



# The Maronite Voice

A Publication of the Maronite Eparchies in the USA



Volume XI

Issue No. IV

April 2015

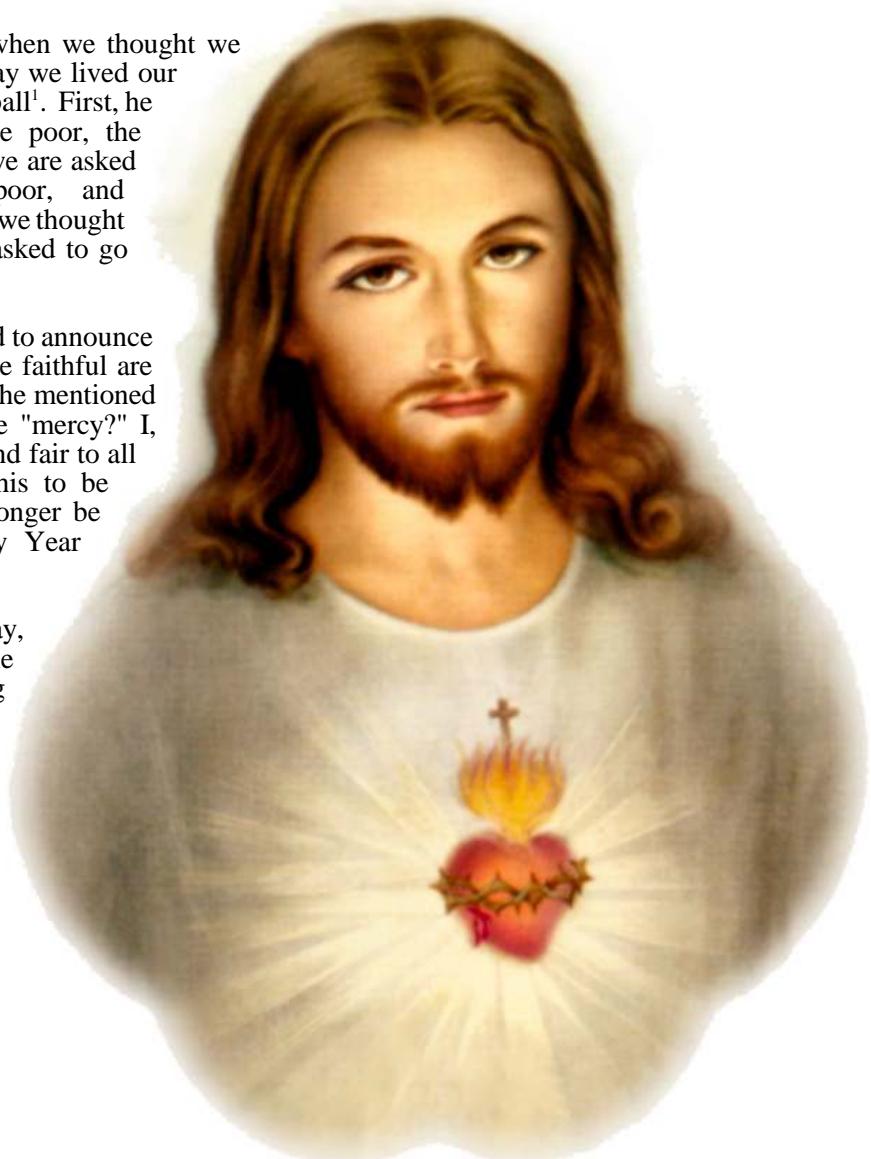
## *The Challenges of the Holy Year of Mercy*

Pope Francis has done it again. Just when we thought we could become comfortable with the way we lived our Christian life, he throws another curve ball<sup>1</sup>. First, he called us to be more mindful of the poor, the refugee, the imprisoned, and the needy. Now, we are asked to be more Christ-like, more simple, poor, and compassionate. Yes, we are in trouble. Just when we thought we were already all those things, now we are asked to go even further.

This coming December, Pope Francis is prepared to announce a special holy year, a time of grace in which the faithful are asked to dedicate some time and effort towards the mentioned theme of the year. Why did he have to choose "mercy?" I, personally, was just getting used to being just and fair to all people, now I am asked to go far beyond this to be merciful? All of us are in trouble. It can no longer be "business as usual." In the upcoming Holy Year everything changes.

Perhaps this is just what the world, or should I say, what all of us need: a dose in our lives of a little more mercy. Thank you, Pope Francis for making us a little more uncomfortable and a little more like Christ Himself. □

+ Gregory J. Mansour  
Bishop of the Eparchy of Saint Maron



1.) On March 13, 2015, His Holiness Pope Francis announced a Jubilee Year of Mercy starting on December 8, 2015, Feast of the Immaculate Conception, and concluding on November 20, 2016, Feast of Christ the King. See page 14 for more details.

## Schedule of Bishop Elias Zaidan

**April 7 - 9, 2015**

Our Lady of the Cedars Maronite Church, Houston, Tex.

**April 12, 2015**

Pastoral Visit to Saints Peter and Paul, Simi Valley, Calif.

**April 14, 2015**

Armenian Genocide Centennial Commemoration, Los Angeles, Calif.

**April 15, 2015**

Enthronement of the Most Reverend Robert W. McElroy, the new Bishop of San Diego, Calif.

**April 21 - 22, 2015**

Presbyteral Council Meeting, St. Louis, Mo.

**April 24, 2015**

Diocesan Stewardship Council Meeting, St. Louis, Mo.

**April 25, 2015**

Diocesan Pastoral Council Meeting, St. Louis, Mo.

**April 26, 2015**

St. Raymond Cathedral, St. Louis, Mo.

**May 2 - 3, 2015**

Dedication of the New Assisted Living Center run by the Antonine Sisters, North Jackson, Ohio

**May 8 - 9, 2015**

Pastoral visit to St. George Maronite Church, San Antonio, Tex. □

**The Maronite Voice**  
4611 Sadler Road  
Glen Allen, VA 23060  
Phone: 804/270-7234  
Fax: 804/273-9914  
E-Mail: gmsebaali@aol.com  
<http://www.stmaron.org>  
<http://www.usamaronite.org>

*The Maronite Voice, (ISSN 1080-9880) the official newsletter of the Maronite Eparchies in the U.S.A. (Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles and Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn), is published monthly.*

*Send all changes of address, news, pictures and personal correspondence to The Maronite Voice at the above captioned address. Subscription rates are \$25.00 per year. Advertising rates are available upon request.*

### **Publishers**

- *Most Reverend Bishop Gregory John Mansour*
- *Most Reverend Elias Zaidan, M.L.M.*

**Editor** Msgr. George M. Sebaali

**Editing and proofreading**  
Mary Shaia

Printed in Richmond, Virginia.

### **Maronite Convention 2015**

Saint Maron Maronite Church

Cleveland, Ohio

**July 1 - 5, 2015**

For more information  
contact the NAM office  
at (914) 964-3070  
or visit [www.Namnews.org](http://www.Namnews.org)



**O**n a beautiful, sunny day, parishioners of the Heart of Jesus Maronite Mission, Fort Lauderdale, Fla., gathered after Liturgy for their annual picnic on the church grounds to recognize the Feast of St. Joseph. It was a sold-out event! Volunteers prepared the food and people enjoyed the fellowship. The children especially enjoyed the face painter, who gave them very colorful smiles. Chorbishop Michael G. Thomas greeted everyone and administered the raffle at the end. The lucky winners went home with very large Easter baskets of all kinds. □

## New Bedford, Massachusetts New Members for Sodality of St. Joseph



by Natalie Salameh

The Sodality of St. Joseph at Our Lady of Purgatory Church (OLOP), New Bedford, Mass., welcomed thirteen new members on March 15, 2015. The initiation ceremony took place during the Divine Liturgy, celebrated by Fr. Jack Morrison, Pastor. The Divine Liturgy concluded with the benediction of the icon of St. Joseph.

President of the Sodality is Deacon Jean Mattar and the new members are: the Maronite Servants of Christ the Light, Jose Bettencourt, Maria Baptista, Jacques and Amal Barbour, Fadi Bark, Gaby Baroody, David Dickinson, Michael and Diane LeBlanc, and Martha Mattar.

The Sodality of St. Joseph (also known as the Sodality of a Happy Death) was originally founded in 1648 in Rome. Subsequent chapters were established throughout the world. In 1918, (just one year after the founding of OLOP) a chapter of the Sodality of St. Joseph was established there. It is the oldest parish organization at OLOP and assists the parish in many ways by providing spiritual support through its prayers and devotions, and financial support through its fundraising initiatives. □

## Worcester, Massachusetts Children's Lenten Retreat

by Natalie Salameh

The Maronite Servants of Christ the Light offered a retreat day for the children of Our Lady of Mercy Parish, Worcester, Mass., on Saturday, March 21, 2015, focusing on the Glorious Resurrection of Christ.

The Sisters made use of media, crafts, drama and music to explain that in Jesus' resurrection, He triumphed over sin and death forever, and so have we. As Jesus rose from the dead, so too will we rise with Him. We have no need to fear death, because Jesus promised us eternal life and a share in His resurrection.



The children enthusiastically played and sang the *Mazmooro* of the Sunday of the Glorious Resurrection with percussion instruments for their Pastor, Fr. Gaby Hoyek. The day concluded with Fr. Gaby celebrating the Saturday Vigil Liturgy in which the children participated as altar servers and by transferring the gifts, singing and reading.

