



# The Maronite Voice

A Publication of the Maronite Eparchies in the USA



Volume XII

Issue No. I

January 2016

## Weak Words Are Not Enough

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

“**W**eak words are not enough.” So began the Congressional Testimony of Genocide expert, Dr. Gregory Stanton. Along with Carl Anderson of the Knights of Columbus, Bishop Frank Kalabat of the Chaldean Church, and others, he came to express grave concern for religious minorities, among them Yezidis, Christians and others, at the hands of the so-called Islamic State (ISIS).

Pope Francis has also expressed clearly: “Today, we are dismayed to see how in the Middle East and elsewhere in the world many of our brothers and sisters are persecuted, tortured and killed for their faith in Jesus. In this third world war, waged piecemeal, which we are now experiencing, a form of genocide is taking place, and it must end” (Speech in Bolivia, July 9, 2015).

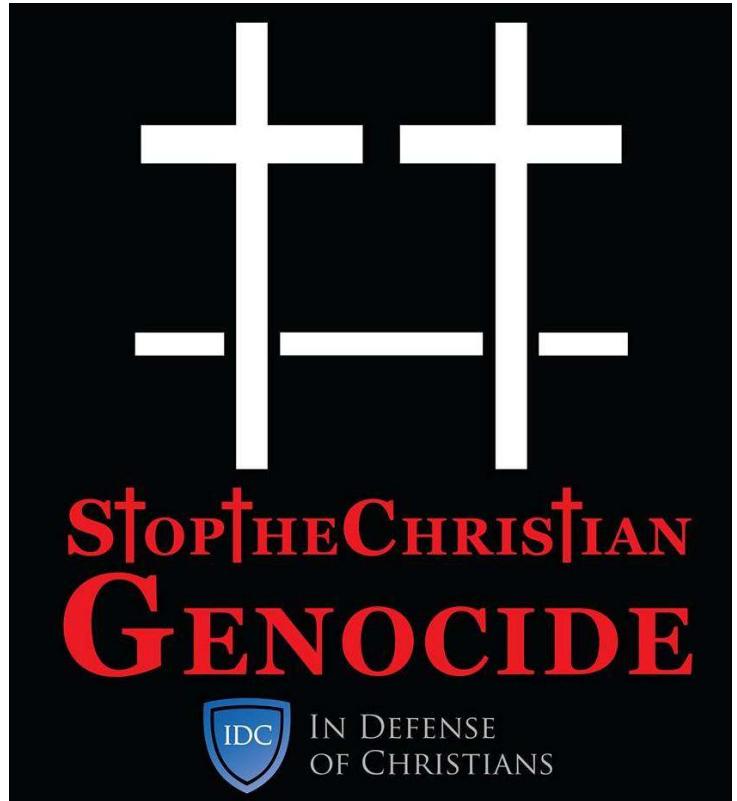
Dr. Stanton pointed out that what is happening now is not “ethnic cleansing,” nor is it just “crimes against humanity.” These words were used in our most recent past, and were not strong enough to stop the **genocide** in Rwanda, Bosnia, Kosovo or Darfour. In fact, **genocide** is a crime on a massive scale compared to other crimes against humanity and implies an intention to completely exterminate the chosen group.

With impunity, ISIS has swept through Syria and Iraq and taken defenseless Christian villages and those of other minorities. In fact, they have taken aim at minorities, as well as their own co-religionists, in fact, anyone who thinks differently from them. While we understand that the crimes of ISIS and other extremists represent a crisis within the larger political crisis, Dr. Stanton and others came to urge the United States Congress to formally declare the systematic destruction of these ancient communities, and those who stand with them, **genocide**.

Article II of the 1948 United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment for the Crime of Genocide defines it as:

*Any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group, as such:*

(a) *Killing members of the group;*



- (b) *Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;*
- (C) *Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;*
- (d) *Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;*
- (e) *Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.*

Since the beginning of their swift and destructive rise, ISIS has committed all of these, in whole and in part, through a calculated and deliberate system of atrocity. Furthermore, their intent can be clearly seen as outlined in their propaganda, which calls for the eradication or subjugation of those who do not conform to their ideology.

*(Continues on page 20)*

## Schedule of Bishop Elias Zaidan

**January 2 - 3, 2016**

Visit of St. Sharbel Relics, Sts. Peter and Paul Mission, Simi Valley, Calif.

**January 4 - 5, 2016**

Visit of St. Sharbel Relics, St. Ephrem Church, El Cajon (San Diego), Calif.

**January 6, 2016**

Pastoral Visit to Our Lady of the Cedars Church, Fairlawn [Akron], Ohio

**January 8, 2016**

Visit of St. Sharbel Relics, St. Jude Church, West Covina, Calif.

**January 10, 2016**

Visit of St. Sharbel Relics, St. John Maron Church, Orange, Calif.

**January 11 - 15, 2016**

Annual Eparchial Clergy Retreat, Scottsdale, Ariz.

**January 15 - 17, 2016**

Visit of St. Sharbel Relics, St. Joseph Church, Phoenix, Ariz.

**January 20 - 24, 2016**

Visit of St. Sharbel Relics, Our Lady of Mt. Lebanon Cathedral, Los Angeles, Calif.

**January 31, 2016**

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

**February 6 - 7, 2016**

Pastoral Visit to Our Lady's Church, Austin, Tex.

**February 8, 2016**

St. Raymond Cathedral, Saint Louis, Mo.

**February 9, 2016**

Feast of St. Maron and Pastoral Visit to Our Lady of Lebanon Church, Norman, Okla. □

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### **Maronite Convention 2016**

Our Lady of Lebanon Church

San Francisco, California

**July 6 - 10, 2016**

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

## Boston, Massachusetts Genealogy Sunday

by Randa Yazbeck

**O**n Sunday, December 20, 2015, the children of the Our Lady of the Cedars of Lebanon Church in Jamaica Plain [Boston], Massachusetts, learned about the Genealogy of Jesus while serving the *Qurbano* [Liturgy]. Following the Divine Liturgy, a breakfast brunch was served, and the children were entertained with caroling and crafting supported by the parents and the parishioners. Homemade baked goods were delivered to the local Orphanage Home. □



# THE ORDER OF SAINT SHARBEL



## Perpetual Members

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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). □

# North Jackson, Ohio Jubilee Holy Door



The Basilica and National Shrine of Our Lady of Lebanon in North Jackson, Ohio, commemorated the beginning of the Jubilee Year of Mercy on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception with the blessing of the Holy Door. Bishop Elias Zaidan, Bishop of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon, designated the Basilica Shrine as a special place of pilgrimage during this Holy Year.

The southeast portal was designated as the Holy Door and was blessed prior to the celebration of the Liturgy. More than one hundred faithful gathered before the doors and observed the incensing and blessing with holy water. The door bears three coats of arms: those of the Holy Father, Bishop Elias Zaidan and the Basilica. The door was tapped three times and once the door was opened, the faithful entered as the choir sang the Litany of the Saints.

It was a very moving experience, and the Christmas lights gave the Basilica Shrine a grand and festive atmosphere. It is hoped that many will come to visit Our Lady's beautiful Shrine during the Holy Year of Mercy to experience grace, blessing, mercy and love. □

*the Deadline is...* **Deadline for next month's issue of *The Maronite Voice* is January 25, 2016.**

*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:

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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). □

# Utica, New York

## Dedication of the Chapel of Our Lady of Mercy



Helen Abdoo, the "matriarch" of St. Louis Gonzaga Church, dresses the altar that was donated by Saint Mary's Guild.

by Chorbishop John D. Faris

**W**ith the blessings of Bishop Gregory John Mansour, on December 13, 2015, Chorbishop John D. Faris opened the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy with the dedication of a chapel under the patronage of Our Lady of Mercy. The celebration, which took place entirely in the church hall, was attended by 250 people.

