



The Maronite Voice



A Publication of the Maronite Eparchies in the USA

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February 2018

The Armor of God

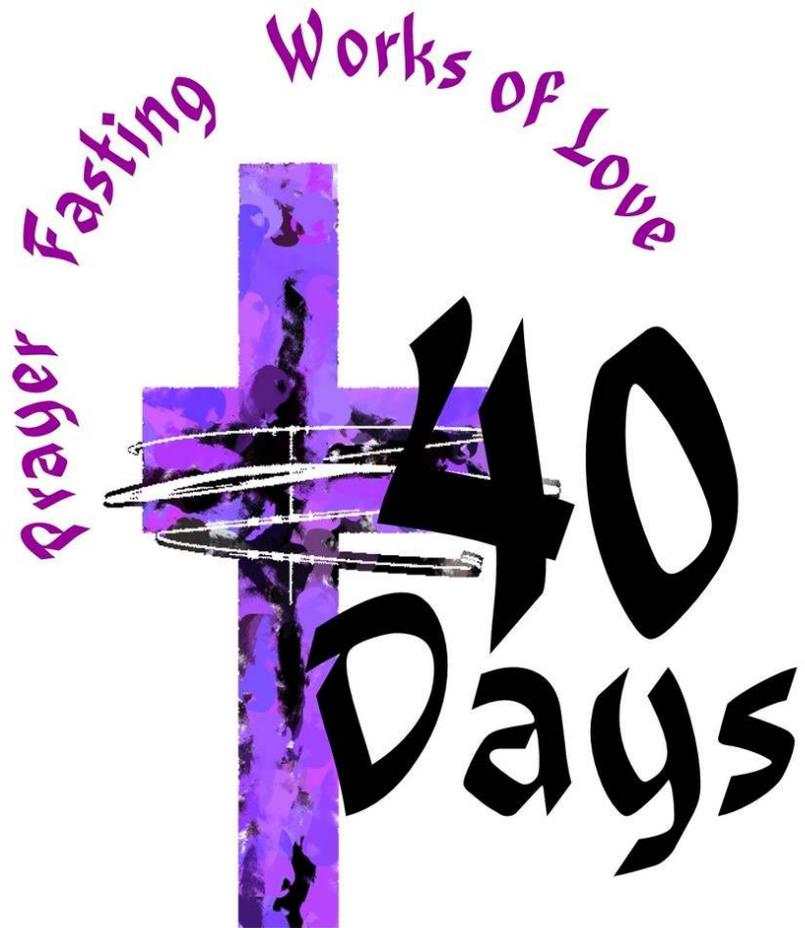
St. Paul tells us "Therefore, put on the armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground..." (Ephesians 6:13). Every year we observe the Season of Great Lent in preparation for the Feast of the Resurrection. We associate the Lenten Season with fasting, alms-giving and prayer. Each of these practices entails the giving up of something. We give up certain foods and drinks; we give away some of our wealth to the poor; we give up "free time" to spend prayer-time with the Lord.

The Scriptures mention fasting many times and link it to prayer and preparation for a mission. It seems that the holy men and prophets in the Old Testament as well as the earlier followers of Christ fasted, and prayed, before they made important decisions (Acts, Chapters 13 and 14). Jesus, himself, fasted for forty days before he began his public ministry (Matthew 4:1-11). In Matthew 6:16 the Lord says, "When you fast do not be like the hypocrites." It tells us that fasting was common among the people at that time; Jesus simply assumes that we fast. So, Christians continued to follow this custom of fasting.

We "give up" something not to just deprive ourselves but so that we can make ourselves spiritually stronger. As St. Paul explains to us, we do these things not as ends in and of themselves but in order to strengthen ourselves for the "spiritual battle" of temptations that come to us each and every day. In particular, the fasting from certain pleasures in life (whether food, lust, drink, entertainment or other physical pleasures) is meant to help us learn to better control our passions – our desires. We fast to learn discipline, to gain self-control, especially over those things that are actually within our ability to control but that we often allow to control us.

Too often for us, the focus of fasting is on the giving up of a particular food. This is good and may be where it starts, but it does not end there. The real purpose of fasting is to take our eyes off the things of this world and refocus them on God. Fasting intends to prove that we are serious about repenting from our wrong ways and strengthening our relationship with God.

Although fasting in Scriptures and in the tradition of the Church is almost always a fasting from food, there are other ways to fast. Anything you can give up in order to better center yourself on God can be considered a fast.



(Continues on page 7)

Schedule of Bishop Elias Zaidan

February 2 - 3, 2018

Pastoral Visit to St. Maron Church, Detroit, Mich.

February 4, 2018

St. Maron's Feast Day Celebration, St. Raymond Cathedral, St. Louis, Mo.

February 6, 2018

Ordination and Enthronement of Bishop-Elect W. Shawn McKnight, Jefferson City, Mo.

February 8, 2018

Maronite Divine Liturgy at St. John Seminary, Camarillo, Calif.

February 9 - 11, 2018

Pastoral Visit to St. Maron Parish, Cleveland, Ohio

February 12, 2018

Ash Monday Services, Our Lady of Mt. Lebanon Cathedral, Los Angeles, Calif.

February 25, 2018

St. Maron's Feast Day Celebration, Our Lady of Mt. Lebanon Cathedral, Los Angeles, Calif.

March 3, 2018

Dedication of the new Cathedral, Knoxville, Ten.

March 4, 2018

St. Maron's Feast Day Celebration, Our Lady of the Cedars Church, Houston, Tex.

March 5, 2018

Caritas Lebanon-USA Board Meeting, St. Louis, Mo.

March 6 - 7, 2018

Eastern Catholic Bishops Meeting, St. Louis, Mo.

March 9 -12, 2018

Our Lady of Mt. Lebanon Cathedral, Los Angeles, Calif. □

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- Most Reverend A. Elias Zaidan, M.L.M.

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Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Massabki Award

Salema DahDah, the granddaughter of one of the oldest families of St. Maron Parish in Philadelphia, Penn., was awarded the Massabki Medal by His Excellency Bishop Gregory J. Mansour on Sunday, December 3, 2018. Miss DahDah's recognition was one of the many highlights of the 125th Anniversary Weekend at St. Maron Church.

Miss DahDah has been a faithful and lifelong parishioner of St. Maron Church, as well as a long-term member of the National Apostolate of Maronites (NAM). She, along with her sister Barbara DahDah Anderson, have personally supported their Maronite legacy through their service to both St. Maron Church and to NAM. □



Maronite Convention 2018

Our Lady of the Cedars Maronite
Catholic Church

Houston, Texas

July 11 - 15, 2018

For more information
contact the NAM office
at (914) 964-3070
or visit

www.Namnews.org
www.Namconvention2018.com

North Palm Beach, Florida *Eparchy of Saint Maron Annual Clergy Retreat*



by Fr. Vincent Farhat

January 8, - 12, 2018, Bishop Gregory Mansour and the clergy of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn met once again for their annual clergy retreat held in North Palm Beach, Florida. This was time for them to gather to pray, reflect, and share and to rejuvenate after a busy and active year.

This year the retreat master was Msgr. Terry Hogan from the Archdiocese of Miami. Msgr. Hogan reminded the priests of a very basic theme they hear and talk about daily, yet something they need to repeat to themselves and their parishioners---"God is love!" We all know this and yet when we hear these words from a brother priest it makes us stop and reflect on how awesome these words are.