For those interested in holding a similar retreat day at their Maronite Parish, please contact the Maronite Servants of Christ the Light by email [sister@maroniteservants.org](mailto:sister@maroniteservants.org). □

## Springfield, Massachusetts Parish Represented



Anna Moran, (in the picture-7th on the left) of St. Anthony Maronite Church in Springfield, Mass., was chosen to represent St. Stanislaus School on the cover of *The Catholic Mirror*, the magazine for the Catholic Diocese of Springfield for their annual Catholic Charities Appeal. (Photo by Fred LeBlanc) □

## Food For Thought

Faced with the sacredness of life and of the human person, and before the marvels of the universe, wonder is the only appropriate attitude.

St. John Paul II

## Glen Allen, Virginia Regional Youth Retreat



by Cathy George

“**D**are to Love” was the theme of the 2015 Youth Regional Retreat held at Saint Anthony Maronite Church in Glen Allen, Va., on March 6 - 8, 2015. Seventy youth and chaperones participated this year. They came from Our Lady of Lebanon Church in Washington, D.C.; St. Elias Church in Roanoke, Va.; and St. Michael the Archangel in Fayetteville and St. Sharbel Mission in Raleigh, N.C. St. Paul's words to the Corinthians: “Love is patient, love is kind... (1 Cor. 13:4)” was a constant refrain throughout the weekend. Many of the community-building activities on Friday and Saturday dealt with the theme of building up a strong repertoire of love language. The retreat revolved around the movie *Fireproof* and our relationships with God and with each other. The youth were able to discuss the movie in small groups according to their ages. They learned the definition of compatibility, the elements that make people compatible, and why having similar Christian values is the most important key in forming lasting relationships.

Prayer life was also important during the retreat. On the first evening several youth led St. Rafka's rosary. On Saturday evening, the reconciliation service began with a presentation about why confession is necessary and then an examination of conscience. Father Sam Najjar, Father Michel Lahoud and Monsignor George Sebaali heard the confessions of the youth and advisors. The evening ended with a talent show, video games, dancing, and finally, Pope Francis' method of five fingers of prayer.

On Sunday morning, the youth participated in the liturgy by reading, transferring the gifts, and ushering. They took a group picture before a final breakfast in the hall. For many, it was their first experience with a retreat. Tia Azzi, an eighth grader, said, “It was a very fun and different experience for me. I really enjoyed it and like the new couple of friends I made. When we went to do confession I was worried about

what I was going to do. Afterwards I felt completely relieved and as if a weight was taken off of my shoulders. But overall it was a great and fun experience and I'm hoping to do it again next year.” Evelyn Mazloom, a tenth grader, said, “It's so nice to be around people who think like me.” □

## San Francisco, California Regional Convention



by Nicole Rishwan

**O**ur Lady of Lebanon Maronite Church community in San Francisco Bay Area, Calif., hosted for the first time the NAM Southwest Regional Convention. The weekend of March 13-15, 2015, was filled with prayerful Divine Liturgies and services, informative workshops, sightseeing excursions, and entertaining *haflies*. Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Church is looking forward to hosting the National Maronite Convention July 6 - 10, 2016. □

## Boston, Massachusetts *Knights of the Virgin Mary*



by Ibtissam Chahwan and Randa Yazbeck

**O**n Sunday, March 22, 2015, at Our Lady of the Cedars of Lebanon, Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts, The Knights of the Virgin Mary (*Fersen El Adra*) held their third meeting. The meeting's objective was getting the children ready for Holy Week and introducing them to the Lebanese Palm Sunday and Easter traditions. During the gathering, children decorated their own candles, participated in an egg cracking contest and put together a "Holy Week" craft. At the end, the Easter Bunny surprised them with Easter treats. □

## Orange, California *St. John Maron Feast Day*

by Suad Ammar

**S**unday, March 1, 2015, was a memorable day for the parishioners and friends of St. John Maron Maronite Catholic Church in the City of Orange, Calif., as they celebrated the Feast Day of St. John Maron, the Patron Saint of their Church, and honored fifty-seven of their elders in recognition of their service and dedication to the Church as it grew from a mission in the early eighties to a community with over 1,500 parishioners. The Liturgy opened with members of the Order of Saint Sharbel lining the pews while the elders approached the altar followed by Father Antoine Bakh.

After Pete Coury, Harvey Owen, Mary Farrage and Suad Ammar unveiled a portrait of St. John Maron, the elders were called upon to be presented with a blessing and a special gift



from Father Bakh, while a photo PowerPoint presentation of the fifty-seven elders was shown.

Father Bakh presented Dr. Bob and Mrs Ramza Hamra with the Silver Massabki Award for their service to the Parish as founders and pioneers who helped in the establishment and growth of the Church.

Mr. Youssef and Mrs. Alice Khreich, also pioneers, were recognized for never having missed a Sunday Liturgy since the founding of the Church.

It was a delight to see Mr. Francois Zouein, at 104 years of age, walking down the aisle with a big smile and without any assistance, as his proud daughter, Nada Salloum, escorted him to receive Father Bakh's blessing and a big round of applause from the congregation.

With a great sense of appreciation Father Bakh and all in attendance said goodbye to Serge El-Khoueiry and his family. For over fifteen years Mr. El-Khoueiry served as the Choir Director. Serge and his family will soon be moving to Qatar for an employment opportunity.

Following the Liturgy a Lebanese food buffet was served by Grand Catered Events. Guests were greeted by Event Chairpersons Andrea Doche, Joanne Marsh and their committee members. Young Samir Robbie Ayoub sang the Lebanese National Anthem, followed by Sumayah Ferris, who sang the American National Anthem. While dining, strolling musicians entertained the guests and Father Bakh circled the room with a wireless microphone, giving a few of the elders the opportunity to share their experiences and memories as parishioners. There was singing, laughter and a few tears as people looked back and remembered the journey, the joyful and the sad events that made us a true family in Christ. It was a day in which we expressed our gratitude to the parish elders and to our Heavenly Father, who has blessed us, and to Father Bakh, whose faith and hard work have inspired and helped us to arrive to this blessed day and to continue to grow as a parish for the future generations. □

# Cincinnati, Ohio Commemoration Dinner and Chapel Dedication



From left: Fr. George Hajj, Bishop Zaidan and Fr. Milad Yaghi.

by Linda Conour

**O**n Saturday, February 28, 2015, the Parish of St. Anthony of Padua Church in Cincinnati, Ohio, commemorated the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Monsignor Joseph A. Abood's passing into Eternal life. For forty years (1948-1987), Monsignor Abood was the beloved Pastor of St. Anthony of Padua Church and the cornerstone of the parish. He led the Church, shepherding its growth and success, molding it into a thriving Maronite community.

His Excellency Bishop A. Elias Zaidan, Bishop of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon; Fr. George Hajj, Pastor; Fr. Milad Yaghi, Bishop Zaidan's Secretary and Pastor of Our Lady of the Cedars Church in Houston, Tex.; and Fr. Benedict O'Cinnsealaigh, Rector of Mount St. Mary's Seminary, concelebrated the Divine Liturgy in remembrance of Monsignor Abood. Many relatives of Monsignor Abood came from Cleveland, Ohio, to participate.

Following the Divine Liturgy, His Excellency Bishop A. Elias Zaidan consecrated a new Chapel dedicated to St. Aquilina of Byblos. What was once a drab storage closet attached to the main foyer, is now a truly beautiful, warm and inviting place for worship! The new Chapel is the work of many parishioners' long, tireless hours, generous donations and dedication to complete this project in three short months. Father George's vision and inspiration came to fruition and the parish was blessed to have the new Chapel consecrated by His Excellency Bishop Zaidan during his visit.

Then the celebration began! Two hundred people from Cincinnati, Dayton, Columbus, and Cleveland, Ohio, Lexington, Kent., and even Florida entered into the Monsignor Joseph A. Abood Maronite Center for a sit-down dinner. Throughout the dinner, members of Monsignor Abood's family, along with several parishioners, told personal and endearing stories of a pastor well-respected and loved by all. Monsignor Abood's presence could almost be felt during

the evening! His Excellency Bishop A. Elias Zaidan encouraged the Parish of St. Anthony of Padua to move forward, to come together again like the Parish did during the years of Monsignor Abood and utilize its renewed spirit to cultivate and grow the Parish.

On Sunday, March 1, His Excellency Bishop Zaidan, Fr. Milad Yaghi, and Fr. George Hajj concelebrated the Divine Liturgy. A Brunch sponsored by St. Anthony of Padua's MYO followed immediately afterwards in the Monsignor Joseph A. Abood Maronite Center. It was hard to say good-bye to Monsignor Abood's family and to His Excellency Bishop Zaidan and Fr. Milad Yaghi after such an uplifting and wonderful weekend.

## Special Retirement



Fr. George Hajj presents John Merkle with a plaque for his many years of service.

**O**n Sunday, March 1, 2015, St. Anthony of Padua Church in Cincinnati, Ohio, honored a special parishioner and employee: Mr. John Merkle. For over thirty-five years, John had been the grounds and facility manager for the parish. If something needed to be repaired or taken care of, John was always there. During the parish's festival and other events, John was the person getting the Hall set up and ready to go, and the last one to leave after everything was torn down and cleaned up. John donated many hours of his time as well as paid for many items out of his own pocket, reflecting his warm and generous spirit and dedication to St. Anthony of Padua Church.