In his homily, Chorbishop Faris reflected that no matter what we have done, no matter how many times we have "messed up," no matter how much hurt we have caused, when we show up at the door of our home, they must take us in—we're family. This is what the Church is called to be.

"For too long the Church has been portrayed and even perhaps perceived itself to be a courtroom with judges. It has been a Church in which each of us appears before the judge, pleads our case, and waits for a judgment. Pope Francis calls for the Church to be a place of mercy in which each of us is welcomed and finds compassion. A place where we can meet God, experience His love, realize that we are precious and cherished."

After the Divine Liturgy, the MYO, under the direction of Lisa Barkett and Roseanne Ciaccia, offered a Lebanese breakfast for all the attendees. The occasion was also an opportunity for the parish to celebrate the birthday of our beloved Helen Abdoo.

The renovated chapel, occupying that space that was formerly used as a stage in the church hall, will be used for the daily celebration of the Divine Liturgy as well as smaller liturgical celebrations. The renovated space also includes a multi-purpose conference room and a restroom for handicapped.

### Young Adults Fundraiser

In November 2015, the Maronite Young Adults (MYA) from St. Louis Gonzaga Church in Utica, N.Y., made a



From left: John Paul Salamy and Josh Lewis, MYA co-chairs, and Chorbishop John D. Faris. Not pictured: Zachary Lewis, event co-chair.

generous \$2,000 donation to the Children's Miracle Network Hospitals (CMN) at Faxton St. Luke's Healthcare. The MYA hosted a Fall Social Hour with proceeds benefiting CMN. The event took place at Aqua Vino Restaurant and Banquets, where there were prize drawings and live entertainment by Anthony LaBarbera.

"The Saint Louis Gonzaga, Maronite Young Adult Group chose CMN as the charity to donate to since we have family ties to CMN and have known several miracle children over the years," said Zachary Lewis, the event co-chair. "We were pleased that our Fall Social Hour was a great success and hope that our small donation has an impact on saving and improving the lives of children in our community."

MYA is a movement for young adults who choose to learn more about their Catholic faith. MYA puts together the tools and programs needed to help its members understand the Christian virtues and then put them into practice. MYA achieves these goals by conducting a series of activities including spiritual activities, social events, community service, and fund-raising activities to support various programs in the Church. □

### Food For Thought

Let us not be afraid. Let us allow ourselves to be embraced by the mercy of God who is waiting for us, and who forgives everything. Nothing is sweeter than his mercy.

Let us allow ourselves to be caressed by God. The Lord is so good, and he forgives everything. Through the intercession of Mary Immaculate, may mercy take hold of our hearts and transform our entire life.

Pope Francis

## Warren, Michigan Prayer Service for The Middle East



by Dianne Bartolomeo

**O**n Friday, November 20, 2015, Archbishop Allen Vigneron invited all the Eastern Rite Catholics and non-Catholics in the Archdiocese of Detroit, Michigan, to join him for a prayer service at the Cathedral of the Most Blessed Sacrament. Those assembled invoked the intercession of the Holy Mother of God, Queen of Peace, as they prayed for peace in the Middle East. The Saint Sharbel Church Choir in Warren, Mich., participated for the third year by performing a Marian hymn. □

## Children's Christmas Party



**T**he children of the Religious Education Classes of Saint Sharbel Church in Clinton Township [Warren], Mich., gathered around the Altar on December 13 and December 20, 2015 as they participated in the Liturgy and sang Christmas Carols in English and Arabic.

The annual Children's Christmas Party was held on Friday, December 18, at the Fern Hill Country Club in Clinton Township, Michigan. The 200 guests enjoyed food and entertainment by Luigi, while Chorbishop Alfred Badawi, Pastor, and members of the MYO provided music and sang Christmas Carols. The highlight of the party was the much anticipated visit by Santa Claus. Many thanks go to Rima Michael, Rena Solomon, Rita Abi Younis and Noha

Ajini for coordinating the event and providing the festive atmosphere. □

## Minneapolis, Minnesota Christmas Play



Chorbishop Sharbel Maroun with children of St. Maron Parish in Minneapolis, Minn.

by Joannie Moses

**T**he children of Saint Maron Church, Minneapolis, Minnesota, have acted out the Story of the Nativity of Jesus annually for twenty-five years on the Sunday before Christmas. All students of Maronite Christian Formation from preschool through sixth grades are offered parts; major roles are played by second graders.

This year, we started with our special prayer of commitment kneeling before the beautiful altar/crèche display designed by Amira Farah of the parish. The stunning display calls each person into the birth of Jesus, the dedication of souls like that of Saint Sharbel, and the beauty of the Bethlehem hillside similar to that of Lebanon.

We discussed how God gives different talents to different people and how we should each develop our talents for the glory of God. That is what each one of the dozens of students did to portray the birth of Jesus. This is a personal journey for each of them – whether they are one of the four narrators, one of the Holy Family, a king, or a donkey. With clusters of little stars, angels, innkeepers, shepherds, and animals, each takes pride in his own little part to make up the whole.

Classic Christmas songs led by the talented teenaged organist, Miriam Hitti, and singer, Rosie Irani, are interspersed in the script to involve the onlookers. Parents and parishioners of all ages immerse themselves in the story of the nativity through the children's innocent portrayal and relearn the glory of Jesus' coming.

During the season of Great Lent, the children will portray the Passion of Christ with grades three through six taking the major roles in the story. May every person spread the love of Christ throughout the coming new year. □



## Springfield, Massachusetts Breakfast With Santa



by Kathy LaBella

**O**n Sunday, December 13, 2015, St. Anthony Maronite Church in Springfield, Mass., held its annual Breakfast with Santa in the Cedars Banquet Hall. The event was open to the whole parish. Parishioners were asked to bring a toy for the annual Toys for Tots collection.

## Fall Harvest



On November 21 - 22, 2015, the women's guild of St. Anthony Church in Springfield, Mass., held its annual Fall Harvest Bazaar. Forty-eight vendors participated, showcasing their hand-crafted articles of clothing, arts and crafts, and jewelry. Homemade Middle Eastern food and pastries were available to eat at the food court or to take out. □

## Effective Ways YOU Can Help your Eparchy!

Please consider the following ways in which you can help the Maronite Church!

### Planned Giving: Consider Your Legacy

This is a creative way to support the Church. Planned giving can involve contributing through your **will**, **insurance policy**, or **retirement assets**. You can also create a **Charitable Gift Annuity** to get a tax deduction and provide yourself with a steady source of income!

#### Suggested wording for a bequest to the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn:

"I give and bequeath to the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn, located in Brooklyn, New York, \_\_\_\_\_% of the residue of my estate [or: the sum of \$\_\_\_\_\_]."

#### Suggested wording for a bequest to the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles:

"I give and bequeath to the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles, located in St. Louis, Missouri, \_\_\_\_\_% of the residue of my estate [or: the sum of \$\_\_\_\_\_]."

### Tax-Smart Giving of Appreciated Stock or other Assets

The gift of an asset such as common stock or mutual fund shares is a smart way to make a contribution and receive maximum tax benefits based on the value of the asset. Gifts of other appreciated assets such as land, antiques, and homes, can also be utilized as potential gifts with valuable tax benefits. Gifts of these assets should be considered on a case-by-case basis.

