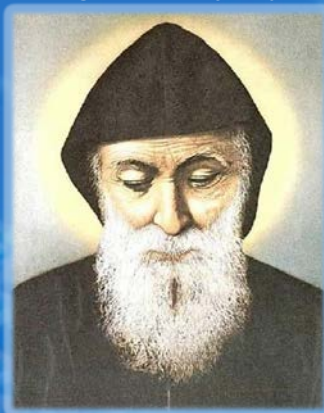
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