To recognize his years of service and to honor his retirement, Parish Council Chairman John George and Father George Hajj presented John with a plaque thanking him for all that he had done. The entire Parish gave him a much-deserved standing ovation. Again, thank you Mr. John Merkle, for a job well done. □

## Appeal From Caritas Lebanon

**C**hristians in Lebanon are suffering! If you are able to relieve some of the suffering, please visit <http://www.caritas.org.lb>. Thank you for your consideration. □

# Fayetteville, North Carolina Stained Glass Windows



Leslie Miler, left, Paul Thornton and Gian Carlo, of C. Pickel Studio Inc., slowly raise a stained glass window into place at St. Michael the Archangel Church in Fayetteville, North Carolina.

by Chick Jacobs (Staff writer of Fayetteville Observer, posted on Friday, March 13, 2015)

**F**r. Samuel Najjar, Pastor of Saint Michael the Archangel Maronite Church in Fayetteville, N.C., expected a lengthy fundraising period when he suggested adding new stained glass windows for the oldest Maronite Church in the Carolinas.

Less than six months later, the pastor of St. Michael the Archangel stood with two dozen church members watching with a mixture of delight and marvel as the first of ten windows was installed at the church on Haymount Hill.

By Saturday evening's worship service, the historic church should have each of the windows in place. Each represents a figure important to the faith, and each, church members say, helps provide the church with a sense of identity.

"The windows came from our congregation families," said Marie Reale, a church member since the 1950s. "We are a small congregation, but we love our church."

"It's a wonderful way to remember people who have been a part of St. Michael's. They (the windows) help provide a sense of identity."

Built in 1936, the church was originally St. Patrick Catholic Church. When that congregation moved to Village

Drive in the 1960s, the building was shuttered.

In 1973, a group of Lebanese families in the Cape Fear region who had been a part of St. Patrick began worship service at the old structure. They became the founding families of St. Michael the Archangel, the first Maronite Catholic Church in the Carolinas.

Over the years, the congregation made repairs to the building. The windows, smoked glass that subdued lighting in the sanctuary, remained.

"I think people had wanted to replace them for a while," Najjar said, "but it's a major expense. There was always something else to work on."

Last fall, two of the church families approached Najjar. Each had recently lost a long-time church member. Each wanted to replace a window as a memorial.

"If we were going to replace windows, then I felt we should do all of them," Najjar said. "But that would require a substantial contribution. So I asked the congregation if we could do this as a church."

The reaction was surprisingly swift and decisive. Several church families immediately donated several thousand dollars for each window. A \$10,000 fund for a "community window," which allowed all church members to donate lesser amounts, exceeded the window's cost and led to the purchase of a second window.

"The whole thing just snowballed," Najjar said. "Our congregation was committed to the idea."

Some of the figures in the windows are familiar, including St. Michael the Archangel, St. Joseph and St. Francis. Others are unique to the Maronite faith: St. Sharbel, a Maronite monk and priest from Lebanon; St. Nematullah, a Lebanese monk, priest and scholar of the church; and the Massabki Brothers, who were killed for their faith in 1860.

In addition, another group that worships in the building, St. George Anglican Church, offered to purchase a window of their patron saint.

Craftsmen from Conrad Pickel Studio in Florida created the windows and arrived in Fayetteville earlier this week to install them.

"The whole time from presenting the idea to now has been about six months," Najjar said. "It's passed so quickly, I'm still shocked."

"It's been a wonderful addition to the church, and a tribute to the families here. This is a wonderful gift." □

*the Deadline is... Deadline for next month's issue of The Maronite Voice is April 25, 2015.*

*The Maronite Voice* is the official newsletter of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon and of the Eparchy of Saint Maron.

Send all changes of address, news, pictures and personal correspondence to:

*The Maronite Voice*  
4611 Sadler Road  
Glen Allen, Virginia 23060  
Phone: (804) 270-7234; Fax: (804) 273-9914  
Email: Gmsebaali@aol.com

Pictures must be original. Digital pictures must be in "JPG" format and in high resolution. *The Maronite Voice* is also available online, in PDF format, at [www.stmaron.org](http://www.stmaron.org). □

## Houston, Texas Couples Ministry Event



by Eliana Abou-Jaoude

**D**eacon Jim and Mrs. Christy Wright, both experts in Couples Ministry, were the featured presenters at an evening of fellowship among couples at Our Lady of the Cedars Maronite Church in Houston, Tex., as a part of the parish's Couples Ministry. The theme for the evening was *Together in Christ*. The speakers recreated the setup of their

own living room in the Cedar Hall, at the center of which were an altar and Bible, in order to illustrate and emphasize the importance of dedicating a "sacred place" for a couple to pray and reflect on the Bible together. The speakers stated that being together in Christ and placing Christ at the center of a marital relationship is the secret to a successful and lasting marriage such as theirs.

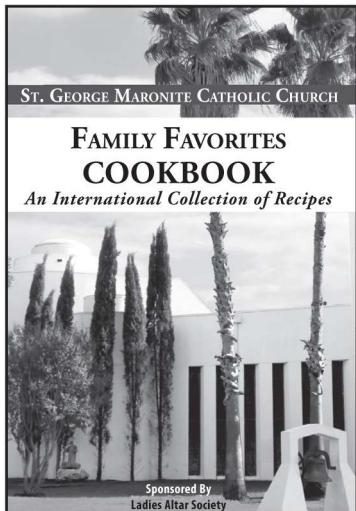
Among the many noteworthy topics and reflections covered during this event, the analogy of St. Paul regarding Christ as the Bridegroom and the Church as His bride (Eph 5:32) stood out the most. St. Paul labeled the relationship between a husband and wife as sacred and a mystery, just like the relationship between Christ and the Church. When we believers pray to Christ and ask Him to be at the center of our marriages, we become betrothed or engaged to Christ in a personal and committed relationship. As with marriage, faith in Christ involves a deliberate choice. Christ stands at the door of our hearts and knocks. It is up to us to invite Him into our hearts and marriages.

God chose marriage to represent the relationship He desires with humans, whom He created in His own image. God's relationship with us humans is permanent, and through His righteousness, He will never abandon us. God will always be there for us.

The Couples Ministry Committee is preparing the next event, "a Blessing of the Rings Celebration," with Fr. Pierre El Khoury as the celebrant. This event will be memorable for all couples and will take place in late Spring. □

## St. George Maronite Catholic Church Family Favorites COOKBOOK

An International Collection of Recipes



Our *Family Favorites Cookbook* came about through years of recipe collecting from our parish and beyond.

This cookbook features Lebanese and other Middle Eastern dishes and desserts that come from the ancestors of our church. Other recipes included in the collection are recipes from around the globe and the U.S. that we serve our families everyday and on special occasions.

\$25.00 + \$6 P&H

Volume Discount Available

374 pages

To Order CALL 210-690-9569

St. George Maronite Catholic Church Ladies Altar Society  
6070 Babcock Rd. San Antonio, TX 78240

## Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania Annual Food Drive



From Left: Cynthia Collins (Event Coordinator), Marie Michael, Maria Kaspar, Mayrula Homsi and Lena Michael.

by JoAnn M. Schultz

**T**he Altar & Rosary Society of St Anthony/St George Maronite Church, Wilkes-Barre, Penn., and Father Hanna Karam, Pastor, held their Annual Saint Maron Food Drive during the months of February and March of 2015. For over twenty years, the ladies of the Altar & Rosary have been collecting non-perishable food items in honor of the Feast of Saint Maron and donating the food to needy families or charitable agencies for distribution. The Church

parishioners are the main contributors, while the Society women assemble and deliver the donated items. On March 23, 2015, the collected food was delivered to Catholic Social Services of Wilkes-Barre, Penn. □



## Eparchial Condolences

**Bechara Yaghi**, the brother of Father Milad Yaghi, Pastor of Our Lady of the Cedars Maronite Church, Houston, Tex., passed away on March 28, 2015. In addition to Father Milad, he is survived by his wife, Afaf, three young children, Milad, Mark and Melissa; and by his siblings, Sister Claudette, Nadia, Elias, George and Charbel. Expressions of sympathy may be sent to:

Father Milad Yaghi  
c/o Our Lady of the Cedars Church,  
11935 Bellfort Village Dr.,  
Houston, TX 77031

Bishop A. Elias Zaidan along with the clergy and faithful of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon extend their heartfelt sympathy and the promise of their prayers to Fr Milad and his family. May the Lord God grant Bechara eternal rest in His Kingdom and consolation to his family and loved ones. □

## Pope Francis Sends His Condolences on the Death of the Assyrian Patriarch

*Mar Dinkha IV, who became head of the Assyrian Church of the East in 1976, died in the United States on March 26 at the age of 79, according to the Assyrian International News Agency.*

To His Beatitude Mar Aprem  
*Locum Tenens* of the Assyrian Church of the East

Having learned with sadness of the death of His Holiness Mar Dinkha IV, Catholicos Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East, I wish to express my heartfelt condolences to Your Beatitude, to the Bishops, clergy and all the faithful and to assure you of the spiritual closeness of all Catholics at this time. The Christian world has lost an important spiritual leader, a courageous and wise pastor who faithfully served his community in extremely challenging times. His Holiness Mar Dinkha suffered greatly because of the tragic situation in the Middle East, especially in Iraq and in Syria, resolutely calling attention to the plight of our Christian brothers and sisters and other religious minorities suffering daily persecution. I recall how we spoke of this at length during the recent visit of His Holiness to Rome. I give heartfelt thanks to Almighty God for the enduring commitment of His Holiness to improving relations among Christians and in particular between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East. May the Lord receive him into his kingdom and grant him eternal rest, and may the memory of his long and devoted service to the Church live on as a challenge and inspiration to us all. □

Franciscuss pp.