*For more information on any of these options, please contact Stewardship Director John F. Kurey, Esq., MBA, at 718-237-9913 or 314-231-1021; or by e-mail at [saintmaron@yahoo.com](mailto:saintmaron@yahoo.com) or [maroniteswest@yahoo.com](mailto:maroniteswest@yahoo.com).*



# Maronite Vigil For Life & March For Life 2016



Join us as we pray, march and send a peaceful message to the world!!  
**ALL LIFE IS SACRED and WORTHY OF RESPECT !!!**



The Office of Family and Sanctity of Life of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn is pleased to host the third Maronite Vigil For Life on Thursday Jan 22nd at Our Lady Of Lebanon Maronite Church located on 7142 Alaska Avenue N.W. Washington D.C. 20012.

All are invited to join us for an evening of prayer, worship and fun.

**Thursday, January 21, 2016**

**5:00 pm - Arrival at OLOL Church  
6:00pm - Dinner  
7:00pm - Welcoming talk  
8:00pm - Eucharistic Adoration  
9:15pm - Activities, Music & Movie**

**Friday, January 22, 2016**

**8:30am - Maronite Divine Liturgy  
9:30am - Breakfast  
11:00am - Maronite Catholics For Life meet at the Starbucks on the corner of Indiana Ave. & 7th St.**

For those who wish to attend the Vigil For Life at the National Shrine at 6:30pm, you are welcome to join us afterwards at Our Lady of Lebanon Church.

**Men and women sleep in different locations.  
Please bring your sleeping bags & plan accordingly.**



**Please RSVP with number of people attending  
no later than Monday, January 19th.  
Contact Joseph and Simona Hallal  
by phone at (540) 815-2104 and (540) 798-8450  
or by email at [jhallal@verizon.net](mailto:jhallal@verizon.net)**

**We kindly ask for a free will donation  
of \$20 per person to cover the cost of the meals**

**Witness  
to  
Life**

## Houston, Texas Christmas Celebration



by Nabil Joubran

Saturday, December 19, 2015, was a day dedicated to Christmas events at Our Lady of the Cedars in Houston, Tex. For two hours in the morning, the Pastoral Center was buzzing with children of all ages decorating cookies, making a variety of Christmas crafts, writing Christmas cards to be sent to the elderly or sending letters to Santa. There was a station where the Parish youths were taking photos of the children in front of a Christmas background, then printing them on the spot so the children could place them on frames and decorate them.

In between stations, children could pick out ornaments from a "Jesse" tree with pre-printed prayers and inspirational messages. The little ones were treated to story-telling time as a youth volunteer read Christmas stories in a quiet room in the back of the Pastoral Center.

After the children had finished all the stations, they gathered in the Cedar Hall and sang traditional Christmas songs as they anxiously awaited the arrival of Santa Claus, who showed up with gifts for everyone.

Later in the day, and after the evening Liturgy and Christmas Novena, the youth and adult choirs treated the entire parish to a performance of Christmas hymns and songs, prior to a Christmas dinner.

The day came to an end after dinner, with its success attributed to the hard work of many volunteers, the generosity of those who donated the food, and most importantly to all those who participated and enjoyed the various events. □

## Food For Thought

Let us pray for Christians suffering persecution, often amid the shameful silence of so many. □

Pope Francis



## Fayetteville, North Carolina Parade of Saints



by Marie Vanheusen

**O**n the weekend of December 12- 13, 2015, St. Michael the Archangel Parish in Fayetteville, N.C., was blessed with a visit by Bishop Gregory Mansour, Bishop of the Eparchy of Saint Maron. During his visit the Bishop was called on to bless the beautiful new stained glass windows that were installed earlier this year and the new baptismal font.

During the summer of 2014, Father Sam Najjar, Pastor, was approached by a few parishioners who asked purchasing and installing stained glass windows in memory of deceased family members. Father decided to announce to the parish that this was a possibility only through donations; parish operating/building funds could not be used. He opened up to everyone the opportunity to purchase nine windows, and hoped that perhaps within a year we could raise enough money to complete them all. The money was raised within thirty days, and many parishioners still wanted to contribute on a smaller level. Father then opened up the possibility of contributing to an additional large community window over the entrance to the church. Again the donations came quickly, and eventually enough was raised to replace not just the community window but also window panels in the church's doors. The artisans, Pickle Studios, who made the windows, worked hard to design, create and install them before the Sunday of the Glorious Resurrection of Our Lord.

On Saturday, December 12, the youth of St. Michael Parish presented a "Parade of Saints" for Bishop Mansour, depicting all the saints found in the stained glass windows as well as a few others revered by Maronites around the world. As part of the program, the Bishop gathered all the children around him as he blessed and consecrated the new baptismal font and then circled the church, blessing each window and the parishioners of St. Michael.

Bishop Mansour preached on Saturday and at the liturgy on Sunday about the unparalleled examples of motherhood and fatherhood found in the Virgin Mary and her spouse Joseph. His words brought new light to the immense devotion and sacrifice that both gladly embraced in their lives of service to Our Lord Jesus Christ from birth. Following the Liturgy, a meal was served in the Social Hall. □

# Glen Allen, Virginia Concludes Its Charitable Drive



Theresa Shibley (right), Christmas Tree Coordinator, William Shulleeta and Maureen Carley deliver the Christmas gifts to Kika Husejnovic, Pre Arrival and Match Grant Coordinator of the Church World Service/ Immigration and Refugee office.

**S**t. Anthony Maronite Catholic Church in Glen Allen (Richmond), Virginia, began and ended its 2015 charitable and religious activities with children in mind. St. Anthony's annual Golf Tournament, held on Sunday, September 20, raised \$15,000 for orphaned children in Lebanon. The golfers and their supporters enjoyed the day which ended with a Lebanese meal.

The annual Benefit Dinner held on December 6 also was widely supported. About 360 people attended the dinner, and \$21,000 was sent to Bishop Gregory Mansour who then sent it on, earmarked "orphaned children," to His Beatitude Patriarch Rai.

The annual Christmas Star program began the Sunday after Thanksgiving. Parishioners chose stars from the tree in the vestibule of the church and brought in their gifts by December 20. Over 200 gifts and needed items were distributed to people through the Church World Service/ Immigration and Refugee Richmond office, and to other disadvantaged families in the Richmond area.

The final charitable drive of the year celebrated children also. On December 20, to celebrate Genealogy Sunday, the teens presented a nativity play prior to the Liturgy, and each Sunday School class sang Christmas carols. During the Liturgy, the high school youth read the readings and petitions, carried the gifts and ushered. Afterwards, the parish hosted a Breakfast with Santa. Each child brought a canned food item to benefit the Central Virginia Food Bank. □

## Jubilee Year of Mercy

**O**n Tuesday, December 8, 2015, Feast of the Immaculate Conception, His Holiness Pope Francis inaugurated the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy. The purpose

of the Jubilee Year of Mercy is to bring more mercy and love into our world.

The theme of mercy has been strongly accentuated in the life of the Church, starting with Pope Paul VI. Pope John Paul II underlined it in his encyclical on Divine Mercy, the canonization of St. Faustina and the institution of the Feast of Divine Mercy.

In order to celebrate more fully the Jubilee Year, Bishop Gregory Mansour has designated seven parishes as places of pilgrimages:

- Our Lady of Mercy in Worcester, Mass.
- Saint Louis Gonzaga in Utica, N.Y.
- Our Lady of Victory in Pittsburgh, Penn.
- Our Lady of Lebanon in Washington, D.C.
- Saint Joseph Church in Atlanta, Ga.
- Saint Jude Church in Orlando, Fla.
- Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral in Brooklyn, N.Y. □

## Schedule of Bishop Gregory Mansour

### January 2 - 3, 2016

Pastoral Visit to Sts. Peter and Paul Mission, Tampa, Fla.