Being reminded of God's unconditional love for His people and especially His clergy and religious makes us take a step back and reflect on what these words really mean. Msgr. Hogan reminded us that without the love that God bestows upon each of us sinners, the power of forgiveness, compassion, and understanding becomes more and more difficult. "When we love as God loves, we are in heaven and when we refuse to love as God loves, we are in hell." It is true that it is sometimes very difficult to love all the time. This is especially true for those who are closest to us whether it be our family, friends, co-workers, volunteers or ourselves. That is why sacred scripture reminds each of us daily of the importance of love and forgiveness. To accomplish this, Msgr. Hogan began with three common threads that we

share: we stand before God, we have been chosen by God, and all of us need to be saints.

"Love bears all things, endures all things, believes all things, hopes all things. Love never fails. So faith, hope, love, these three remain-but the greatest of these is love." These words from St. Paul are key to all of us in order to understand and allow ourselves to love. As servants of God we are required to bring this love of God into those we serve. "Pray for those who you may dislike or have an issue with" Msgr. Hogan requested of us. And let us look at our own shortcomings and failures, for by doing so, we realize that the power of forgiveness becomes easier when we see ourselves for who we are- faithful servants of God who fail at times and come to ask God for forgiveness.

The week was filled with prayer, talks, and friendship, so that each of us could return to our parishes and begin to live out and spread these words that are vital to our faith. Our daily Liturgies were offered for our priests and every parish and parishioner with the intention that the love of God will spread in the hearts and minds amongst our family, friends, and parishioners.

May each of us be reminded daily to love one another so that each of us may be rewarded the forgiveness and unconditional love that God gives to us. □



Washington, D.C. Parish's 50th Anniversary



by Terry Abdo King

On the weekend of October 14 - 15, 2017, parishioners and friends of Our Lady of Lebanon Church in Washington, D.C., held the final events of the year-long celebration of its 50th year.

On Saturday, October 14, a panel discussion and town meeting were held at the Sheraton Hotel in Alexandria, Va. Along with the parishioners of Our Lady of Lebanon, the Maronite deacons and their wives attended the events as the deacon retreat was being held the same weekend.

The panel was moderated by Chorbishop Seely Beggiani. The topic was the past, present, and future of our parish. Reflecting on the past, panelists included Dr. Martha Rashid, retired professor of the George Washington University, and Rick Shadyak, Chief Executive Officer of the American Lebanese Syrian Association Charities (ALSAC), who are founding members of the parish. Mr. Shadyak's parents, Julie and Dick Shadyak, were instrumental in the building of the church and spent countless hours volunteering at our parish events. Dr. Rashid talked about the pioneers of our parish, who first met in the chapel at the Maronite Seminary. "The founders were a diverse group who met in the chapel. It was a beautiful experience, not just the chapel itself, the beauty and the spiritual environment of the Mass, but the community as well. The seminarians took care of us and treated us wonderfully," said Dr. Rashid. Dr. Rashid also discussed the many challenges of the early years. "Establishing a parish was unchartered territory, but we worked together and were helped by our successors."

Mr. Shadyak recalled his time being an altar boy and taking Arabic lessons at the church. "Our Lady of Lebanon brought such happiness to our parents. I saw my mom come to life at the church. Our Lady of Lebanon taught me the sense of community and taught me about service. I saw the great pride everyone had in their heritage."

The 1970s and early 1980s brought new immigrants to the Washington area and many new members to our parish.

Talking about the present was parishioner Maroun Metzher, who came to Washington, D.C., as a 20-year old to go to school. He left Lebanon because of the war. Mr. Metzher talked about how we had needed a bigger church building, and the challenges that building a church entailed. "It was a big project -- buying the land and deciding where the church would be." Mr. Metzher talked about the importance of keeping our children in the community. "It's important for me to keep my kids coming to this church. I see a bright future ahead."

The new church building, next door to the seminary, was completed in 2005, and is the first Catholic Church built in the District of Columbia since 1953.

Discussing the future of the parish were two of our young parishioners, Karla Feghali and Mark El-Hallal who spoke about the challenges of young people today who have busy schedules with work and school, and how important it was to keep the church in their lives. "I view the church as a place I want to bring my children up, and I want to understand what's happening in the Mass," said Ms. Feghali.

Mr. El-Hallal talked about the youth as the future of the church, what it means to be Maronite, and ideas on opportunities for the youth to get together.

After a short break, there was a lively question and answer session with the panelists and Chorbishop Beggiani. Topics included how to get the young people more involved, possible service projects, and community service.

At 6 p.m., there was a cocktail reception, followed by a gala dinner at the Sheraton.

After the Lebanese National Anthem led by Nathalie Assaf and the American National Anthem led by Paul El-Hallal, Josephine Gamen Torbay served as mistress of ceremonies. The invocation was given by Chorbishop Seely Beggiani, and speakers included Charge d'Affaires of the Lebanese Embassy Carla Jazzar, Jubilee Committee Chair Charles Feghali, Archbishop Emeritus of Washington Cardinal McCarrick, Our Lady of Lebanon Chorbishop Dominic Ashkar, and His Excellency Bishop Gregory Mansour.

Our Lady of Lebanon Church choir performed. Benediction was given by Msgr. Peter Azar, and the evening concluded with a performance by Lebanese entertainer Doris Farhat. □

Chicago, Illinois Student Leadership Summit

Three Maronite Young Adults share on their transformative experience at the FOCUS Student Leadership Summit (SLS) during the week of January 2-6, 2018. For more information about FOCUS, helpful tools for campus ministry, and their locations throughout the U.S.A. visit their website www.focus.org.



Sr. Therese Maria and Maronite Young Adults at the FOCUS Leadership Conference, Chicago, Ill., January 2 - 6, 2018.

Leah Bostany from St. Elias Maronite Church in Birmingham, Ala.

By the grace of God, over 8,000 college students and lay people gathered in Chicago for the SLS conference sponsored by the Fellowship of Catholic University Students (FOCUS). As a full-time missionary with FOCUS, it was such a joy to accompany our students as they heard from renowned speakers on the topics of authentic friendship, divine intimacy, and spiritual multiplication. The conference flows out of our duty as Catholics in the Great Commission--"Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Mt 28:19-20).

FOCUS aims to teach students the tools of discipleship and how to share and live the Gospel with their friends. By virtue of our Baptism, all are called to share the faith and invite others into our communion—and this conference truly revitalized that calling in our college-age students, as they heard throughout the week to have courage, to go against cultural norms and to pursue virtue with passion.

Truly one of the greatest blessings for me was seeing "worlds collide"--my mission work meeting my Maronite faith--as Sister Therese Maria shared her testimony and the history of our Church with 40+ of the students I minister to on a daily basis. They loved meeting her and learning practical ways to discern their own vocations! Another personal highlight for me was the Adoration and confessions that followed. The priests present heard over 2,200 confessions in a single night, and the students I talked to said it was truly a transformative time, and that God's mercy was revealed to them through our priests and consecrated religious. For many of them, it was their first confession or Adoration in years! The power of evangelization knows no bounds and is such a reminder to us that our relationships with Christ and with each other are transformed and magnified in the Sacraments, the source and summit of our faith.

Gabrielle Chahine from St. Elias Maronite Catholic Church, Roanoke, Va.