(Vatican Radio, March 29, 2015)

## US Catholics Feeling Stronger Ties to Faith

Catholic Americans have become more likely to report a "strong" relationship with the faith, and less likely to report a "not very strong" tie, in the past few years, according to one survey.

Citing responses from the 2014 General Social Survey, a massive study that is conducted every two years, Mark Gray of the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate told the Religion News Service that he saw a "significant bounce" in the strength of Catholic identity, perhaps illustrating the "Pope Francis effect."

In 2012, just 27% of Catholic Americans reported a "strong" religious affiliation; that figure jumped to 34% in 2014. The number reporting a "not so strong" relationship was down by 6%, at 56%. □

(Catholic World News - March 26,

## Schedule of Bishop Gregory Mansour

### April 11 - 12, 2015

Pastoral Visit to St. Sharbel Church, Newtown Square, Penn.

### April 13, 2015

Sexual Abuse Review Board Meeting, Washington, D.C.

### April 13 -16, 2015

Visit to Our Lady of Lebanon Seminary, Washington, D.C.

### April 16, 2015

American Task Force For Lebanon Dinner, Washington, D.C.

### April 19, 2015

Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral, Brooklyn, N.Y.

### April 21, 2015

Eparchial Finance Council Meeting, The Chancery, Brooklyn, N.Y.

### April 22, 2015

Eparchial Presbyteral Council Meeting, The Chancery Brooklyn, N.Y.

### April 25 - 26, 2015

Dedication of Saint John PaulII Maronite Church, Sleepy Hollow, N.Y.

### April 28, 2015

Prayer Service and Reception sponsored by Aid to the Church in Need for the Melkite Archbishop of Aleppo, Syria, NYU Catholic Center, N.Y.

### May 2 - 3, 2015

Dedication of the Antonine Sisters' New Adult Care Facilities, North Jackson, Ohio; and Pastoral Visits to the Parishes of New Castle, Darlington (Aliquippa), and Carnegie (Pittsburgh), Penn.

### May 7, 2015

Symposium on Christians of the Middle East with Cardinal Timothy Dolan, Manhattan, N.Y.

### May 10, 2015

Mother's Day, Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral, Brooklyn, N.Y. □

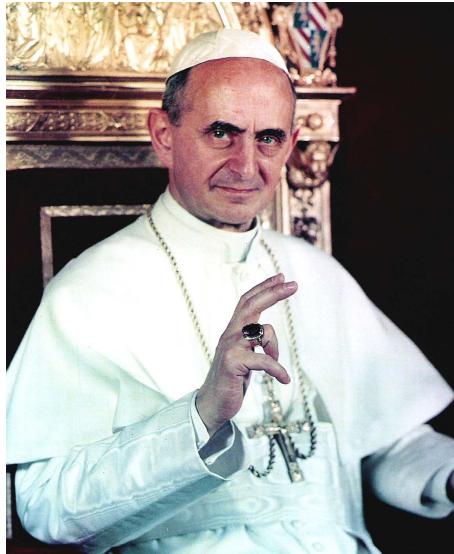
## **Remembering Blessed Paul VI**

*When we look to this great Pope, this courageous Christian, this tireless apostle, we cannot but say in the sight of God a word as simple as it is heartfelt and important: Thanks! Thanks! Thank you, our dear and beloved Pope Paul VI! Thank you for your humble and prophetic witness of love for Christ and his Church!*

*Pope Francis, Beatification of Pope Paul VI, 19, October 2014*

**I**t is well known that Pope Francis has great admiration and devotion to the person and the legacy of Pope Paul VI. Unlike his immediate predecessors who were directly involved in the Second Vatican Council: John Paul I, Saint John Paul II, and Benedict XVI (who was a theological expert), Pope Francis (Jorge Mario Bergoglio) was not. It was his experience of the Church and its Pope after the Council, that deeply shaped and moved the mind and heart of the future Pope Francis and brought him to understand that the sufferings of Paul VI for the Church and the world were worthy of emulation and respect. Thus with great joy on a sunny October day in Rome, during the closing of the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops, Pope Francis personally beatified Giovanni Battista Enrico Antonio Maria Montini, Blessed Paul VI, who reigned as Pope from 1963 until 1978.

Born in 1897, Paul VI experienced first-hand many of the most turbulent events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the total reconfiguration of the world which they created. He served the Church as a diplomat, Vatican official, Secretary of State for Pope Pius XII, Archbishop of Milan during the reign of Saint John XXIII, and eventually Pope. Above all it was Blessed Paul VI who inherited the unfinished work of the Second Vatican Council. The Council was divided between those who felt the Council of Trent had defined the "culture" of Catholicism forever and those who wanted to create a "new" Church that paid little attention to Tradition. Under his guidance the Council preserved the "deposit of faith" handed down by Tradition while at the same time embraced the emerging Third World as it shed the shackles of colonialism and isolation, affirmed the right of the Eastern Catholic Churches to be fully Eastern, reached out to new areas of missionary activity, began dialogues with other Christian communities and non-Christian



religions, and addressed a modern world that was rapidly moving towards secularism, relativism and skepticism.

After the Council, Blessed Paul VI was often criticized within and outside the Church as being too liberal from the mouths of those on the right and too conservative by those on the left. He was critical of the proliferation of nuclear arms, lobbied for ending the Vietnam War, defended the Church's teaching against abortion and contraception, was stabbed in Portugal, was the first reigning Pope to visit the United States of America, and near the end of his life, mourned the death of his close friend, the former Prime Minister of Italy, Aldo Moro, who was savagely murdered by the anarchist Red Brigade terrorist movement. Blessed Paul VI explained his ministry this way:

"Perhaps the Lord has called me and preserved me for this service not because I am particularly fit for it, or so that I can govern and rescue the Church from her present difficulties, but so that I can suffer something for the Church, and in that way it will be clear that he, and no other, is her guide and savior" (P. Macchi, *Paolo VI nella sua parola*, Brescia, 2001, pp. 120-121).

Having lived through two World Wars, *Papa Montini*, as he was often called by Italians, was a great advocate of peace. In his first Encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*, written in 1964, he shares with the Council Fathers that part of his ministry as Holy Father will be the promotion of world peace. He writes:

"What we cannot, however, fail to mention here is the fact that we are acutely conscious of our duty to pay particular attention to the serious problem of world peace. It is a problem which demands our continuous personal involvement and practical concern, exercised of course within the limits of our own ministry and entirely divorced from any set political theory and from considerations of our own personal and purely temporal advantage.... Our mission is to bring men together in mutual love through the power of that kingdom of justice and peace which Christ inaugurated by His coming into the world" (Pope Paul VI, *Ecclesiam Suam*, n.16, 1964).

Blessed Paul VI suffered greatly in the world media after the promulgation of his last Encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, of 1968. So great was the criticism that he never wrote another Encyclical Letter, not wanting to subject this most important form of Papal teaching to such condemnation. By the 1960s the media was already equipped to distort the news by slanted sound bites. In case of this prophetic Encyclical on Human Dignity and Procreation, the world media reduced its content to "Pope bans the pill." In fact the Holy Father, after considering the final recommendations of the committee set up many years before by Saint John XXIII to address the issues of procreation, contraception and abortion, keeping close attention to the growing desire of Prime Minister Indira Ghandi in India to create a program of mass sterilization, and reflecting on the growth of devaluation of the human person around the world; produced a

# THE ORDER OF SAINT SHARBEL



## Perpetual Members

### ★ Nouhad Ayoub

*Our Lady of Mount Lebanon  
Cathedral, Los Angeles, Calif.*

### ★ Louise K. Michael

*St. Anthony Church, Danbury,  
Conn.*

### ★ Millicent Gabriel

*(From Annual to Perpetual)  
St. George Church, Uniontown,  
Penn.*

### ★ Regina C. Aune

*St. George Maronite Church, San  
Antonio, Tex.*

\*\*\*\*\*

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](http://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 10<sup>th</sup> Street  
St. Louis, MO 63104

masterful work of human affirmation, from conception until natural death and eternal life. He writes the following in response to those governments (such as was the case in India at the time) who seek to alleviate poverty through contraception and abortion:

"We are fully aware of the difficulties confronting the public authorities in this matter, especially in the developing countries. In fact, We had in mind the justifiable anxieties which weigh upon them when We published Our encyclical letter *Populorum Progressio*. But now We join Our voice to that of Our predecessor John XXIII of venerable memory, and we make Our own his words:

"No statement of the problem and no solution to it is acceptable which does violence to man's essential dignity; those who propose such solutions base them on an utterly materialistic conception of man himself and his life. The only possible solution to this question is one which envisages the social and economic progress both of individuals and of the whole of human society, and which respects and promotes true human values." No one can, without being grossly unfair, make Divine Providence responsible for what clearly seems to be the result of misguided governmental policies, of an insufficient sense of social justice, of a selfish accumulation of material goods, and finally of a culpable failure to undertake those initiatives and responsibilities which would raise the standard of living of peoples and their children" (Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, n. 23, 1968).

This long suffering Pope, this Successor of Peter who steered the Church through rough waters, this Apostle of Peace has been found worthy to be numbered among the Blessed of the Church. May our remembrance end with these words he addressed to the American people near the end of his homily during the Eucharistic Liturgy at Yankee Stadium in 1965:

"You must serve the cause of peace. Serve it, and not make use of it for aims other than the true aims of peace. Serve it, and not use this noble standard as a cover for cowardice or selfishness, which refuses to make sacrifices for the

common good; not debilitate and pervert the spirit, by evading the call of duty and seeking one's own interests and pleasure. Peace is not a state which can be acquired and made permanent. Peace must be built; it must be built up every day by works of peace. These works of peace are, first of all, social order; then, aid to the poor, who still make up an immense multitude of the world population, aid to the needy, the weak, the sick, the ignorant. Peace must be like a garden, in which public and private beneficence cultivates the choicest flowers of friendship, of solidarity, of charity and love" (Pope Paul VI, Homily at Yankee Stadium, New York, 1965).