### January 9 - 10, 2016

Pastoral Visit to Heart of Jesus Mission, Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

### January 11 - 15, 2016

Annual Clergy Retreat, North Palm Beach, Fla.

### January 17, 2016

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

### January 21 - 22, 2016

Vigil and Pro-Life March, Washington, D.C.

### January 24, 2016

Pastoral Visit to Our Lady of Lebanon Church, Washington, D.C.

### January 31, 2016

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

### February 6 - 7, 2016

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

### February 12 - 13, 2016

Ordination of Joseph Abi Saad to Diaconate, St. Anthony Church, Lawrence, Mass.

### February 14, 2016

Pastoral Visit to St. George Church, Dover, N.H.

### February 15 - 28, 2016

Visit to Catholic Relief Services' Outreach to the Poor and Refugees, Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt. □



*The Maronite Voice* would like to take this opportunity to express its gratitude to Their Excellencies Bishop A. Elias Zaidan, Bishop of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon, and Bishop Gregory Mansour, Bishop of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn, as well as to its readers and all Maronite faithful for their support throughout the year. We pray that 2016 will be a year filled with God's Peace and Blessings to all. □

# The Beautiful Shepherd of John 10:11

**"I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep"**

*The Gospel of John 10:11*

*The biblical figure of shepherd-king is totally fulfilled in Jesus Christ in the sacrificial dimension, in the offering of life. In a word, it is brought about in the mystery of the Cross, that is, in the supreme act of humility and oblate love - Pope Benedict XVI.*

## Introduction

"**B**eauty will save the world," is a quote from the great Russian writer Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821-1881). In his book *The Idiot*, it is "attributed to the main character, Prince Myskin. The prince, an epileptic Russian nobleman, serves as a Christ-like figure, who stands apart for his innocence and even naiveté."<sup>1</sup> Dostoyevsky's own religiosity has long been a topic of those interested in his life and work; while coming from a family background of Russian Orthodox and Ruthenian Catholic heritage, and while remaining an official member of the Orthodox Church, his personal religious interests were quite eclectic. However, what stands out is his attachment to the person of Jesus Christ; he once wrote, "even if truth lay outside Christ, I should choose to remain with Christ rather than with the truth."<sup>2</sup> It should be said, he found no greater truth in his often turbulent life.

Pope Francis in his first encyclical *Lumen Fidei*, reflects on Dostoevsky's understanding of salvation in Christ, as portrayed in his work *The Idiot*:

In Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*, Prince Myskin sees a painting by Hans Holbein the Younger depicting Christ dead in the tomb and says: "Looking at that painting might cause one to lose his faith." The painting is a gruesome portrayal of the destructive effects of death on Christ's body. Yet it is precisely in contemplating Jesus' death that faith grows stronger and receives a

<sup>1</sup> Staudt, R. Jared, Crisis Magazine, July 10, 2013, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Jones, Malcolm V. *Dostoevsky and the Dynamics of Religious Experience*, Anthem Press, 2005, p.7.

dazzling light; then it is revealed as faith in Christ's steadfast love for us, a love capable of embracing death to bring us salvation. This love, which did not recoil before death in order to show its depth, is something I can believe in; Christ's total self-gift overcomes every suspicion and enables me to entrust myself to him completely.<sup>3</sup>

Alexander Solzhenitsyn (1918-2008), who was for a time in prison and later expelled from Soviet Russia for his writings against the totalitarianism of the Soviet government, said during his Nobel Prize speech that, "Dostoevsky's remark, 'Beauty will save the world,' was not a careless phrase but a prophecy."<sup>4</sup> Saint John Paul II, also had reference to this prophetic sentence. When writing to artists he reminded them that, "It has been said with profound insight that, "beauty will save the world."<sup>5</sup>

## A Brief Consideration of the Language of the New Testament

There are two realities that are often overlooked when reading the Sacred Scriptures; first that we are normally reading them in translation, and secondly that the language of the Bible, be it the Hebrew of the Old Testament or the Greek of the Old and New Testament, were at that time living languages that developed and changed just like our own modern languages.

<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, *Lumen Fidei*, June 29, 2013, no. 16.

<sup>4</sup> Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Noble Laureate for Literature Speech, 1970.

<sup>5</sup> St. John Paul II, Letter to Artists, April 4, 1999, no. 16.

The Koine Greek<sup>6</sup> of the New Testament may be understood as Near Eastern Greek or semitized Koine, strongly influenced by Aramaic and Hebrew. Chronologically it would be classified as that of the early Christians era (1st to the 3rd centuries A.D.), and even here we can distinguish between the popular Greek of Mark and the cultured Greek of the Letter to the Hebrews.<sup>7</sup> Therefore the New Testament, and all of Sacred Scripture, is rich in its linguistic heritage, and its depth of meaning can often get lost in translation.

## John 10:11

While almost all translations of John 10:11 speak of the "Good Shepherd," the original Greek uses the word *kalos*, meaning also "beautiful", or even Lovely. Therefore the translation could also be "I am the beautiful shepherd," and this beautiful shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. While *kalos* is used here as an adjective, in its verb form it conveys the meaning of attractiveness, expressing how that which is beautiful draws the attention and devotion of those who encounter it.

(Continues on page 19)

<sup>6</sup> Koine Greek means common Greek, as compared to philosophical Greek. It is the Greek spread around the world by Alexander the Great's conquests and for many centuries was the universal language of anyone with an education or anyone involved in trade.

<sup>7</sup> For a more in-depth explanation see, *The Blackwell Companion to the Bible*, edited by David E. Aune, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 2010.

# Pope Francis and True Mercy

by  
**Bishop Robert Barron**

**H**aving covered Pope Francis's triumphant journey to the United States, I can confidently tell you that the news media are in love with the Vicar of Christ. Time and again, commentators, pundits, anchorpersons, and editorialists opined that Pope Francis is the bomb. They approved, of course, of his gentle way with those suffering from disabilities and his proclivity to kiss babies, but their approbation was most often awakened by this Pope's "merciful" and "inclusive" approach, his willingness to reach out to those on the margins. More often than not, they characterized this tenderness as a welcome contrast to the more rigid and dogmatic style of Benedict XVI. Often, I heard words such as "revolutionary" and "game-changing" in regard to Pope Francis, and one commentator sighed that she couldn't imagine going back to the Church as it was before the current pontiff.

Well, I love Pope Francis too, and I certainly appreciate the novelty of his approach and his deft manner of breathing life into the Church. In fact, a number of times on the air I commented that the Pope's arrival to our shores represented a new springtime after the long winter of the sex abuse scandals. But I balk at the suggestion that the new Pope represents a revolution or that he is dramatically turning away from the example of his immediate predecessors. And I strenuously deny that he is nothing but a soft-hearted powder-puff, indifferent to sin.

A good deal of the confusion stems from a misinterpretation of Francis's stress on mercy. In order to clear things up, a little theologizing is in order. It is not correct to say that God's essential attribute is mercy. Rather, God's essential attribute is love, since love is what obtains among the three divine persons from all eternity. Mercy is what love looks like when it turns toward the sinner. To say that mercy belongs to the very nature of God, therefore, would be to imply that sin exists within God himself, which is absurd.

Now this is important, for many receive the message of divine mercy as tantamount to a denial of the reality of sin, as though sin no longer matters. But just the contrary is the case. To speak of mercy is to be intensely aware of sin and its peculiar form of destructiveness. Or to shift to one of the Pope's favorite metaphors, it is to be acutely conscious that one is wounded so severely that one requires, not minor treatment, but the emergency and radical attention provided in a hospital on the edge of a battlefield.