My favorite part of SLS18 was seeing examples of Catholic adults living out their faith. Hearing Jim Caviezel's speech and meeting Fr. Mike Schmitz were highlights of the week. Both were so humble despite their popularity. Caviezel spoke about the importance of humility. He said, "We must be little if we wish to be great." His speech inspired the crowd of eight thousand Catholic students to be humble warriors in our Godless and sinful culture. Fr. Mike Schmitz also preached about humility, but without words. Wherever Father went a line of students eager to get a picture with him followed, yet he managed to greet each person individually. He spoke to us all with a genuine interest in our lives and was not impatient with the crowds. Their actions remind me that no matter one's vocation, humility is the path to holiness.

Thomas Michael from Saint Teresa of Calcutta Maronite Catholic Mission, Aliquippa, Penn.

There were over 8,000 Catholics in Chicago at the FOCUS Student Leadership Summit (SLS), almost all of whom were college students learning how to spread the Gospel through leading Bible studies, intentionally investing in others, and truly loving our neighbor by willing their spiritual good. Being in this company of Catholic students shows that there are young Catholics who are ready to make Christ the very center of their lives and at the forefront of every action. Many attending may not have arrived to SLS18 with such piety, but they all left with it. The joy radiating from the participants at this conference as they together learned how to make Christ the center of their lives and how to teach others to follow Christ was, if I may say, heavenly. Many tasted the joy and peace that every human being hungers for, and that only Christ can give when we carry the cross and obey his commandments, particularly making disciples of all nations.

Many speakers like Dr. Peter Kreeft of Boston College, Bishop Robert Barron of Word on Fire, and Jim Caviezel who played Jesus in *The Passion of the Christ* came to speak and instruct the youth in how to follow Christ in everyday life and how to evangelize others so that they may also know Christ and spend eternity with him. While the idea of picking one master, the true master, Christ, and renouncing the world may seem daunting, especially for college students in this day and age where we are taught that life is about being comfortable, economically successful, and chasing earthly pleasures, we must remember what Venerable Fulton Sheen teaches us: "Our Lord did not ask us to give up the things of this earth, but to exchange them for something better." When one has a taste of the joy and fire of Christ as we did at the SLS18 conference, it seems crazy to settle for anything less and to not spread this joy to all corners of the Earth. □



Austin, Texas Youth Choir Activities



prayed over our community and our families. He chose the perfect Saint for our growing mission because St. Stephen never gave up on his people. He helped a small community grow into a larger one. ☐

Houston, Texas The Glorious Epiphany

by Nabil Joubran

Our Lady of the Cedars Maronite Church, Houston, Tex., observed the Feast of the Glorious Epiphany with an evening Divine Liturgy and Blessing of the Epiphany waters on Friday, January 5, 2018. Fathers Milad Yaghi and Edward Hanna concelebrated the Divine Liturgy, during which the Rite of the Blessing of the Waters was performed. Fr. Hanna sprinkled the faithful with Holy Water. At the end of the service, pre-filled bottles of Holy Water were distributed to all those present, so that they can bless their homes and take some to friends and family members who could not attend.

Following the Liturgy, everyone enjoyed fellowship in the Cedar Hall, where the Daughters of Mary had prepared Lebanese sweets that are traditionally offered for this feast. There were plenty of *zlebye*, *maakaroun*, and *awemet* for everyone to enjoy, with many taking home the remaining desserts. ☐



Deadline for next month's issue of The Maronite Voice is February 22, 2018.

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

Send all news, pictures and personal correspondence to:

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Email: Gmsebaali@aol.com

Digital pictures must be in "JPG" format and in high resolution (300dpi). The Maronite Voice is also available online, in PDF format, at www.stmaron.org. ☐

With angelic voices and hearts filled with God's love and compassion, Our Lady's Maronite Youth Choir in Austin, Tex., helped spread the joy of Our Lord's birth by singing Christmas songs to the residents of Senior Care Center of Onion Creek. They cut a cake and handed it out themselves to all present.

On another note, the youth welcomed His Excellency Bishop A. Elias Zaidan, Bishop of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon, with a concert, singing the traditional Maronite hymns in five languages. Bishop Zaidan was pleased with the youths' performance and it was nice hearing him sing along with them.

Many thanks to our youth for setting an example of how to be an active Christian in our society and many thanks to all parents for their involvement in their kids' spiritual lives. ☐

Charlotte, North Carolina Mission's Consecration Sunday

by Amanda Nassar

On December 16, 2017, the Maronite Mission of Charlotte, N.C., was consecrated to Saint Stephen, the first martyr in the Christian faith. His Excellency Bishop Gregory Mansour, Bishop of the Eparchy of Saint Maron, celebrated the consecration along with Father Elias Khalil, administrator, and Fr. Patrick T. Hoare, priest at St. Matthew's Catholic Church. The consecration brought early wishes from each family to come true on our journey to reach Christ. As Jesus said, follow me, a step in naming our mission has granted us a step towards Christ. Our Christmas party before the event was a night filled with dancing, music, great food, and a family-friendly atmosphere. Young children sang Christmas carols followed by a *dabke* performance from our young adult group. Santa, Mrs. Clause, the elves and reindeer made a special appearance at the end of the night. St. Stephen kicked off its first capital campaign.

Bishop Mansour brought St. Stephen into our hearts as he

NAM Annual Spring Raffle - 2018

The National Apostolate of Maronites (NAM) presents its 26th Annual Spring Raffle- 2018.

Cash Prizes

First Prize: \$10,000
 Second Prize: \$ 3,000
 Third Prize: \$ 2,000
 Fourth Prize: \$ 1,500
 Fifth Prize: \$ 1,000

This year's drawing will be held at St. Maron Church in Torrington, Conn., on April 22, 2018. This raffle fundraiser is an important part of the NAM annual budget. To purchase a personal ticket(s) or to help NAM sell tickets please contact:

Mike J. Naber, Executive Director
 NAM, P.O. Box 717
 Yonkers, NY 10702
 (914) 964-3070
 (914) 964 -3071 (fax)
 nam@namnews.org

You may purchase your tickets online using a credit card, or request it to be mailed to you. All requests have to be received by April 15, 2018. Only 420 tickets are printed. Donation is \$100 per ticket. □

The Armor of God

Continued from page 1

We can "fast" from gossip, ad language, hurtful language or destructive behavior. We give up certain pleasures and we give in to a more conforming way to the will of God. We give up food so that we help others with the money we save. We give up hatred so that we can reconcile with others. We give up sin and free time so that we give more time to God in prayer and meditation.

*The
 Season
 of
 Lent*



The Lord leads us by example and the Church gives us the guidance. We should make this Lent a positive experience in our spiritual journey. Let us imitate our Lord and invite the Holy Spirit into our lives. Let us minimize worldly distractions, the temptations of human desires so that we can make room for the Lord. Thus, we will ready ourselves for the celebration of the glorious Feast of the Resurrection, the feast of victory over sin and death. □

+ A. Elias Zaidan
 Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles



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Sling is an internet-based TV service that will allow you to access the various NOURSAT channels at a reasonable cost. The service requires an internet connection and purchase of a unit that would run on the television such as a "flash-drive" (for example, Roku). There are various packages that can be added to Arabic Mosaic for additional charges. However, with the basic Arabic Mosaic you can get for free: TV Charity, Noursat Mariam, Noursat Kids, Noursat Music, Noursat of the East and others.

You can learn more about it by logging into www.sling.com or calling 1-888-940-6789.