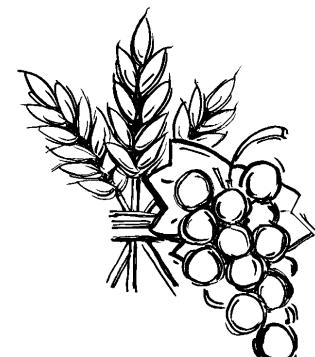
Blessed Paul VI, Pray for Us. □

## About the Author

*Reverend David A. Fisher is an Adjunct Professor of Philosophy at Rosemont College, Philadelphia, Penn.*

**“He  
is risen;  
he is not here.”**

**MARK 16:6**



## The Role of the Family in the Calling of Christ

In attempt to identify why some young men decide to be priests, we will occasionally speak to members of their families to get their thoughts so that we can present real life examples. We know that a solid family life focused on God and His Church is a pathway to the priesthood. We begin today with the thoughts of Mr. George Mansour, the father of Bishop Gregory Mansour, Bishop of the Eparchy of Saint Maron.

As Mr. Mansour, spoke, it was clear that he saw three major influences which helped Bishop Gregory to choose the life of a priest - his family life, a dedicated mother, Gloria, who worked tirelessly for her family and the

church, and the influence of Monsignor Ron Beshara, his parish priest.

Mr. Mansour emphasized that for them the most important activity was Mass, as a family, every Sunday. Mass was the center of their spiritual life. He spoke of the fact that they never used a cry room, but required their children to be respectful of the Mass. They were taught that Mass was never playtime. Life in the Mansour household also included praying together before family meals and prayer before bedtime. In many ways it was simply a life of a typical Catholic family. Not overly pious, but a family who loved God and respected His Church. The children knew what was important and that was God and His Church. The Church was not distant, but a part of their everyday life.

Another influence on Bishop Gregory according to his father, was the love of his mother for both her family and God. The example of his mother who was always active in the programs of Our Lady of Lebanon and Holy Rosary in Flint, Michigan, were bound to impact all her children. She was a founding member of the Women's Society at Our Lady of Lebanon. She was a catechist both in the home and in the religious education programs at the Church. She assisted with fundraising and parish functions. She felt that working for the Church was important and should be honored. Church activity is noble. That was not lost on Bishop Gregory.

Mr. Mansour spoke of the influence of Monsignor Ron Beshara on the future Bishop. There is a blessed impact of a good priest on a young man. Monsignor Ron was a good example for a man discerning a vocation to the priesthood. According to Mr. Mansour, he was a good pastor and a guide for souls. He was there for the people when he was needed, both in a spiritual and practical way.

Mr. Mansour said that these influences came together just after high school when Bishop Gregory went to work at

a camp for underprivileged children. He chose the camp instead of the family grocery business. He wanted to work with those in need. He even spent a summer while in college in Peoria, Illinois, with Fr. Anthony Salim to discern a possible call to the priesthood. In a way, during those summers he left his home and the family business to serve God's people for the first time. It is clear that family, examples of dedicated lay people, and a good and holy priest can influence the vocation choice of young man. □



### If the Lord is Calling You, The Church Needs You!

If you feel that you have a vocation to the Priesthood or religious life, please contact your Pastor or write to:

Fr. Gary George, Director  
Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon  
Office of Vocations  
1021 South 10<sup>th</sup> Street  
St. Louis, MO 63104

Or  
Fr. Dominique Hanna, Director  
Eparchy of Saint Maron  
Office of Vocations  
c/o St. Joseph Church  
502 Seminole Ave. NE  
Atlanta, GA 30307

Or  
Our Lady of Lebanon Seminary  
7164 Alaska Ave. NW  
Washington, DC 20012

### Prayer For Priestly Vocations

Father, in every generation You provide ministers of Christ and the Church.

\*\*\*

We come before You now, asking that You call forth more men to serve our eparchies in the ministerial priesthood.

\*\*\*

Give us priests who will lead and guide Your holy people gathered by Word and Sacrament.

\*\*\*

Bless us with priestly vocations so that we can continue to be a truly Eucharistic Church, strengthened in our discipleship of Jesus Christ, Your Only Son.

\*\*\*

Raise up, we pray, men who are generous in their service, willing to offer their lives and all their gifts for Your greater glory and for the good of Your people.

\*\*\*

We make our prayer in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, through Christ, our Lord. Amen.



## Episcopal Elections

The Synod of Bishops of the Maronite Patriarchal Church, in its extraordinary session of March 10 -14, 2015:

- ◆ Accepted the resignation of Bishop Elias Sleiman from the pastoral care of the Eparchy of *Lattaquie*, Syria, upon reaching the age limit, and elected him as President of the Patriarchal Tribunal.
- ◆ Elected Bishop Joseph Mouawad, Patriarchal Vicar of *Ehden-Zgharta*, Lebanon, as Bishop of *Zahle* (Catholics 50,000, priests 34, religious 42), Lebanon
- ◆ Elected, with pontifical assent, Chorbishop Antoine Chbeir as Bishop of *Lattaquie* of the Maronites (Catholics 35,000, priests 27, religious 50), Syria. The bishop-elect was born in *Ghosta*, Lebanon, and was ordained a priest in 1988. He holds a doctorate in Biblical Theology from the Pontifical Gregorian University of Rome and has served as parish priest and diocesan chancellor. He is currently chancellor of the Patriarchal Vicariate of *Jounieh*, Lebanon, and succeeds Bishop Elias Sleiman. □

(Vatican Information Service, March 16, 2015)

## Syrian Christians Grateful to Pope Francis

### According to the Maronite Archbishop of Damascus, the Holy Father's Commitment to Peace in the Middle East Is Praiseworthy

by Luca Marcolivio

The city of Damascus is in the hands of the Assad government, the suburbs in the hands of the rebels, while in Aleppo the situation is decisively tipped in favor of the *jihadist* forces. This is the scene described by Maronite Archbishop Nassar Samir of Damascus, Syria, who intervened today [March 5, 2015] at a press conference held at the Bonus Pastor House, a few hours after taking part in the audience of Bishops-Friends of the Focolare Movement with Pope Francis.

"March 15 is the fourth anniversary of the war and we don't want anything other than peace," said the Syrian prelate, referring also to the possibility of Syrian residents supporting their relatives economically, through the blocking of bank accounts in the country, while "whoever wants to leave the country can no longer find a Consulate or Embassy."

Archbishop Samir spoke with ZENIT, stressing first of all his gratitude for the help given by the Holy See and the Pontiff.

**ZENIT:** Your Excellency, in the Catholic world, be it in the

West as well as the East, numerous persons hold that Pope Francis and the Vatican are not sufficiently committed to peace in Syria and Iraq and that, essentially, they are silent over the persecution of Christians. What do you think?

**Archbishop Samir:** Already since Benedict XVI's pontificate, the Catholic Church has done much for peace. Five years ago, the Extraordinary Synod on the Middle East was held, and the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente* is the basis for peace in our territories. In regard to Pope Francis, I believe it is good to recall that already in September of 2013, he succeeded in halting the bombardments in Syria. Then the Pope is doing a lot through *Cor Unum* and *Caritas Internationalis* to help refugees of Syria and Iraq. The topic of our congress at *Castelgandolfo* is Eucharist, Mystery of Communion. In fact, this morning the Pope spoke of this communion and peace. What the Churches in Syria are committed to do is to create this communion and set the basis for peace. Italy is also doing much for our country: all archaeological excavations in Syria are in the hands of research groups of Italian Universities.

**ZENIT:** Do you think that the strategy of terror that ISIS is sowing could, in the long run, have a "boomerang effect" and that the population could rebel?

**Archbishop Samir:** For the time being people limit themselves to fleeing, and they do not have the possibility of posing much resistance. Middle Eastern Christians are a peaceful people, opposed to war and any type of violence. ISIS is still far from Damascus, therefore, I don't have direct knowledge of the situation. However, in general, people don't want to fight the terrorists; rather, they want to avoid violence. Some have chosen to resist and have taken up arms; others have preferred to leave and escape. They await the protection of the United Nations and the world powers, which, however, has yet to arrive.

**ZENIT:** In such an apocalyptic scenario, how is it possible for Christians not to let themselves be overwhelmed by fear?

**Archbishop Samir:** Medicines, doctors, water, electricity are lacking and, for over four years, there is no possibility of work, of earning, and the value of the local money has collapsed. The wealthier Christians have left; the rest live with very few means. Fortunately, there is some solidarity that arrives, and the Church is helping families to survive: it's all we can do! □

(Zenit.org, March 5, 2015)



# Jubilee of Mercy

The Pontifical Council for the New Evangelization has produced this explanatory note for the upcoming Holy Year, the Jubilee of Mercy.

In St. Peter's Basilica, Pope Francis announced on March 13, 2015, the celebration of an "extraordinary Holy Year." This "Jubilee of Mercy" will commence with the opening of the Holy Door in St. Peter's on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, 2015, and will conclude on November 20, 2016, with the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe. At the start of the new year, the Holy Father had stated: "This is the time of mercy. It is important that the lay faithful live it and bring it into different social environments. Go forth!"