When Pope Francis was asked, in a famous interview two years ago, to describe himself, he responded, "a sinner." Then he added, "who has been looked upon by the face of mercy." That's getting the relationship right. Remember as well that the teenaged Jorge Mario Bergoglio came to a deep and life-changing relationship to Christ precisely through a particularly intense experience in the confessional. As many have indicated, *Papa Francesco* speaks of the devil more frequently than any of his predecessors of recent memory, and he doesn't reduce the dark power to a vague abstraction or a harmless symbol. He understands Satan to be a real and very dangerous person.

When Pope Francis speaks of those on the margins, he does indeed mean people who are economically and politically disadvantaged, but he also means people who are cut off from the divine life, spiritually poor. And just as he reaches out to the materially marginalized in order to bring them to the center, so he reaches out to those on the existential periphery in order to bring them to a better place. In speaking of mercy and inclusivity, he is decidedly not declaring that "I'm okay and you're okay." He is calling people to conversion. As my mentor, Cardinal Francis George, said, "All are welcome in the Church, but on Christ's terms and not their own."

Nowhere has the confusion on this score been greater than in relation to the Pope's famous remark regarding a priest with a homosexual orientation, "Who am I to judge?" I would wager that 95%

of those who took in those words understood them to mean that, as far as Pope Francis is concerned, homosexual activity is not really sinful. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Pope was responding to a hypothetical involving a priest with same sex attraction, who had fallen in the past and who is now endeavoring to live in accord with the moral law, a sinner, in a word, who has been looked upon by the face of mercy.

So as we quite legitimately exult in the beauty of Pope Francis's unique style and theological emphasis, let us not turn him into an advocate of an "anything goes" liberalism. As St. Augustine long ago reminded us, *misericordia* (mercy) and *miseria* (misery) are two sides of the same coin. □

## About the Author

*Bishop Robert Barron is an Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and the founder of Word on Fire Catholic Ministries.*

## Appeal from Caritas Lebanon

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



## **Vocations from a Wife's Perspective**

*by*

**Marie VanHeusen, St Michael the Archangel Parish, Fayetteville, N.C.**

In November of 2013, my husband, Chuck, was ordained a Subdeacon in at St. Michael the Archangel Fayetteville, N.C. Since then, I was asked to write about the effect my husband's ordination has had on my life. As I reflect upon this, especially amidst the season of the Glorious Birth of Our Lord, it seems as if my husband's call to serve is interwoven with all the "joyous births" of the vocations of our entire family. I find it difficult to limit the changes in my life to Chuck's ordination alone. When I look back, I see a flow of God's grace throughout our family as each of us came to realize in a more profound way where God has called us, and as we sought to say "yes" to our particular vocations.

When Chuck and I were married over forty years ago, we were both very young. Although we lacked many things, we both loved God and knew we wanted to live our married lives faithfully. Truthfully, we had no idea the depth and fullness of God's plan for our marriage. Our first few years together we lived near family, but then Chuck decided to enlist in the Army and life began to take many new twists and turns. We struggled in many ways as we experienced the birth of our children; job changes; moving to different states and different countries and other life-changing transitions. Throughout we were often unaware of the constant grace of the Holy Spirit in our lives. There were many times when the world tried to turn our eyes away from God's plan for us, pulling our focus to materialism and "worldly" ambitions. Now, we give many thanks to God as we can see His loving patience as we matured in life and in our faith.

Although the Army life brought with it many transitions and moves, our family was always active in every parish we ever joined. Chuck and I, at one point along the way, also decided to begin to pray for religious vocations within our family and the church, thinking this only

meant praying for priests and sisters. In 1999 our oldest son, Eric, realized his vocation to be a husband and father when he married his wonderful wife, Jennifer. Then, over eight years ago, Chuck and I were thrilled when our youngest son, Ian, told us he felt called to the priesthood. We were filled with joy and thanksgiving. Within just a couple of years, Tresa, our daughter, shared with us her response to God's call to leave her career in the military and devote her life to Him as a religious sister. Then within a year of Tresa's decision, Chuck acknowledged that God was calling him to serve as a subdeacon and, God willing, eventually as a deacon. Looking back over the course of these events, I see a beautiful pattern as one joyous "yes" after another was leading our family to ever more clarity of God's plan in each of our lives.

Now all these years later, Eric and Jennifer have blessed our family with five beautiful grandchildren, Ian was ordained a priest this past June, Tresa continues to discern her place in the Maronite Church as a sister, and Chuck is a subdeacon studying for the diaconate. Following the Sunday of the Annunciation, I was pondering Mary's Fiat and the amazing power of God to transform our lives when we respond to him with our individual "Yes." Suddenly, I was filled with a fuller understanding of the meaning and power of vocation. I thought of my oldest son, Eric, and his loving, humble and faithful devotion to God through his vocation as husband, father, son and brother. My mind's eye took me to Blessed Francis Massabki, who reminds me of my son Eric, and I was overwhelmed with the amazing realization that each "yes," whether it is to "love, honor and obey one's spouse," or to serve at God's Altar, is beautiful in His eyes. I find that each time we affirm God's plan we empty out the worldly compartments in our lives, and



The VanHeusen family

as soon as we empty them God fills them with his grace!

So you are probably wondering where is the answer to the question, "How has my life changed?" The simple answer seems to be that our lives are constantly changing! Chuck's role as subdeacon has certainly magnified the sacred purpose of the sacrament of our marriage for me, especially in the way of daily drawing me ever closer to Our Lord. We were always happy to serve in our parish before, and are overjoyed to continue in this service with all its many blessings and challenges. May God Bless all the holy vocations in the Maronite Church, especially during this blessed season of "Yes!" □



# **Reflection on My Renewal of Vows: Transfigured by Mercy**

**by**

**Sr. Therese Maria Touma, MSCL**

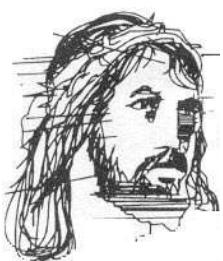
In response to God's captivating invitation to lay down my life, in love, and for love, I joyfully renewed the total gift of myself in service to God and His people on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, December 8, 2015. My sole desire is to be "wholly consumed" (*holo*-meaning "total") by love, through faithfully living the evangelical counsels of obedience, chastity and poverty, in order that I may reflect Mercy Himself, Jesus, who was obedient, chaste and poor.

"Let us not be afraid. Let us allow ourselves to be embraced by the mercy of God who is waiting for us, and who forgives everything. Nothing is sweeter than his mercy. Let us allow ourselves to be caressed by God. The Lord is so

good, and he forgives everything. Through the intercession of Mary Immaculate, may mercy take hold of our hearts and transform our entire life." Pope Francis

As I reflect over the past six years of my religious formation journey, I cannot but give thanks to God for his merciful and transforming love at work in my life and those of my sisters! I see his gracious providence in all things, especially lately in the mission trips and retreats our community has offered, to materially reach out in sharing Jesus' love and healing with young and old. Pope Francis' insightful words on God's unconditional mercy and forgiveness resonates deep within my heart. Indeed, nothing is sweeter than experiencing first-hand his life-giving mercy. "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good. His mercy endures forever" (Psalm 136:1). I thank God each day for the gift of his limitless mercy, which has strengthened me in my vocation of love and spiritual motherhood.

In imitation of Mary, our sisters are called as servants of the Lord to radiate the light of Christ's merciful love and hope by offering the gift of their spiritual motherhood to nurture God's life in the hearts of children, families, and people of all ages through the works of mercy in service to the Maronite Church (Maronite Servants' Rule no. 3).