Uniontown, Pennsylvania Christmas Season Celebration



by Dr. Mabel George Howard

The youth groups of St. George Church in Uniontown, Penn., were very involved in several activities and events during the December 2017 Christmas holiday season. First, the Maronite Youth Organization (MYO) visited the Marquis Gardens Place Personal Care Senior Living Community to spread joy, cheer and good tidings among the elderly. The MYO entertained the Marquis residents with religious and traditional Christmas carols and distributed candy canes to them as a seasonal treat. The residents' smiles confirmed their genuine appreciation for the group's kindness.

Subsequently, the MYO traveled to Mount Saint Macrina to participate in their outdoor Christmas program. Mt. St. Macrina in Uniontown, a beautiful mansion and estate, is home to the Sisters of the Order of St. Basil the Great. It was once home to J.V. Thompson, coal baron in the late 19th

century. Mt. St. Macrina is the site of one of the largest religious pilgrimages in the United States and a renowned resource for spiritual retreats. The MYO sang religious hymns to accompany the Live Nativity presentation on the grounds. Even though it was a very cool and frosty night, the St. George MYO seemed to warm the hearts of parents, parishioners, and community members in attendance. As a gesture of "thanks," the youths were given a holiday ornament and invited into the Mt. St. Macrina Nursing Home for hot chocolate and cookies. The MYO members agreed that this was a rewarding experience -- an opportunity to bring a little happiness to others during this holy and festive time of year.

The children of the Maronite Christian Formation (MCF) also participated in the holiday festivities. On December 17, the Ladies Guild sponsored a breakfast and Christmas party for the children held in the decorated church hall. Santa Claus made a grand and exciting appearance, and lots of gifts and treats were distributed to the youths. On Christmas Eve, the MCF children appeared in a live Nativity on the church altar with a replica of the little town of Bethlehem constructed as a backdrop. Dressed as angels, shepherds, wise men, stable animals, and most importantly, the Holy Family, the children portrayed the birth of Jesus in the Christmas pageant. The church altar was adorned with Christmas trees, twinkling lights, and decorative ornaments made by the children in the MCF classes. Parishioners purchased these prayer intention ornaments, and the donations collected were given to the poor fund.

This blessed holiday season reminds us of the challenging journey and trials and tribulations that Mary and Joseph faced to bring their son, Jesus, into the world. It reminds us of sacrifices that we make for richer spiritual lives. It reminds us of our Maronite faith and gratefulness for God's blessings at Christmas and throughout the year. □



ANNUAL LENTEN APPEAL 2018



The Maronite Bishops' Annual Appeal takes place during Lent each year.

Please be generous and help with the greatest needs of your Eparchy.

HOW DO YOU MAKE A GIFT?

YOU MAY MAKE A DONATION IN YOUR PARISH:

Please bring your gift to your Maronite Parish on any Sunday during Lent in a special envelope marked "Annual Appeal."

MAIL A GIFT OR MAKE A DONATION ON-LINE:

Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn
109 Remsen Street
Brooklyn NY, 11201
www.stmaron.org

Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles
1021 S. 10th Street
Saint Louis, MO 63104
www.eparchy.org



Lenten Observances 2018

The Most Reverend Bishops Gregory Mansour and A. Elias Zaidan have issued the following Lenten guidelines for the Maronites of the U.S.:

- ★ All Maronites who are physically capable are to abstain from meat on Ash Monday (February 12, 2018) and all Fridays of Lent.
- ★ Ash Monday and the Great Friday of the Crucifixion are also days of **fasting**. Fasting in the Maronite Church involves eating and drinking nothing at all (except water and medicine) from midnight until noon. The rest of the day normal meals can be taken, but without meat. All Maronites who are physically capable are to fast on these two days.

Distribution of Ashes

All parish priests are to bless and distribute **ashes** on Ash Monday during the celebration of the Divine Liturgy as indicated in our liturgical books. This ceremony may not be celebrated on the vigil of Ash Monday (Cana Sunday). For the convenience of some faithful of the Latin Church who may come to Mass at a Maronite Church on their Ash Wednesday, ashes that were blessed on Monday may be given to them after the Mass. However, ashes are not to be blessed again on this day.

Devotion of Lenten Fridays

All parish priests are to celebrate the Benediction with the Cross every Friday of Lent except for the Great Friday of the Crucifixion. This service may be preceded by other popular devotions such as Evening Prayer (*Ramsho*), Stations of the Cross or even the Divine Liturgy. Benediction with the Blessed Sacrament should not take place on Fridays of Lent.

Personal Devotion

Clergy, religious and laity who wish to observe the more traditional Maronite practice of fasting and abstinence are encouraged to do so. That practice is summarized in the following, taken from the Synod of Mt. Lebanon (1736): *Every weekday of Lent (Monday through Friday) is a day of fasting and abstinence from meat and dairy products (eggs, butter, milk, etc.) Fasting involves eating and drinking nothing at all (except water and medicine) from midnight until noon. The rest of the day normal meals can be taken, but without meat or dairy products. Dairy products are excluded because they are animal byproducts. Saturdays and Sundays are exempt from fasting and abstaining, as are the following four feast days: St. Maron - February 9, The 40 Martyrs - March 9, St. Joseph - March 19, and the Annunciation - March 25.* □

Schedule of Bishop Gregory Mansour

February 3 - 4, 2018

Saint Maron Feast Day Celebration, Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral, Brooklyn, N.Y.

February 9, 2018

Saint Maron Feast Day, St. Anthony/St. George Church, Wilkes-Barre, Penn.

February 11, 2018

Entrance Into Lent, St. Sharbel Church, New Brunswick, N.J.

February 12, 2018

Ash Monday Service, St. Sharbel Church, Newtown Square, Penn.

February 18, 2018

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

February 23 - 25, 2018

Pastoral Visit to St. Joseph Church, Olean, N.Y.

March 2 - 4, 2018

MYO/MYA Retreat, Our Lady Star of the East Church, Pleasantville, N.J.

March 5, 2018

Caritas-Lebanon Meetings, St. Louis, Mo.

March 6 - 8, 2018

Eastern Catholic Bishops Meetings, St. Louis, Mo.

March 9, 2018

Our Lady of Lebanon Church, Easton, Penn.

March 11, 2018

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

March 12 - 13, 2018

Meetings with USCCB Bishops, Washington, D.C. □

Appeal from Caritas Lebanon

Christians in Lebanon are suffering! If you are able to relieve some of the suffering, please contact

Fr. Elias Abi Sarkis, Director

8315 South 107th East Ave.

Tulsa, OK 74133

Ph: 918-872-7400

or visit Caritas Lebanon at <http://www.caritas.org.lb>.
Checks may be made payable to Caritas Lebanon.

Thank you for your consideration. □

Of Martyrdom and Martyrs

by
Rev. David A. Fisher

Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it (Matthew 16:24-25).

Introduction

Each Christian life is a vocation, literally a calling to be a witness (martyr, μ [Greek]), as one who gives testimony to salvation in Jesus Christ. In this way we are obeying the command of Holy Scripture to let "our light shine" and not hide the light of truth under a "bushel basket."

We are not alone in giving testimony. Jesus assured His Disciples before his Ascension, as he does us that "you will receive power when the holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth " (Acts 1:8).

The Church of Martyrs and Confessors

I said to him, "My lord, you are the one who knows." He said to me, "These are the ones who have survived the time of great distress; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 7:14).