The Jubilee announcement had been made on the second anniversary of the election of Pope Francis, during his homily for the penitential liturgy with which the Holy Father opened the "24 Hours for the Lord." This initiative, proposed by the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, promotes throughout the world the opening of churches for an extended period of time for the purpose of inviting people to the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The theme for this year has been taken from the Letter of St. Paul to the Ephesians, "God, rich in mercy" (Eph 2:4).

The opening of this next Jubilee will take place on the fiftieth anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Council in 1965. This is of great significance, for it impels the Church to continue the work begun at Vatican II.

During the Jubilee, the Sunday readings for Ordinary Time will be taken from the Gospel of Luke, the one referred to as "the evangelist of mercy." Dante Alighieri describes him as "*scriba mansuetudinis Christi*," "narrator of the meekness of Christ." There are many well-known parables of mercy presented in the Gospel of Luke: the lost sheep, the lost coin, the merciful father.

The official and solemn announcement of the Holy Year will take place with the public proclamation of the *Bolla* in front of the Holy Door on Divine Mercy Sunday, the Feast instituted by Saint John Paul II and celebrated on the Sunday after Easter.

In the ancient Hebrew tradition, the Jubilee Year, which was celebrated every fifty years, was meant to restore equality among all of the children of Israel, offering new possibilities to families which had lost their property and even their personal freedom. In addition, the Jubilee Year was a reminder to the rich that a time would come when their Israelite slaves would once again become their equals and would be able to reclaim their rights. "Justice, according to the Law of Israel, consisted above all in the protection of the weak" (St. John Paul II, Tertio millennio adveniente 13).

The Catholic tradition of the Holy Year began with Pope Boniface VIII in 1300. Boniface VIII had envisioned a Jubilee every century. From 1475 onwards - in order to allow each generation to experience at least one Holy Year - the

ordinary Jubilee was to be celebrated every twenty-five years. However, an extraordinary Jubilee may be announced on the occasion of an event of particular importance.

Until present, there have been twenty-six ordinary Holy Year celebrations, the last of which was the Jubilee of 2000. The custom of calling extraordinary Jubilees dates back to the XVI century. The last extraordinary Holy Years, which were celebrated during the previous century, were those in 1933, proclaimed by Pius XI to celebrate 1900 years of Redemption and in 1983, proclaimed by John Paul II on the occasion of the 1950 years of Redemption.

The Catholic Church has given to the Hebrew Jubilee a more spiritual significance. It consists in a general pardon, an indulgence open to all, and the possibility to renew one's relationship with God and neighbor. Thus, the Holy Year is always an opportunity to deepen one's faith and to live with a renewed commitment to Christian witness.

With the Jubilee of Mercy, Pope Francis focuses attention upon the merciful God who invites all men and women to return to Him. The encounter with God inspires in one the virtue of mercy.

The initial rite of the Jubilee is the opening of the Holy Door. This door is one which is only opened during the Holy Year and which remains closed during all other years. Each of the four major basilicas of Rome has a Holy Door: Saint Peter's, St. John Lateran, St. Paul Outside the Walls and St. Mary Major. This rite of the opening of the Holy Door illustrates symbolically the idea that, during the Jubilee, the faithful are offered an "extraordinary pathway" towards salvation. The Holy Doors of the other Basilicas will be opened after the opening of the Holy Door of St. Peter's Basilica.

Mercy is a theme very dear to Pope Francis, as is expressed in the episcopal motto he had chosen: "*miserando atque eligendo*". This citation is taken from the homily of Saint Bede the Venerable during which he commented on the Gospel passage of the calling of Saint Matthew: "*Vidit ergo Iesus publicanum et quia miserando atque eligendo vidit, ait illi Sequere me*" (Jesus therefore sees the tax collector, and since he sees by having mercy and by choosing, he says to him, 'follow me'). This homily is a tribute to divine mercy. One possible translation of this motto is "With eyes of mercy."

During the first Angelus after his elections, the Holy Father stated: "Feeling mercy, that this word changes everything. This is the best thing we can feel: it changes the world. A little mercy makes the world less cold and more just. We need to understand properly this mercy of God, this merciful Father who is so patient" (Angelus, March 17, 2013).

In his Angelus on January 11, 2015, he stated: "There is so much need of mercy today, and it is important that the lay faithful live it and bring it into different social environments. Go forth! We are living in the age of mercy, this is the age of mercy." Then, in his 2015 Lenten Message, the Holy Father expressed: "How greatly I desire that all those places where the Church is present, especially our parishes and our communities, may become islands of mercy in the midst of

the sea of indifference!"

In the English edition of the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* the term "mercy" appears thirty-two times. Pope Francis has entrusted the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization with the organization of the Jubilee of Mercy.

## ***List of Jubilee Years and their Popes***

1300:	Boniface VIII
1350:	Clement VI
1390:	Proclaimed by Urban VI, presided over by Boniface IX
1400:	Boniface IX
1423:	Martin V
1450:	Nicholas V
1475:	Proclaimed by Paul II, presided over by Sixtus IV
1500:	Alexander VI
1525:	Clement VII
1550:	Proclaimed by Paul III, presided over by Julius III
1575:	Gregory XIII
1600:	Clement VIII
1625:	Urban VIII
1650:	Innocent X
1675:	Clement X
1700:	Opened by Innocent XII, closed by Clement XI
1725:	Benedict XIII
1750:	Benedict XIV
1775:	Proclaimed by Clement XIV, presided over by Pius VI
1825:	Leo XII
1875:	Pius IX
1900:	Leo XIII
1925:	Pius XI
1933:	Pius XI
1950:	Pius XII
1975:	Paul VI
1983:	John Paul II
2000:	John Paul II
2015:	Francis

In the years 1800 and 1850, due to the political circumstances of the times, there were no jubilees. □

*(Vatican Radio, March 13, 2015)*

## ***Homily of Pope Francis Announcing The Year of Mercy***

This year as last, as we head into the Fourth Sunday of Lent, we are gathered to celebrate the penitential liturgy. We are united with so many Christians, who, in every part of the world, have accepted the invitation to live this moment as a sign of the goodness of the Lord. The Sacrament of Reconciliation, in fact, allows us with confidence to draw near to the Father, in order to be certain of His pardon. He really is "rich in mercy" and extends His mercy with abundance over those who turn to Him with a sincere heart.



To be here in order to experience His love, however, is first of all the fruit of His grace. As the Apostle Paul reminds us, God never ceases to show the richness of His mercy throughout the ages. The transformation of the heart that leads us to confess our sins is "God's gift," it is "His work" (cf. Eph 2:8-10). To be touched with tenderness by His hand and shaped by His grace allows us, therefore, to approach the priest without fear for our sins, but with the certainty of being welcomed by him in the name of God, and understood notwithstanding our miseries. Coming out of the confessional, we will feel God's strength, which restores life and returns the enthusiasm of faith.

The Gospel we have heard (cf. Lk 7:36-50) opens for us a path of hope and comfort. It is good that we should feel that same compassionate gaze of Jesus upon us, as when he perceived the sinful woman in the house of the Pharisee. In this passage two words return before us with great insistence: love and judgment.

There is the love of the sinful woman, who humbles herself before the Lord; but first there is the merciful love of Jesus for her, which pushes her to approach. Her cry of repentance and joy washes the feet of the Master, and her hair dries them with gratitude; her kisses are pure expression of her affection; and the fragrant ointment poured out with abundance attests how precious He is to her eyes. This woman's every gesture speaks of love and expresses her desire to have an unshakeable certainty in her life: that of being forgiven. And Jesus gives this assurance: welcoming her, He demonstrates God's love for her, just for her! Love and forgiveness are simultaneous: God forgives her much, everything, because "she loved much" (Luke 7:47); and she adores Jesus because she feels that in Him there is mercy and not condemnation. Thanks to Jesus, God casts her many sins away behind Him, He remembers them no more (cf. Is 43:25). For her, a new season now begins; she is reborn in love, to a new life.

This woman has really met the Lord. In silence, she opened her heart to Him; in pain, she showed repentance for her sins; with her tears, she appealed to the goodness of God for forgiveness. For her, there will be no judgment except that which comes from God, and this is the judgment of mercy. The protagonist of this meeting is certainly the love that goes beyond justice.

Simon the Pharisee, on the contrary, cannot find the path of love. He stands firm upon the threshold of formality. He is not capable of taking the next step to go meet Jesus, who brings him salvation. Simon limited himself to inviting Jesus to dinner, but did not really welcome Him. In his thoughts, he

invokes only justice, and in so doing, he errs. His judgment on the woman distances him from the truth and does not allow him even to understand who his guest is. He stopped at the surface; he was not able to look to the heart. Before Jesus' parable and the question of which servant would love his master more, the Pharisee answered correctly, "The one to whom the master forgave most." And Jesus does not fail to make him observe: "Thou hast judged rightly" (Lk 7:43). Only when the judgment of Simon is turned toward love, then is he in the right.

The call of Jesus pushes each of us never to stop at the surface of things, especially when we are dealing with a person. We are called to look beyond, to focus on the heart to see of how much generosity everyone is capable. No one can be excluded from the mercy of God; everyone knows the way to access it and the Church is the house that welcomes all and refuses no one. Its doors remain wide open, so that those who are touched by grace can find the certainty of forgiveness. The greater the sin, so much the greater must be the love that the Church expresses toward those who convert.