## **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

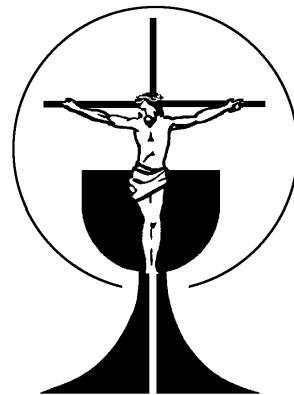
Our Lady of Lebanon Seminary  
7164 Alaska Ave. NW  
Washington, DC 20012



Sr. Therese Maria Touma renews her vows. Mother Marla Marie is standing next to her.

are materially poor and lead them closer to Jesus in a weekly Bible sharing and/or prayer gathering.

If you are interested in reaching out in service opportunities or would like us to come and offer a recollection day or a retreat day please contact Mother Marla Marie at 508-996-1753. □





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## **Roanoke, Virginia Youth Activities**



by Edward A. Lynch, Ph.D.

**O**n November 6, 2015, the Youth Group from St. Elias Maronite Church in Roanoke, Va., performed Lebanese dances for the delegates gathered for the Appalachia Regional Model Arab League. The conference took place at Hollins University in Roanoke. Wearing costumes that had arrived only minutes before their performance, the girls added a welcome cultural component to the conference and set a positive and energetic tone to the entire weekend.

The Model Arab League conference was sponsored by the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations, a non-profit, non-governmental, educational organization dedicated to improving American knowledge and understanding of the Arabic-speaking world. Mrs. Linda George is head of the youth group and arranged for their appearance. Dr. Ed Lynch, Hollins professor and St. Elias parishioner, organized the conference. Fr. Kevin Beaton, Pastor, was in attendance. □

## **Olean, New York Annual Festival**

by Lisa Zlockie

**S**t. Joseph Church of Olean, N.Y., just celebrated our annual *Mahrajan*, which is in our seventh decade, and is our third festival on the new church grounds.

The weather was beautiful, and attendance was high. Patrons were treated to Lebanese and Polish cuisine, as the church was the former Transfiguration Parish in a heavily populated Polish neighborhood. Entertainment was provided by our own members, Alex Cole as a solo guitar/singer, DJ services by Paul Sawaya, polka music by Larry Lewicki, a former student of both Transfiguration and St. Joseph, and belly dance by Etin Zlockie, who has been dancing since the



age of three, following in the footsteps of four generations before her.

Tours of the newly renovated church were offered and well received. St. Joseph Church is proud to celebrate its heritage and appreciated the support and assistance of the area churches and community. □

## **Fall River, Massachusetts Christmas Concert**



Cast of the Living Nativity: Andro Alkhawande, Ava Assad, Matthew Beaudry, Gabriel Boulos, Melia Bouramia, Muina Bouramia, Catherine Brownell, William Brownell, Leah Dunn, Caroline Durost, Jack Durost, Lexi Filipe, Sydney Filipe, Daniel Howayeck, Matthew Howayeck, Mya Pacheco, Kate Pontes, Maya Pontes, Bella Simones, David Simones and Music Director Evan Massoud.

by Subdeacon Brian Dunn

**S**aint Anthony of the Desert, Fall River, Mass., held its Third Annual Christmas Concert on December 12, 2015, for a standing-room only audience. The sanctuary of the church was transformed into a concert stage for the choir and the children of the Living Nativity.

(Continues on page 20)

# **In His Urbi et Orbi Message Pope Francis Highlighted World Conflicts but Stressed that Where God Is Born There Is Peace, Hope and Mercy**



“Christ is born for us, let us rejoice in the day of our salvation!” Those were Pope Francis’ words to the City and the World this Christmas Day from the central loggia of St. Peter’s Basilica.

On a clear, sunny day and on the dot of 12 noon the Holy Father greeted the thousands of people gathered in the square below.

“Where God is born, hope is born. Where God is born, peace is born,” the Holy Father said. “And,” he continued, “where peace is born, there is no longer room for hatred and for war.”

Yet, he noted, where the incarnate Son of God came into the world, tensions and violence persist, and peace remains a gift to be implored and built. These tensions included those between Israelis and Palestinians, and Pope Francis prayed for a resumption in direct dialogue so that peace in the region would be given a chance.

The Pope also prayed that agreement reached in the United Nations would succeed in halting violence in both Syria and Libya.

Pope Francis went on to appeal to the international community to do what they could to end atrocities in countries, such as Iraq, Yemen and sub-Saharan Africa.

On the Pope’s mind on this Christmas Day were also those affected by what he called “brutal acts of terrorism, particularly the recent massacres which took place in Egyptian airspace, in Beirut, Paris, Bamako and Tunis.”

During his message the Holy Father’s attention turned to whom he called “our martyrs of today,” those brothers and sisters, he said, “who in many parts of the world are being persecuted for their faith...”

African nations such as, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi and South Sudan, were encouraged by Pope Francis to promote a dialogue that leads to a “sincere spirit of reconciliation and of mutual understanding.”

Also those who endure cold, poverty, and rejection including migrants, child soldiers, women who suffer

violence, and the victims of human trafficking and the drug trade and those whose struggle to find employment were not forgotten by the Pope.

Speaking in Italian and before taking his leave, Pope Francis recalled the Holy Year of Mercy, saying it was a year to be merciful to one another, because he added “that is how we make peace flourish.” □

(Vatican Radio, December 25, 2015)

## **A Dark Night: Christmas Letter from the Maronite Archbishop in Syria**

by Sr. Theresa Aletheia

This is a short Christmas letter from Maronite Archbishop Samir Nassar in Syria, translated by Sr. Margaret Charles Kerry, FSP. May we keep these suffering people in our prayers this Christmas.

### **Christmas Oasis**

Most of our Maronite families of Damascus, Syria, live away from the Cathedral in Bab Touma, the only Maronite church in Damascus. Since 2007 we have celebrated Liturgy with Syriac Catholics in Douwaylaa and Jaramana and Greek Catholics in Kachkoul.

Coming together for an hour and a half a week is sufficient to form a parish. Despite the war, economic and social problems, our priests and faithful have launched three projects to develop three chapels in the three aforementioned areas. This is in order to better connect the community, to organize catechesis and Bible evenings, and for the catechumenate. Christ continues to allure and attract people to him.

The name of the first of these three Maronite churches is Church of the Blessed Brothers Massabki, Martyrs of Damascus (1860). It will be inaugurated at Kachkoul, in the eastern suburb of Damascus, on January 8, 2016.

In the middle of destruction this new chapel appears like the Star of the Magi which leads to the Divine Child. It is a true Christmas present; an oasis of prayer and a sign of joy and of hope in the middle of a world of violence, of intolerance, anguish, fear and death.

To build a Church in times of war and desolation expresses the will to overcome death and the courage of living the Faith. Our modest faithful choose to row against the current and to renew their confidence in Jesus Christ in this dark night.

This year Christmas in Damascus merges with the Resurrection. □

+Samir NASSAR  
Maronite Archbishop of Damascus



# **“When We Acknowledge Our Sins and Ask for Forgiveness, There is a Celebration in Heaven. Jesus Celebrates: This is His Mercy: Let Us Not Be Discouraged”**

*Below is a ZENIT translation of Pope Francis' address during his weekly General Audience on December 16, 2015, in St. Peter's Square.*

**O**n Sunday, December 13, 2015, the Holy Door was opened in the Basilica of St. John Lateran, Cathedral of Rome, and a Door of Mercy was opened in the Cathedral of every diocese of the world, as well as in shrines and churches indicated by bishops. The Jubilee is in the whole world, not only in Rome. I wanted this sign of the Holy Door to be present in every particular Church, so that the Jubilee of Mercy could become a shared experience by every person. Thus the Holy Year got underway in the whole Church and is celebrated in every diocese as at Rome. Moreover, the first Holy Door was opened in fact in the heart of Africa. And Rome, see, is the visible sign of the universal communion. May this ecclesial communion become ever more intense, so that the Church is a living sign of the Father's love and mercy in the world.