The Christian Church in its first three hundred years could be called the Church of Martyrs and Confessors. Not until the Edict of Milan issued by Constantine and his further imperial acts favoring the Christians were the followers of Jesus ever far from witnessing to Christ through the shedding of their blood.

The early church's theology of martyrdom was born not in synods or councils, but in sunlit, blood-drenched coliseums and catacombs, dark and still as death. The word martyr means "witness" and is used as such throughout the New Testament. However, as the Roman Empire became increasingly hostile toward Christianity, the distinctions between witnessing and suffering became blurred and finally nonexistent. In the second century, then, martyr became a technical term for a person who had died for Christ, while confessor was defined as one who proclaimed Christ's lordship at trial but did not suffer the death penalty ("How the Early Church Viewed Martyrs" by William Bixler in Christianity Today, issue 27).

The relics of martyrs were greatly honored in the early Church, and all who were venerated as saints had been martyred for the faith or suffered as confessors. Indeed, confessors were often sought out for spiritual guidance and blessings.

The roots of Christian martyrdom can be found in the experience of the Jewish people during the Greco-Syrian Seleucid reign of King Antiochus IV Epiphanus and the subsequent Maccabean Revolt (173-164 BC). While many joined in the armed revolt led by Judas Maccabees and his brothers, many other pious Jews chose the path of martyrdom in confronting the Seleucid king's attempt to force his pagan religion upon them. The Second Book of Maccabees tells us of one such martyrdom, that of the scribe Eleazar:

Eleazar, one of the foremost scribes, a man advanced in age and of noble appearance, was being forced to open his mouth to eat pork. But preferring a glorious death to a life of defilement, he went forward of his own accord to the instrument of torture, spitting out the meat as they should do who have the courage to reject food unlawful to taste even for love of life. When he was about to die under the blows, he groaned, saying: "The Lord in his holy knowledge knows full well that, although I could have escaped death, I am not only enduring terrible pain in my body from this scourging, but also suffering it with joy in my soul because of my devotion to him." This is how he died, leaving in his death a model of nobility and an unforgettable example of virtue not only for the young but for the whole nation (2 Maccabees 6:18-20, 30-31).

The early Church chose the example of Eleazar and those like him, rather than the path of the Maccabees in response to the persecutions of the Roman Empire. The Church's example of faith shined brightly in the lives of the martyrs and confessors and eventually found favor in the conversions of the Kingdom of Great Armenia, the Kingdom of Axum (Ethiopia) and in the fourth-century Roman Empire.

The Martyrdom of Monasticism

Saint Anthony of the Desert (also known as Anthony the Great, c. 251–356 AD) represents the transformation of ultimate Christian witness from the martyrs of blood to the martyrs of asceticism. Beginning in Egypt and spreading throughout the whole Church, men and women chose various forms of ascetically inspired lives of prayer to do battle with evil and to give all for the sake of the crown once exclusively worn by martyrs and confessors. It has been said that the desert of Egypt became an ocean of ascetics, men and women living primarily as hermits or solitaries living in close proximity for some communal moments of prayer. These Desert Fathers as they are called have left numerous short but profound sayings on the spiritual life and spiritual combat:

They asked the abbot Macarius, saying, "How ought we to pray?" and the old man said, "There is no need of much speaking in prayer, but often stretch out your hands and say, 'Lord, as Thou Will and as Thou knowest, have mercy upon me.' But if there is war in your soul, add, 'Help me.' And because He knows what we need, He shows us His mercy."

Abba Anthony said, 'Our life and our death is with our neighbor. If we gain our brother, we have gained God, but if we scandalize our brother, we have sinned against Christ.'

He also said, "The one who makes a show of his good works and publicizes them is like the one who threw seeds on the ground, 'and the fowls of the air came and devoured them up' (Matt 13:4). But the one who conceals his way of life is as one who sows in a furrow in the ground and who will reap an abundant harvest (*Sayings and Stories of the Desert Fathers, published by the Monastery of Christ in the Desert*).

It is in this period of monastic foundations that we find Saint Maron (died 410 AD), who went to the Taurus Mountains, in the region of Cyrrhus, near Antioch. He became so outstanding in his holy desire to give all in following the Lord that he attracted many followers, and those who desired to imitate his extreme ascetical life (self-denial). Even his former classmate from Antioch, the great father of the church, St. John Chrysostom, wrote to him, asking for his prayers.

“To Maron, the Monk Priest:

We are bound to you by love and interior disposition, and see you here before us as if you were actually present. For such are the eyes of love; their vision is neither interrupted by distance nor dimmed by time. We wished to write more frequently to your reverence, but since this is not easy on account of the difficulty of the road and the problems to which travelers are subject, whenever opportunity allows we address ourselves to your honor and assure you that we hold you constantly in our mind and carry you about in our soul wherever we may be. And take care yourself that you write to us as often as you can, telling us how you are, so that although separated physically we might be cheered by learning constantly about your health and receive much consolation as we sit in solitude. For it brings us no small joy to hear about your health. And above all please pray for us” (Letter to Saint Maron, St. John Chrysostom).

By the sixth century the monastic movement took hold in western Christianity, with Saint Benedict of Nursia (c.480-543 AD), who first lived as a hermit in Subiaco, outside Rome, and having attracted so many followers moved south to Monte Cassino, near Naples. He created the first formal monastery in western Christianity with his "*Rule of Life*" for monks.

Martyrdom and the Life of the Sacred Mysteries (The Sacramental Life)

When the hour came, he took his place at table with the apostles. He said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer, for, I tell you, I shall not eat it [again] until there is fulfillment in the kingdom of God."... Then he took the bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me." And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you...."

He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them and those in authority over them are addressed as 'Benefactors'; but among you it shall not be so. Rather, let the greatest among you be as the youngest, and the leader as the servant (Luke 22: 14-16, 19, 20, 25, 26).

The ancient faith is discovered in the life of the Church, which is itself the Mystery (Sacrament) of Salvation, for the Church is formed by the Mysteries (Sacraments) it celebrates, especially the Eucharistic Mystery. These most sacred celebrations of the Church constantly call the faithful to embrace their share of the Holy Cross, so that we might grow to full stature as Christians. Unlike the Protestant Reformers

who taught an extreme form of Predestination that saw salvific grace given to some and not to others, rendering the Sacred Mysteries unnecessary, in the ancient faith, the Catholic faith, our life of grace, which is the living presence of the Holy Spirit within us, flows from the Mysteries/Sacraments of Salvation.

Our Lord instructed his Apostles in the way of humility, service, self-sacrifice, and love of neighbor. He told them that this way of life is not the way of the majority of the world, but that to "do this in remembrance of me," that is in celebrating the Eucharist they would learn and grow in this way of life, the way of the Cross, the life of witnessing to Christ. The late Russian Orthodox theologian Paul Evdokimov, in his monumental work on Christian Marriage, *The Sacrament of Love*, said this about the "Mystery of Crowning":

“The wedding rite symbolically summarizes the entire married life. The betrothed have already exchanged rings; they have already been crowned and they partake of the one cup of life. It is only in the evening of life that this cup, symbolic of fullness, will be taken, when the shadow of the crowns will fall upon it... [and] the spaces of the heart that do not exist as of yet... are created by suffering. In order to be loved by the other, one must renounce oneself completely. It is a deep and unceasing ascetic practice. The crowns of the betrothed refer to martyrdom” (*The Sacrament of Love*, by Paul Evdokimov).