*Dear brothers and sisters,* I have often thought about how the Church might make clear its mission of being a witness to mercy. It is a journey that begins with a spiritual conversion. For this reason, I have decided to call an extraordinary Jubilee that is to have the mercy of God at its center. It shall be a Holy Year of Mercy. We want to live this Year in the light of the Lord's words: "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (cf. Lk 6:36).

This Holy Year will begin on this coming Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception and will end on November 20, 2016, the Sunday dedicated to Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe - and living face of the Father's mercy. I entrust the organization of this Jubilee to the Pontifical Council for Promotion of the New Evangelization, that [the dicastery] might animate it as a new stage in the journey of the Church on its mission to bring to every person the Gospel of mercy.

I am convinced that the whole Church will find in this Jubilee the joy needed to rediscover and make fruitful the mercy of God, with which all of us are called to give consolation to every man and woman of our time. From this moment, we entrust this Holy Year to the Mother of Mercy, that she might turn her gaze upon us and watch over our journey. □

(Vatican Radio, March 13, 2015)

## ***Christians in Syria React to Jubilee Year of Mercy***

### ***Syrian Catholic Bishop: From Hatred, Wounds, Only Mercy Can Save Us***

by Staff Reporter

**F**riday evening [March 13, 2015] during the penitential liturgy over which he presided in St. Peter's Basilica, Pope Francis announced an extraordinary Jubilee of mercy, and just a day after, Syrian Catholics are reflecting.

According to Fides, Bishop Georges Abou Khazen, Apostolic Vicar of Aleppo for the Catholics of the Latin Rite, said that as Syria enters its fifth year of conflict, "Let us ask and beg God's mercy for ourselves, for the Church here, for

all our friends and fellow travelers, and also for all those who commit atrocities in the name of God: may God himself have mercy on us and them, and touch the hearts of all."

The Franciscan bishop conveyed this sentiment, describing the feelings and expectations of the announcement of a Jubilee year dedicated to mercy.

"For all of us," he explained, "experiencing God's mercy is a vital issue. Only those who experience the mercy of God can then be merciful with others."

The innocent's pain and suffering, he added, "seem absurd, and can harden the most generous hearts, to the point of becoming wicked. Only the miracle of mercy can heal the wounds of our souls and produce fruits of conversion and reconciliation."

The bishop concluded, saying, "Pope Francis repeats that mercy is not a pastoral attitude, but is the very substance of the Gospel." □

(Zenit.org, March 16, 2015)

## ***Families, Divorce, and Children The High Cost of Family Breakdown***

by Father John Flynn, LC

**A** recent press release from the American College of Pediatricians called attention to the negative effects for children when their parents divorce.

The March 9 statement observed that a common view is that when a marriage no longer provides happiness to the spouses that divorce is the best solution and that children will be able to adapt to the new circumstances.

This is not the case, however, for most children. "In fact, the best scientific literature suggests that, with few exceptions, children fare better when parents work at mending and maintaining their marriages," the press release noted.

The college referred to two large meta-analysis studies conducted over a ten-year period. The studies showed that children of divorced parents did worse at school, had problems with psychological adjustment and with social relations.

Divorced parents also suffer, with lower incomes, a higher risk of physical illness and an increased risk of partner violence.

"Research has shown that two thirds of unhappily married adults who avoided divorce or separation ended up happily married five years later," commented college Board member and author of the statement, Dr. Jane Anderson.

The statement referred to a study published last year by the college, "The Impact of Family Structure on the Health of Children – Effects of Divorce."

It started by observing how the age at which people marry has risen significantly in recent decades, along with higher divorce rates.

In the United States, in 1970, 84% of children lived with their married biological parents, but by 2009, only 60% did so. In 2009, only 29% of African-American children lived with their married biological parents, while 50% were living in single-mother homes.

## **Single-Parent Families**

Regarding Hispanic children, 58% of Hispanic children lived with married biological parents, while 25% were living in single-mother homes.

The college also cited a recent Harvard study on single parent families which revealed that the most prominent factor preventing many children from upward mobility is living with a single parent.

The number of cohabitating couples has also risen sharply and the stability of these relationships is far less than for married couples.

The majority of divorces occur in the first fourteen years of marriage, and as many remarriages end in divorce a child can experience multiple family breakups.

The study acknowledged that each family is unique, with varying strengths and weaknesses and different resources.

"Despite these differences, divorce has been shown to diminish a child's future competence in all areas of life, including family relationships, education, emotional well-being, and future earning power," it noted.

After a divorce children tend to spend less time with their parents. Contact with the father is reduced, and as the mother may have to work longer hours to support a single-parent family, she will have less time with her children.

In terms of economic security, the study said that even five years after the divorce, mothers who remain single have only risen to 94% of their pre-divorce income, while continuously married couples have increased their income.

Therefore, children living with single mothers are more likely to live in poverty than children with married parents.

Emotional security is another important issue, with children losing contact with their father and with his grandparents and relatives.

The study also found that college students whose parents were divorced were more likely to experience verbal aggression and violence from their partner during conflict resolution. As well, children of divorced parents may have lower scores on self-concept and social relations, as well as suffering from a greater degree of anxiety and depression following the divorce of their parents.

In addition, there is increased approval by children of divorced parents of premarital sex, cohabitation and divorce.

### **Effect on Faith**

Following a divorce, children are more likely to abandon their faith. Then, as adults, those raised in step-families are less likely to be religious than those raised by both biological parents.

Parents and children aren't the only ones who feel the impact of divorce, as it also places a high economic burden on government.

The UK's Relationships Foundation just released an update of its annual "Cost of Family Failure Index." It showed that the 2015 cost of family breakdown to the taxpayer is 47 billion pounds, representing a cost to each taxpayer of 1,546 pounds a year.

"Despite cuts in government spending, the cost of family failure continues to rise," foundation added.

The 47 billion pounds represents half as much as the education budget and more than the government spends on defense. When the index began in 2009, the annual cost was 37 billion pounds.

"The six-year trend suggests there are no signs these overall upward pressures on the cost to the public purse as a result of family failure will abate in the near future," the study concluded. □

(Zenit.org, March 15, 2015)

## **Over Sixty Nations Sign Statement in Support of Middle East's Christians**

**T**he United States has joined over sixty other nations in signing a joint statement of support for the Middle East's beleaguered Christians.

Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, the Holy See's leading diplomat at UN offices in Geneva, said that "a core group composed of the Russian Federation, Holy See, and Lebanon" drafted the statement.

Citing atrocities committed by the Islamic State, the statement noted that "there are more and more reasons to fear seriously for the future of the Christian communities that have more than two thousand years of existence in this region, where Christianity has its full place, and began its long history."

"We ask all states to reaffirm their commitment to respect the rights of everyone, in particular the right to freedom of religion, which is enshrined in the fundamental international human rights instruments," the statement added. □

(Catholic World News, March 16, 2015)

### **Pope Urges Priests: Be Available for Confessions**

**“W**ithout doubt, among the sacraments, it is that of Reconciliation that best shows the merciful face of God," Pope Francis remarked in a March 12, 2015, address to participants in an annual Vatican course for confessors.

The sacraments, the Pope said, are 'the concrete way God created to move closer to us, to embrace us, without shame for our limits.' He said that confession should be a way of bringing the penitent to a greater realization of God's mercy. That mercy, he added, assumes "the just commitment to make amends."

For priests, too, confession should be a learning experience, the Pope continued. He remarked that confessors, as witnesses to the repentance of others, can be led to examine their own consciences more carefully.

"Every faithful penitent who approaches the confessional is 'sacred ground' to be cultivated with dedication, care and pastoral attention," the Pope said. He stressed that priests, in hearing confessions, should always bear in mind that they are ministers "purely by the grace of God," and it is God's mercy that they invoke.

Pope Francis encouraged priests to make themselves available for confessions especially during Lent, to help the faithful prepare - and help themselves prepare - for "the final victory of Divine Mercy over all the evil in the world." □

(Catholic World News - March 12, 2015)

# **“Calvary” and a Portrait of a Real Priest**

**by**  
**Very Reverend Robert Barron**

Father Robert Barron is the founder of the global ministry, Word on Fire, and the Rector/President of Mundelein Seminary. He is the creator of the award-winning documentary series, "Catholicism" and "Catholicism: The New Evangelization." Learn more at [www.WordonFire.org](http://www.WordonFire.org).

**S**t. Pope John Paul II said that a priest should have the heart of Christ the Good Shepherd. Far too many saccharine paintings of effeminate Jesuses in the midst of delicate lambs have conducted toward a misconstrual of this image as something sentimental and harmless. But shepherds not only had the smell of their sheep (to use Pope Francis's language), but they also wielded a stick, meant to bring back strays and to fend off threats. Real shepherding was, and is, a dirty and hard-edged business.

John Michael McDonagh's film “Calvary” shows, with extraordinary vividness, what authentic spiritual shepherding looks like and how it feels for a priest to have a shepherd's heart. The movie opens in the quiet of the confessional, where Fr. James, played by the always-compelling Brendan Gleeson, waits to receive the confession of a penitent. What he hears, however, is not a list of sins, but a brutal threat: “I will kill you Sunday next. Say we meet on the beach?” The awful words are coming from a man who had been sexually abused, across many years, by a priest and who now wants to seek his revenge by eliminating a man he admits is a good priest. The story then unfolds as Fr. James's pssion week, the stations of the cross, as he makes his way to his own Calvary.