The date of December 8 was also intended to stress this need, linking -- fifty years later -- the beginning of the Jubilee with the conclusion of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council. In fact, the Council contemplated and presented the Church in the light of the mystery of communion. Spread throughout the world and articulated in so many particular Churches, it is, however, always and only the one Church of Jesus Christ, the one He desired and for which He offered Himself.

This mystery of communion, which renders the Church a sign of the Father's love, grows and matures in our heart, when the Love, which we recognize in the Cross of Christ and in which we immerse ourselves, makes us love as we ourselves are loved by Him. It is a love without end, which has the face of forgiveness and mercy.

However, mercy and forgiveness must not remain beautiful words, but be realized in daily life. To love and to forgive are the concrete and visible signs that faith has transformed our hearts, and they enable us to express in ourselves the very life of God -- to love and forgive as God loves and forgives. This is a program of life that knows no interruptions or exceptions, but which pushes us to always go beyond without ever tiring, with the certainty of being supported by God's paternal presence.

This great sign of Christian life is then transformed into many other signs that are characteristics of the Jubilee. I am thinking of all those who will cross one of the Holy Doors, which in this Year are true Doors of Mercy. The Door indicates Jesus Himself who said: “I am the door; if any one enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture” (John 10:9). To cross the Holy Door is the sign of our trust in the Lord Jesus, who did not come to judge, but to save (cf. John 12:47). Be careful that you do not come across someone who is a bit fast or too crafty who tells you



that you must pay: No! Salvation cannot be paid for; salvation is not purchased. Jesus is the Door, and Jesus is free! He Himself spoke about those that make one go in as they shouldn't, and He says simply that they are thieves and bandits. Again, be careful: salvation is free. To cross the Holy Door is the sign of a true conversion of our heart. When we cross that Door it is good to remember that we must also have the door of our heart wide open. I stand before the Holy Door and I ask: “Lord, help me to open wide the door of my heart!” The Holy Year will not be very effective if the door of our heart does not let Christ pass, who pushes us to go to others, to bring Him and his love. Therefore, as the Holy Door remains open, because it is the sign of the welcome that God Himself gives us, so our door also, that of our heart, must remain wide open not to exclude anyone, not even he or she who annoys me: no one.

Confession is also an important sign of the Jubilee. To approach the sacrament with which we are reconciled with God is equivalent to having a direct experience of His mercy. It is to meet the Father who forgives: God forgives everything. God understands us also in our limitations, He also understands us in our contradictions. Not only this, with His love He says to us that precisely when we acknowledge our sins He is still closer and spurs us to look ahead. He says more: that when we acknowledge our sins and ask for forgiveness, there is a celebration in Heaven. Jesus celebrates: this is His mercy: let us not be discouraged. Forward, forward with this!

How many times I've heard it said to me: “Father, I am unable to forgive my neighbor, my work companion, the lady next door, my mother-in-law, my sister-in-law.” We have all felt this.” “I am unable to forgive.” But how can we ask God to forgive us, if we are unable to forgive? And to forgive is something great, yet it's not easy to forgive, because our heart is poor and it cannot do so on its own. However, if we open ourselves to receive God's mercy for us, we in turn become capable of forgiving. I've heard it said so many times: “I couldn't stand that person: I hated her. But one day I approached the Lord and asked him to forgive my sins, and I also forgave that person.” These are everyday things. And we have this possibility close to us.

Therefore, courage! Let us live the Jubilee by beginning with these signs that imply a great force of love. The Lord will accompany us to lead us to experience other important signs for our life. Courage and forward! □

*(Zenit.org, December 16, 2015)*

## Vatican Cardinal Encourages Priest-Confessors to Serve 'Mystery of Mercy'

The Major Penitentiary of the Church, Cardinal Mauro Piacenza, has sent a Christmas letter to the confessors of the Church. The Major Penitentiary is the Vatican Tribunal which deals with the "internal forum" and deals with issues in the Church surrounding the Sacrament of Confession.

In his letter, Cardinal Piacenza reminds confessors that the upcoming Solemnity of Christmas is not a "sentimental fairy-tale," but a holy mystery, the mystery of God's mercy.

The Cardinal looks to the end times, when humanity will be judged by the Son of Man. He says this judgement will not only be on the basis of an "abstractly understood moral behavior," but based on the "truth" of our love."

"We know that our love – called to grow in response to Christ's love – is, however, a wounded love, 'polluted' by sin, and a love that not only needs to be 'real', but, more and more, needs to be 'made true,' purified, saved," writes Cardinal Piacenza.

"Nevertheless" - he continues – "there is no social or ecclesial structure, nor any moral exhortation, nor any merely human strategy that can free love and render it truly 'real.' Only the grace of Christ has this power. He is, as the Holy Father reminds us, the mystery of mercy and He, when recognized and welcomed, makes man free to love truly."

Cardinal Piacenza says this means at the end of time, we will be "judged according to the truth of Christ, the truth of our love for Him, but, at the same time, only Christ is able to liberate our love and make us truly capable of loving Him."

"Therefore He is Judge, and He is Savior; He is Justice, and He is Love; He is Truth, and He is Mercy." Cardinal Piacenza continues: "How do we resolve this apparent and divine paradox? Exactly in the great Sacrament of Mercy, in sacramental confession."

The Cardinal says every celebration of the sacrament of confession "anticipates" the Last Judgement, and give the penitent the gift of looking at the "great truth of the mystery of Christ, the Truth of His Mercy."

He calls on all confessors to joyfully offer their lives to the "service of this encounter of Truth and Mercy," and says that in the confessional is "born the only true peace of which the world truly needs."

"The only help truly effective for the whole of humanity, that, confession after confession, you will see cleansed of sin and thus saved from the deadliest of 'smog'" – continues Cardinal Piacenza – "And it is in the confessional where we see the most radical work of ecology that we can accomplish!"

The Cardinal concludes his letter by asking priests to pray for one another, so they, too, can be "continually purified by this Mercy," and therefore be "ever more intimately transformed by the Mystery of the Incarnate Word. □



## God 'Never Imposes Upon Us,' Pope Says Before Tree Lighting

In a ceremony led by Cardinal Giuseppe Bertello, the President of the Governorate of Vatican City State, the Nativity scene and Christmas tree were illuminated in St. Peter's Square on December 18, 2015.

The Nativity scene, which has twenty-four life-size figures, was constructed in Tesero, a town of 2,700 in northern Italy. At the request of Pope Francis, the crèche will be transported to the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem after the Christmas season.

The Christmas tree, which is over eighty feet high, comes from Hirschau, a town of 5,800 in Bavaria.

In a December 18 audience with the delegations from northern Italy and Bavaria, Pope Francis said that "the crèche reminds us of this: God, in his great mercy, descended to us to stay with us." God "never imposes upon us with force," he continued, adding:

To save us, He did not change history by performing a grand miracle. Instead, He lived with simplicity, humility and meekness. God does not like the dramatic revolutions of the powerful of history, and does not use a magic wand to change situations. Instead He makes Himself small, He becomes a child, to attract us with love, to touch our hearts with His humble goodness, to draw attention through His poverty to those who worry about accumulating the false treasures of this world. □

(CWNews, December 22, 2015)

## Maronite Bishops' Annual Appeal



The Maronite Bishops' Annual Appeal takes place in Lent each year. This is an opportunity to help with the greatest needs of the Maronite Church in America.