Evdokimov wrote these words not from the perspective of an academic thinker, but from the personal experience of living with the early death of his first wife and growing older with his second wife. As he points out, the Ritual of Crowning contains within it the call to martyrdom that is always the demand of Christian love; of witnessing to Christ to the point where I must renounce myself for the sake of the beloved and the will of God. We hear Our Lord saying to us here, as in all the Sacred Mysteries that, "unless the grain of wheat falls to the ground it remains just a grain of wheat" (John 12:24).

Conclusion

Each Christian is called in his or her own way to witness to their faith in Christ. In this witness is our share of the Cross, our path of martyrdom. Our Lord taught his Apostles and disciples (and us) through examples like the "rich young man," who was ready to give all but his riches, or when Jesus told his disciples you cannot "put your hand to the plow and look back." The Christian life, which flows from and is formed by the Sacred Mysteries, is ultimately an ascetical life, for nothing and no one but Christ can save us; as Paul reminds us, all else must be seen as rubbish.

“More than that, I even consider everything as a loss because of the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have accepted the loss of all things and I consider them so much rubbish, that I may gain Christ” (Philippians 3:8).

Holy Martyrs, pray for us! □



Going Deeper: Freedom And The Present Moment

“I am with you always to the close of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

by Sr. Therese Maria Touma, MSCL

In *Going Deeper* this month, excerpts from chapter two (Freedom and the Present Moment) of the book *Interior Freedom* written by Jacques Philippe are shared for further reflection. We are encouraged to take some quiet time to invite the Holy Spirit to guide us to prayerfully ponder some of these ideas on growing in interior freedom. According to Philippe, interior freedom requires that a person have the capacity to live and embrace the reality of the present moment. He affirms that it is only then that we can truly exercise our freedom (Pg. 81).

In today’s fast paced and hi-tech society it is difficult to be “present” in the present moment, and in particular to be attentive to the person before us. There are so many distractions, advertisements, social media, and competing voices clamoring for our attention. Moreover, it is easy to get stuck dwelling on our past mistakes and/or be bogged down by the demands and anxieties of the future. If we are honest with ourselves we realize that we have forgotten how to embrace the gift of the “now,” where God is communicating to us his life, tenderness and merciful love.

I appreciate Philippe’s thought on how the merciful presence of God is found within each instant of our lives:

“Every moment, whatever it brings, is filled with God’s presence, rich with the possibility of communion with God. We do not commune with God in the past or the future, but by welcoming each instant as the place where he gives himself to us. We should learn to live in each moment as sufficient to itself for God is there; and if God is there, we lack nothing. We feel we are missing this or that, simply because we are living in the past or in the future instead of dwelling in each second. There is something very liberating in this understanding of the grace of the present moment. Even if the whole of our past has been a disaster, even if our future seems like at a dead end, now we can establish communion with God

through an act of faith, trust, and abandonment. God is eternally present, eternally young; eternally new, and our past and future are his. He can forgive everything, purify everything, and renew everything” (Pg. 82).

In addition, Philippe provides practical insights to assist us to be aware of the “shadows of the past,” thoughts and attitudes that make us fret about old disappointments and choices. He aptly suggests that we should genuinely ask God’s forgiveness for past mistakes and grow from them; he goes on to advise that while seeking to make restitution for any injury caused, we should humbly surrender things into God’s hands with confidence, living in the present and trusting that God will work everything for our good (Pg. 86).

When we are overwhelmed by thoughts of how much we still have to do, feeling threatened by our inadequacies, or paralyzed by the feelings that we are not good enough, we are encouraged to make an act of faith and hope, such as: *thank you, God, for everything. I trust in you.* Philippe emphasizes that nothing can please God more than our coming to him with child-like trust and relinquishing to him the messiness of our daily lives:

“I firmly believe that you can bring good out of everything I have lived through. I want to have no regrets, and I resolve today to begin from zero, with exactly the same trust as if all my past history were made up of nothing but faithfulness in holiness” (Pg. 87).

To avoid the mistake of burdening the present with the future, Philippe suggests that we reflect on the lesson contained in the Gospel (Matthew 6:25-34) about abandonment to God’s providence, and to ask for God’s grace to live it. He notes that living in the present and relying on God’s providence does not mean being negligent or imprudent. Indeed, we need to plan for the future and consider tomorrow’s undertakings. But we should do it without agonizing or being anxious.

(Continues on page 14)

How Has My Life Changed As a Subdeacon's Wife?

by Marie Christine Daou

Nadim was a seminarian in Ghazir, Lebanon, for five years before the war situation forced St. Maron seminary to close down. Marie Christine was discerning to become a Nun at the Holy Family Convent in Bikfaya, Lebanon. God's plan for us was different than ours. In August of 1990 these two strangers met in a very strange way, fell in love and got married. Our vocation was to raise a family that love and praise God.

Nadim and I were very active in our parish. We proudly raised our now two adult children in St Anthony Church in Lawrence, Mass. They were in the children youth group, the choir and our son played on the church basketball team for many years. He started serving the altar since he was



five years of age.

During that time, Nadim was discerning his vocation as a deacon, many obstacles came our way just to find out that God's timing is perfect. Twenty years later Nadim's call was vivid and clear to serve God and the church community. He was ordained on November 8, 2014, to the Order of Subdeacon.

As a Subdeacon's wife, I have my own call to support my husband and my own ministries to serve God and the church in a different way. Nadim and I took on the responsibilities of the religious education school in our church for five years before he started the formation for the diaconate program. We have our children's support every step of the way.

Our daughter Nadine was our last minute substitute teacher and our son Elie was helping in the administration part. He is our technology guy to go to. They took responsibilities when we went on our retreats.

I have been involved in many ministries like visiting the homebound and the sick in the parish, prayers groups, prayer shawl group. With Fr. Elie Mikhael's guidance we started the Bereavement ministry at St Anthony Church. It is a very special and unique ministry. We are touching people's heart during the time of loss. It is time

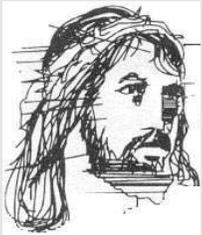
consuming but I have the support and understanding of the whole family. Honestly I feel I am getting more than I am giving in the ministry. The joy that I get from helping and comforting the family during the time of loss of a loved one is indescribable.

How Has My Life Changed As a Subdeacon's Wife?

The minute I said my "yes" to God to support Nadim in his call, my life is in consistence changes. When I let Jesus take over and "mold me like a soft clay" as my spiritual director told me, I was filled with peace and serenity knowing that I am not in charge anymore. I can enjoy the ride trusting that my father up in heaven will take care of me and take my worries and replace them with peace, take my pain and replace it with love, takes my hurt and replace it with joy. I trust that He would not let me walk alone, he will always be carrying me and my family.

Finally, the best part is that Nadim and I pray the office together, which brings us closer to each other and to God to be united with him.

We are looking forward to our last year of formation and the ordination of Nadim to the diaconate in the fall of 2018. □



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

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

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

or

Fr. Dominique Hanna, Director
Eparchy of Saint Maron
Office of Vocations
c/o St. Joseph Church
6025 Glenridge Drive
Sandy Springs, GA 30328

or

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

Reflection on Vows *Yes, Lord, I Choose to Give All*



Sister Natalie Sayde will take First Vows as a Maronite Servant of Christ the Light on the Solemnity of St. Joseph, March 19, 2018, at St. Anthony of the Desert Church in Fall River, Mass. Please keep Sister in your prayers.

by Sr. Natalie Sayde Salameh

As a consecrated religious sister, I will profess three vows – obedience, chastity and poverty. I would like to share on what these vows mean to me. When lived to the utmost, the vows are a radical gift of ourselves to God and His Church. He is the One who makes the living of these vows not only a possibility but a deep joy, for He is the One who lived them first. We strive to follow the example of the obedient, chaste and poor Christ – a very counter-cultural message in today's age, as Jesus was in His.