We see immediately that he is a pastor who knows his people and their struggles. And we also see that this knowledge is not abstract or distant, but rather is born of very close and sympathetic contact with them. By foot, by boat, or by car, he visits the homes of his parishioners and addresses their practical and spiritual needs. Moreover, he is not afraid to take them to task when he sees them walking on an errant path. The people to whom he ministers - a sexually promiscuous woman, a suicidal old writer, a young man caught up in all forms of pornography, a deeply embittered and corrupt financier, an atheist doctor more cynical than Richard Dawkins, and even an imprisoned serial killer - represent the



spiritual wasteland that has emerged in Ireland in the wake of the clergy sex scandals and under the influence of postmodern indifferentism. In his dealings with these people, Fr. James is unfailingly simple, direct, and spiritually incisive, but he is met, over and over, with mockery, condescension, even contempt. And yet, wearing the soutane and collar that unmistakably mark him as a priest, he soldiers on.

Any suspicion that the man in the confessional was only making an idle threat is eliminated when Fr. James's Church is burned to the ground, in an obvious act of arson, and when his beloved dog is found with his throat cut. Understandably enough, the frightened priest, as the fateful Sunday approaches, books passage on a flight to Dublin. The only time that we see him out of his soutane and in civilian clothes is as he makes his way to the airport to escape his fate. But as he is about to board the plane, the priest decides to return to his parish, to his people, and to the encounter with his killer on the seashore. On Sunday morning, Fr. James has a telephone conversation with this daughter Fiona (he had been married and had lost his wife prior to entering the seminary). In

the course of their exchange, he says, “I think there's been too much talk about sin and not enough talk about virtue.” “What is the greatest virtue?” Fiona asks, and her father responds, “I think forgiveness has been quite underrated.”

On the strand, an angry young man, whom we have seen throughout the film, comes striding toward the priest, gun in hand, and with astonishing courage, Fr. James meets him face to face. The tortured man spits out his bitterness toward the church and then breaks into sobs expressive of anger, regret, and deep pain. All this time, Fr. James holds his ground, offering simple words of forgiveness and hope. Finally, the man presses the gun to the priest's forehead and fires.

It seems to be the grimdest possible ending, a confirmation of the world view of the most nihilist and despairing of Fr. James's parishioners. But then we remember that the movie is entitled “Calvary” and that a good priest, by definition, is an *alter Christus*, another Christ. Jesus' shepherding ministry came to its climax on a squalid hill outside of Jerusalem, when he stood his ground as the darkness and dysfunction of the world swept over him. The crucified Jesus did not battle evil on its own terms, but rather swallowed it up in the divine mercy: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Fr. James, though tempted to avoid his awful confrontation with wickedness, walked all the way up his own Calvary, and dealt with sin precisely as Jesus had. The final scene of the film is filled with Christian hope. Fr. James's daughter comes to the prison where her father's killer is incarcerated. Through the glass partition that separates them, he looks at her with anguish, but she looks back at him with a smile. Though no words are exchanged, it is clear that Fr. James's heroic witness to the most underrated of virtues has had its effect. Through the ministrations of a real priest, a green shoot appears in a spiritual wasteland; Calvary is followed by resurrection. □

# 52ND ANNUAL MARONITE CONVENTION

July 1-5, 2015  
Cleveland, OH



## CONVENTION HOTEL RENAISSANCE CLEVELAND

24 PUBLIC SQ. CLEVELAND, OH 44113  
\$129.00/night | rate valid until June 08, 2015  
for single/double/multiple quad room  
self-paying 50% off: \$13.50 per day  
one night deposit is required for all reservations.  
For reservations call: 1-800-HOTELS-1 code NAM

Hosted by St. Maron Church, Cleveland, OH  
[www.saintmaron-clev.org/categorycnham/](http://www.saintmaron-clev.org/categorycnham/)  
Sponsored by The National Apostolate of Maronites  
[www.namnews.org](http://www.namnews.org)



**Maronites in America**  
Continuing the Legacy

## OUR PRESENTERS



CHARLES ELACHI,  
PHD  
Director of NASA Jet  
Propulsion Lab



DEBORAH  
GHAZOUL-MILLS, MD  
Assistant Clinical  
Professor of Pediatrics,  
Cleveland Clinic Lerner  
College of Medicine



GEORGE HARIK,  
PHD  
One of Google's first 10  
employees.  
Founder of Imo.im, a  
social networking app.



SONIA NAJJAR, PhD  
Professor of Physiology  
& Pharmacology  
at University of Toledo



JOHN ZOGBY  
Founder of the  
"Zogby Poll" &  
Zogby companies



RACHEL MUHA  
Founder of Run the  
Race Club, a program  
for inner-city children

THU. JULY 2  
10:30am *How America Turned Me from a Lebanese Immigrant  
into a NASA Rocket Scientist*  
Charles Elachi, PhD

3:30pm *Journey of a First Generation Maronite Professional:  
Thoughts on Family Health & Wellness in America*  
Deborah Ghazoul-Mills, MD & Sonia Najjar, PhD

FRI. JULY 3  
10:30am *Our First Global Citizens & Our Path to the Future*  
John Zogby

3:30pm *Securing the Maronite Family Unit in America*

4:00pm *Success Can Be Around the Corner*  
Special MYA workshop George Harik, PhD

SAT. JULY 4  
10:30am *Forgiving God's Way: Lessons from a Family Tragedy*  
Rachel Muha

3:30pm *Commission on the Middle East: A Parallel Discussion  
on Maronite Americans & US Policy & Its Impact on  
Events in the Middle East*

## WORKSHOPS

## ENTERTAINMENT

### FRI. JULY 3

Middle Eastern Night  
Entertainment by Cleveland's own  
**Tony Mikhael & Band**  
with a performance by  
The MaronKnights

### SAT. JULY 4

Grand Banquet  
entertainment by  
famous Lebanese singer  
**Tony Kiwan**

## EXCURSIONS

### ADULTS, YOUTH (MYO), CHILDREN

#### THU. JULY 2

1:15pm

**Excursion to University Circle**  
Home to the world renowned Cleveland Museum of Art and Cleveland Botanical Garden on the campus of Case Western Reserve University, including Studio Play, where families team and play together at the Cleveland Museum of Art and Hershey Children's Garden at Cleveland Botanical Garden - enchanting botanical wonderland. Food trucks available.

#### FRI. JULY 3

1:15pm

### Cleveland Excursion: Lolly the Trolley Tour

Enjoy a grand tour of Cleveland with an exciting stop at the historic Westside Market. Adults, youth and children alike will enjoy this cultural haven with over 100 indoor and outdoor food vendors.

#### WED. JULY 1 - SAT. JULY 4

### Bucket List of Fun!

Walk or use our free trolley-green line to explore the city with friends and family or venture just outside the city to Edgewater Beach on the beautiful shores of Lake Erie. Note: Free Trolley available to Rock & Roll Hall of Fame on Saturday ONLY.

Movies & crafts will be available for children at the hotel during adult workshops. Children must be monitored by and with a parent(s) at all excursions.

## SCHEDULE

### YOUNG ADULTS (MYA)

#### WED. JULY 1

4:00pm MYA opening mass  
5:00pm Meet & Greet at City & East Hookah Bar  
12:00am MYA social gathering at Barley House

#### THU. JULY 2

1:15pm Excursion to University Circle (Trolley will return to Town Hall for MYA after excursion)  
6:00pm Theology on Tap at TownHall with Fr. Tony Massed

#### FRI. JULY 3

12:00pm MYA mass  
1:30pm MYA lunch with the Bishops  
4:00pm Workshop with George Harik

#### SAT. JULY 4

1:15pm Cleveland Excursion: Lolly the Trolley Tour  
4:00pm Theology on Tap with the Bishops

## WIN A 2015 GMC TERRAIN

\$100  
Raffle Ticket

\$27,620 VALUE



## Brooklyn, New York *Consecration of Holy Oil*



Bishop Gregory Mansour, assisted by priests and deacons and subdeacons of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn, consecrated the Holy Oils of the Church - Chrism, Holy Oil for pre-baptismal anointing, and the oil used for the Sacrament of the Sick - in accordance with the text of the Patriarchal See in Bkerke. Traditionally, the Oils are consecrated on Thursday of the Mysteries, but in order to allow for the participation of the clergy, it took place on Wednesday, March 25, 2015, at Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral in Brooklyn, N.Y.

Before the Eucharistic Anaphora, another "anaphora" of consecration of the Chrism took place. Chrism from the previous year is kept, as it has been for years, and is used for continuity by pouring some into the new Chrism (Myron). The new blessed oils are then sent to all the churches and institutions of the Eparchy to use in the liturgical year.

Monsignors James Root, Francis Marini and David George, and Fathers Rudolph Wakim, Anthony Salim, Vincent Farhat, Kamil Choueifati, Simon El-Hajj, Tony Akoury, Tony Mouanes and Sam Najjar participated. Many deacons and subdeacons assisted. Following the Consecration, the clergy and faithful in attendance joined together in the Cathedral Hall for a Lenten Luncheon. □

## Pope Francis On Palm Sunday: *Remember Persecuted Christians*



Pope Francis on Palm Sunday 2015. ©ANSA

Pope Francis remembered the persecuted Christians in the world on Palm Sunday during Mass in St. Peter's Square. Following the proclamation of the Passion according to St. Mark, Pope Francis delivered a homily, in which he reflected on the plight of all those who endure humiliation because of their faithfulness to the Gospel, all those who face discrimination and pay a personal price for their fidelity to Christ.

"We think, too, of our brothers and sisters who are persecuted because they are Christians," he said, "the martyrs of our own time." The Holy Father went on to say, "They refuse to deny Jesus and they endure insult and injury with dignity. They follow Him on His way. □

(Vatican Radio, March 29, 2015)