Look for more information in next month's issue of *The Maronite Voice* about this year's Annual Appeal. □



## The Beautiful Shepherd

Continues from page 10

Jesus Christ is the Beautiful Shepherd who reveals to us, as the Word (*Logos*) of the Father, the Goodness and Beauty of God. He is both the Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep, and the "Lamb who was slain." Through the power of the Holy Spirit we are drawn to the Beauty of Christ, and by that same Spirit we encounter the Beautiful Savior in the Sacraments.

In Jesus Christ our attraction to his beauty and goodness is not merely an emotional response to God, but the transformation of our Being. As St. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3:18, "All of us, gazing with unveiled face on the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, as from the Lord who is the Spirit." The Word who became Flesh, the Beautiful Shepherd, restores our beauty, the beauty lost through sin, and in restoring our beauty he also transforms it by his Cross and Resurrection, to become a beauty graced with immortality. As so many of the Fathers of the Church (Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Justin Martyr, Theophilus of Antioch, Hippolytus of Rome, Athanasius of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine of Hippo, Maximus the Confessor, Gregory Nazianzus, et al.) point to the fullness of Christ's mission as that of saving us (Atonement) and transforming us (Theosis/Deification). As Clement of Alexandria eloquently expressed this mystery:

*But that man with whom the Word dwells does not alter himself, does not get himself up: he has the form which is of the Word; he is made like to God; he is beautiful; he does not ornament himself: his is beauty, the true beauty, for it is God; and that man becomes God, since God so wills. Heraclitus, then, rightly said, "Men are gods, and gods are men." For the Word Himself is the manifest mystery: God in man, and man God.<sup>8</sup>*

The Beautiful Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep, so that we can have life and life abundantly, in which our beauty is re-fashioned to be like His who saves us, to become beings constituted by Love. "Beauty Will Save The World!" □

Rev. David A. Fisher  
Philadelphia, Penn.

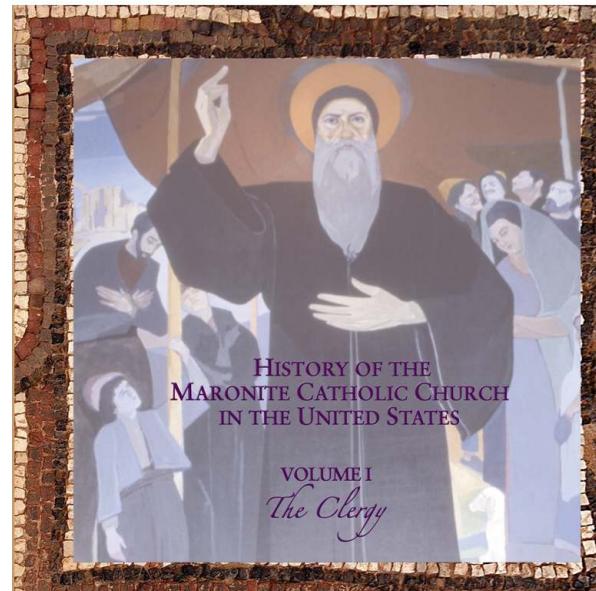


<sup>8</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*, Book III, Chapter One, quoted here from NewAdvent.org.

## From the Book Shelf

### History of the Maronite Catholic Church in the United States

#### The Clergy



by Evelyn Karam Small

In 1890, the first assigned Maronite Catholic missionary arrived in New York City. Like many Lebanese immigrants, he brought with him his faith and the hope of building a better tomorrow.

Now, modern-day parishioners can read about the complete history of the Maronite Church in America in a new book called *History of the Maronite Catholic Church in the United States, Volume I, The Clergy*. Five years of extensive research were needed to unearth never-before published documents and to translate historical records and correspondence from their original French or Arabic into English. To further understand the evolution of the Church, the authors also analyzed interviews conducted with parishioners and pastors over the past seventy years.

This 440-page book is an essential addition to the bookshelf of any Maronite curious about the contributions our Church has made over the last 125 years.

*The Clergy* is available for \$30 plus \$7 shipping from  
Saint Maron Publications,  
4611 Sadler Road, Glen Allen, Virginia 23060  
<http://stmaron.org/store>.

Saint Maron Publications accepts Visa or Master Card.

## Weak Words Are Not Enough

*Continued from page 1*

Unlike previous such instances in modern history, there has been no attempt by ISIS to conceal their actions. On the contrary, the group shamelessly broadcasts decapitations, crucifixions, forced drownings, a theological rationalization for rape, and other horrors, with the sole purpose of spreading its message of destruction and recruiting more agents to the ranks of its hellish crimes.

Two months ago, H. Con. Res. 75 was introduced to the United States Congress by Representatives Fortenberry (R-NE) and Eshoo (D-CA) of the Congressional Caucus for Religious Minorities in the Middle East to officially declare these crimes **genocide**. Doing so would better enable the world community to halt the spread of these crimes. This is not only the right thing to do, but it is also a matter of vital moral importance for the United States, the international community, and for the overall protection and advancement of religious freedom around the world. Perhaps equally important, such a declaration will give a strong voice to the long-suffering victims, whose voices are oftentimes not heard at all. As Pope Francis said it clearly: “*We cannot resign ourselves to a Middle East without Christians, who have professed the name of Jesus there for 2000 years*” (Speech in Turkey, November 30, 2014).

### What Can We Do?

1: Request President Obama and all government officials to publicly acknowledge and denounce the actions of ISIS as genocide. Support the effort of *In Defense of Christians*, a non-partisan and ecumenical non-profit, created to advocate for political action.

2: Help organize fundraisers or make donations to *Caritas Lebanon*, Catholic Relief Services and/or other Catholic humanitarian efforts.

3: Pray, advocate for, and invite fellow Christians, and all other people of good will, to pray for an end to the crimes and hatred of ISIS and other such groups.

“*Weak words are not enough.*” What is needed is correct political, humanitarian and spiritual action. May God give us the grace this new year to be his voice, to be the voice of the oppressed, and to cry out for love and mercy in our tired and troubled world. □

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+Gregory John Mansour  
Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn  
+Elias Abdallah Zaidan  
Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles

## Fall River, Mass.

*Continued from page 15*

The first part of the Christmas Concert featured some of the children in a musical quartet that featured William Brownell, Sydney Filipe, Melia Bouramia, Leah Dunn and Cameron Filipe. Then the children appeared and processed to the sanctuary as part of the Living Nativity that was narrated by Cameron Filipe. The choir, under the direction of Evan Massoud and David Farris, played and sang many Christmas songs, a special Beatles song, “All My Loving” and a compilation of movie-themed songs. A special guest also appeared during the Live Nativity, Santa Claus. Santa came armed with his Rosary Beads to pay homage to baby Jesus. The children of the Living Nativity sang “Christ the King”, “Jingle Bells”, “Frosty the Snow Man” and “Rudolph the Red-Nosed reindeer.” The choir and the children of the Living Nativity practiced for weeks before the concert to prepare for this special event. Following the Christmas Concert, a reception was held in the Saint Sharbel Center. A special thanks to all who helped make this event special for the parish, especially Lynn Abdow, Terry Galib, Barbara Terrio and Stacie Hallal-Moussa and the members of the Blessed Mother’s Guild, who help prepare the costumes for the children and coordinated the practices. □