Present in all of us since the sin of Adam and Eve, is the need to dominate and have our own way; to gratify our senses and pleasures in whatever way we wish; and to possess and amass as much as we can of the goods of this world. The three vows of obedience, chastity and poverty, when lived, counter these strong inclinations.

Obedience was the hallmark of our Maronite saints, and is the crowning jewel of all the vows. Why? Because the greatest gift that God gave to mankind is our freedom to choose. He gave us our will. In the vow of obedience, we say, "I give this gift back Lord, because I love You, and I want only what You will." For a consecrated religious, the will of the Lord is expressed through the directives of the lawful superior. We strive to conform to that will in every way (in all things but sin, of course). This is the ultimate gift of self that we could possibly give God. "It's no longer what I will, but Your will, O Lord." Jesus was the obedient One, par excellence, consumed with the will of His Father, and not His own will.

Christ the Bridegroom has such an unconditional, exclusive love for His Bride, the Church. The Church will always be His radiant lily, His Bride without spot or blemish,

His earthly Kingdom. In the vow of chastity, we are responding to this unconditional, exclusive love of Christ, by saying, "Yes, Lord, I will love You exclusively as well, You alone will claim the affections of my heart, so that I can love with Your love, Your Bride, the Church and her children, my brothers and sisters." Married couples are called to a unifying love that is open to life, for the procreation of children. As a chaste religious, often called a spiritual mother, I am called to reproduce the image of Christ in the souls of my spiritual children. This can only be done by living out the grace of chastity, which God bestows, then empowers and sustains with His infinite love.

"Jesus is the pearl of infinite price!" These were the words Bishop Gregory said to me when I first met him while discerning religious life. In the vow of poverty, I am publicly professing that Jesus is indeed the only treasure that life affords. He alone is my wealth, my possession, my portion. I lack nothing. In Jesus, I am complete. In the vow of poverty, I give Jesus the supreme pleasure of His heart, that of looking after me and seeing to all my spiritual and temporal needs as He sees fit. I am free!

I am very happy to be taking this important step in my vocation journey, and more than happy to lay down my life in the service of our Maronite Church and our people. □

Going Deeper: Freedom And The Present Moment

Continued from page 12

Often this added stress thwarts us from putting our hearts into what we need to do and prevents us from being open to the grace that God desires to offer us (Pg. 87).

It is no surprise that things don't always happen in life as we anticipate or hope. Philippe points out that most of our anxieties and worries turn out to be entirely imagined. He writes: "That difficulties we anticipated become very simple in reality; and the real difficulties are things that didn't occur to us. It's better to accept things as they come, one after another, trusting that we will have the grace to deal with them at the right moment, then to invent a host of scenarios about what may happen—scenarios that normally turn out to be wrong."

If there was one take-away point from Philippe's chapter, it is to do our best in being mindful of the present where God is, and to be intentional in putting our whole heart into whatever we are doing in that moment.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, give us the grace to be mindful of your loving and merciful presence in each moment of our lives. May we strive to do your will, knowing that it is in doing your will that we find true peace and freedom. Amen.

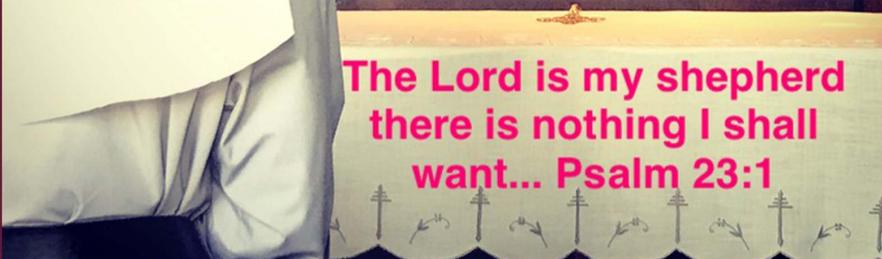
If you have any comments or questions regarding this topic and/or other recommended spiritual resources please email Sister Marla Marie Lucas:
sister@maroniteservants.org. □



Women's Discernment Retreat

April 6-8, 2018

**How is God calling me to serve through the gift of my life?
What is my mission in the life of the Church?**



The Lord is my shepherd
there is nothing I shall
want... Psalm 23:1

Hosted by the Maronite Servants of Christ the Light

WHAT *Prayerfully reflect on the Lord's will for your life and how to discern your call.*

WHO: Women between the ages of 18-35 who are open to discerning marriage or religious life or single life of service.

WHERE: Mother of the Light Convent, 856 Tucker Rd Dartmouth MA 02747.

WHEN: Friday April 6 at 7pm with supper. Concludes Sunday April 8 at 3pm.

COST: Suggested donation \$100 to help cover some expenses.
Includes all meals and accommodation.
Please bring your own toiletries and towels.

Register by: Sunday March 25

Contact: To register for the weekend or to find out more information:
Sister Marla Marie Lucas sister@maroniteservants.org or 202-213-7700

The weekend will include:

- *Divine Liturgy, Confession, Eucharistic Adoration
- *Talks on Religious life, Marriage & Vocational Discernment
- *Fellowship with other young women

www.maroniteservants.org

A Letter from Galilee

by Archbishop Georges Bacouni

I send this letter from Mount Carmel in Haifa in Galilee, close to the holy sites of the Prophet Elijah.

When I was 12 years old, I expressed my desire to become a priest to my father. He replied by shouting: “No, get out of my face!” I thought it was the end of my vocation.

Two years later, my father passed away, and suddenly I found myself in charge of my family, being the eldest boy. As a poor Christian, my dreams were limited to studying, working and, later, getting married.

But the Lord had other plans for me. In 1990, the last year of the civil war in Lebanon — where I was born and grew up — the Lord called me again to priesthood. The archbishop of Beirut accepted me as a seminarian even though I was 28 years old, a late vocation. I resigned from the bank where I had been working for more than ten years and started my theological and philosophical studies.

I was ordained in July 1995. Ten years later, in 2005, I was elected and ordained bishop to serve the Melkite Greek Catholic Archeparchy of Tyre in the south of Lebanon. And now I have been serving in Israel as archbishop in the Melkite Archeparchy of Akko, Haifa, Nazareth and All of Galilee for more than three years.

What a blessing, to be in this particular part of the world — where Jesus was born, grew up, proclaimed the Good News, was crucified and rose from the dead.

The Lord entrusted me with the flock of his homeland and to follow in the footsteps of the apostles.

When I was taught how to meditate on a Gospel passage, I was asked sometimes to imagine the places where Jesus lived: Capernaum, Tiberias Lake, Nazareth, Jerusalem.

Now I know all these places, and they remind me of the historical facts. But Jesus is not only part of the history, he is still alive and in the midst of his church.

When you enter Peter’s house in Capernaum, where Jesus healed the paralytic; when you see the place where he fed five thousand people; when you are in a boat in the middle of the lake where he walked on the water; and [at] many other holy sites, I assure you that you feel you are sharing the experience of the apostles and the crowds. You feel privileged being Christian. Visiting these sites — let alone living there — is a spiritual retreat. Many of my predecessors used to say, “I am the archbishop of Jesus.” I don’t dare say



Melkite Greek Catholic Archbishop Georges Bacouni works in his office in Galilee (photo: Corinna Kern).

that, but it’s true in a way that the bishop in Galilee is responsible for Jesus’ hometown.

What a blessing! But in the same time, it’s a huge responsibility and difficult mission for many reasons.

First, Arab Christians from all denominations make up no more than 1.7 percent of the population in Israel. Almost half are in my eparchy. And yet, Catholics, Orthodox, evangelical Protestants and many religious orders from all over the Christian world maintain a foothold in the Holy Land — particularly in Jerusalem.

To not be of the majority is a challenge in and of itself, but to be divided makes our mission more difficult and weakens our testimony.

Second, what we as a church experience here is common with Christians all over the world: We have a crisis in our families, as youth participation declines — in part because Sunday in most places is not a day off — and gaps widen between generations, as a unified concept of values erodes.

I always share with the people of my eparchy that the pilgrims who come from abroad are not only here to visit the holy places, but to meet the local Christians and find in them genuine witnesses of the faith.

The third challenge is the plight of Christians living in the Middle East. While we are free to practice our faith in Israel — and we live in peace with other communities of faith in our society — the situation of our brothers and sisters in neighboring Syria, Iraq and Egypt has been harmful to the church in the whole region.

I keep saying that, since I became bishop, the blessings have increased and the cross has become heavier, but in all things the Holy Spirit is filling me with grace and encouragement to keep on in my mission.

I made a plan to visit, with the parish priests, all the families of our eparchy in their homes over a period of five years. So far, almost half of them have been visited. I have seen that many remain firm in their faith, even if they don't attend church. They love their church; they are proud of their Christianity. Every year, during Advent, their generosity surprises me during the fundraisers for the suffering Christians in Syria or Iraq.

A few months ago, representatives of the leaders of the European Catholic Episcopal Conferences met in Jerusalem. I told them that the last part of my liturgical vestments worn during my ordination was the *omophorion*, a woolen shoulder garment. It is a symbol of the lost sheep. I told them that my call and my main task are to look after the lost sheep and be a good shepherd. This means that the bishop is not a businessman, nor a politician, nor a general manager.

All kinds of pastoral work give me great joy, and being close to the faithful, sharing with them their joyful or painful times, achieve the goal of my consecration. They want to know who their bishop is, and that it's easy to reach him.

In our tradition, we have married men who can be ordained priests. The seminarian has to decide before being ordained deacon. When I decided to stay single, my main reason was to have enough time to dedicate myself to the mission. Instead of having my own family, I have a wider one. All the faithful with whom Jesus entrusted me are my family, with all the joy and pain that I experience. I don't pretend that I have succeeded, but at least this is my vision.

I have lived, worked and served in many countries in the Middle East. Many Christians have left, but many others remain. We are the salt and the light of the region. In Galilee, Jesus taught: "Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you falsely because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven. Thus they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matt 5:11-12).

This is happening nowadays mainly in Syria, Iraq and Egypt. It's difficult for a Christian to stay there, but we need to stay. We are Arabs. This is also our land, and if God put us in this part of the world, it is because he has a purpose: To be witnesses, to proclaim the Good News and to be peacemakers. It's important to say to humanity that we can live together regardless of our various religions.

Part of the discipleship is persecution. The Lord told us: "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me" (Matt 16:24).

At the same time, and also in Galilee, Jesus promised that surely he would always be with us, to the very end of the ages. He is always with us and there is no need to be surprised; the cross and persecution are part of our daily life.

Near our cathedral in Nazareth, we have a chapel we call the Church of the Synagogue. There, Jesus read from the Prophet Isaiah: "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring glad tidings to the lowly, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners, to announce a year of favor from the Lord" (Is 61:1-2).

Let's keep doing this in the parishes, monasteries, schools, universities, hospitals, orphanages, social centers, prisons, with the refugees and all the needy. In this way, we will prepare for Christmas in Galilee, in the Holy Land, in the Middle East and in all our countries. □

Taken from ONE Magazine, December 2017

Damascus, Syria ***Divine Providence***

Thank you, dear friends, for your continual friendly support and spiritual presence which mean so much in these days when the world appears to have forgotten us.

A bomb fell on my bed on Monday, January 8, 2018, shortly after one o'clock in the afternoon, just when I was getting ready to have a nap. A few seconds at the wash basin saved my life! My bed is riddled with shrapnel holes. Providence is watching over His servant. Now I am exiled as it were, like the twelve million Syrian refugees who have nothing left. The damage is high: the doors of the Cathedral, forty-three windows and small doors need replacing, and there are many holes to be filled in. Water and fuel tanks have to be repaired, the electricity supply reinstalled and a car is completely ruined.

Violence seems to be the only master...and the innocent are sacrificed every day.

Our priests try to keep up their morale: They cried in joy when they saw me emerging alive from the smoke and the destruction. Thank you, Lord, again for this new beginning: My life is in your hands.

In prayerful union with you before Our Lady of Peace.
+ Samir NASSAR
Maronite Archbishop of Damascus, Syria

On January 22, 2018, an estimated nine people were killed and eighteen were injured in Damascus, Syria. The bombing targeted the *Bab Touma* and *Al-Shaghour* districts, which are historically Christian areas, and several churches were damaged as well. Nobody has yet claimed responsibility for the attacks. A bomb also hit the Maronite Archdiocesan complex and Cathedral in Damascus, causing severe damage and knocking out water and electricity. □

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Directed by Bishop Elias Zaidan

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For more information please email Chorbishop sharbel Maroun at

MaroniteMercyPilgrimage@gmail.com or call at 612-379-2758

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Scranton, Pennsylvania *Children's Christmas Party*



From left: Madeleine Mackarey, Ari Friedman, Sophia Iorio, Santa Claus, Anna Ligorio, Lauren Friedman, Lena Ligorio, Joseph Hazzouri and Cosmo Ligorio.

by Msgr. Francis Marini

On Sunday, December 17, 2017, following the celebration of the Divine Liturgy offered by Msgr. Francis Marini, Pastor, Saint Ann Maronite Church in Scranton, Penn., held its Annual Children's Christmas Party in the Church Hall. The children who attended received a gift along with a "meet & greet" from Santa Claus and enjoyed the holiday gathering with families and friends of the parish. A special appreciation going to Maria Mackarey and the Sodality for organizing and setting up the event.

Holy Name Society Christmas Party

On Sunday, December 17, 2017, Saint Ann Maronite Church held its Annual "Holy Name Society, Father, Son, Friend"



Christmas Party at *The New Café* in Summit, Penn. All fathers, sons and friends of the parish were invited to attend.

Doumlet Saadi, parishioner and owner of *The New Café* provided a classic menu of Lebanese and Mediterranean dishes for all to enjoy. A memorable framed portrait of all the men of the Holy Name Society was presented by Subdeacon Said Douaihy and is now displayed inside the church hall. A special appreciation going to the Doumlet Saadi and the men of the Holy Name Society for organizing and setting up the event. □

Food For Thought

Every life counts: from the beginning to the end, from conception to natural death.

Pope Francis, January 19, 2018

There is no better medicine to heal so many wounds than a heart capable of mercy.

Pope Francis, January 20, 2018