



The Maronite Voice

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The Family in the Life of the Church



In his pastoral visit to Australia in 1986, Pope John Paul II (now Saint John Paul) said: "As the family goes, so goes the nation." He then added: "and so goes the whole world in which we live." A healthy family will lead to a healthy Church as well. Pope Francis recently published his Apostolic Exhortation "The Joy of Love" (*Amoris Laetitia*), which he wrote to help families and married couples in today's world. The Pope noted, "...no family drops down from heaven perfectly formed; families need constantly to grow and mature in the ability to love." The Pope divides his document into nine chapters. The vocation of the family, challenges facing families today, love within the marriage bond, children as the fruit of this love, pastoral guidance in strengthening the family and holiness within marriage are among the areas he covers.

The Holy Father, Pope Francis, called for the "Synod on the Family" and then responded to the discussions with his Exhortation on the family in the modern world to address the great concerns raised at the Synod. That concern for the well-being of the family is not new to the Church. There is a long history of the bishops, patriarchs and popes encouraging parents to live up to their duty to properly educate their children and to form strong and permanent family bonds.

We are called "*Beit Maroun*," the "Family of Maron" and our Maronite Church takes pride in upholding sacred family values. The last Maronite Patriarchal Synod (2003-2006) addressed its concerns about the family as well. It noted the many challenges facing families: economic, social and political transformations in the culture, materialism, wars, globalization and "family break-up." But at the same time, the Synod also noted some signs of hope for strong family life such as new apostolic lay movements, prayer groups, civic associations, and many families continuing to hold on to genuine human and Christian values.

As we address these challenges that threaten our families, we need to rise to the occasion and find ways to support each other at various levels: spiritually, socially, culturally, emotionally and even economically by providing job opportunities. All this means that we cannot just assume that all is well with our families. Most importantly, it means that we cannot assume that the families we encounter in our Churches are properly equipped to live and proclaim the Gospel according to their God-given mission. Perhaps we should consider a re-allocation of resources to help these families; perhaps we should focus our attention on supporting our families in their struggles, especially in the education and formation of their children in the faith.

(Continues on page 20)

Schedule of Bishop Elias Zaidan

June 4 - 20, 2016

Annual Synod of Maronite Bishops, Bkerke, Lebanon

June 25 - 26, 2016

Children's Summer Camp, Our Lady of Mt. Lebanon Cathedral, Los Angeles, Calif.

June 29, 2016

With His Beatitude Patriarch Bechara Rai, St. Maron Church, Detroit, Mich.

June 30 - July 1, 2016

With His Beatitude Patriarch Bechara Rai, St. Anthony Of Padua Church, Cincinnati, Ohio, and St. Ignatius of Antioch Church, Dayton, Ohio

July 2 - 3, 2016

With His Beatitude Patriarch Bechara Rai, St. John Maron Church, Orange, Calif.

July 4, 2016

With His Beatitude Patriarch Bechara Rai, Our Lady of Mt. Lebanon Cathedral, Los Angeles, Calif.

July 5 - 10, 2016

NAM Convention, San Francisco, Calif. □

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Maronite Convention 2016

Our Lady of Lebanon Church

San Francisco, California

July 6 - 10, 2016

For more information
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by Sister Natalie Sayde

On Pentecost Sunday, May 15, 2016, the MYO groups from Lawrence, Boston and New Bedford, Mass., came to the Mother of Light Convent in Dartmouth, Mass., to celebrate Divine Liturgy and enjoy a day of retreat with the Maronite Servants of Christ the Light.

In his homily, Monsignor David George set the tone of the day when he asked the teens to remember that their lives are a proof of God's love, and challenged them to witness to this everyday. Msgr. George asked them to consider whether people recognize them as children of God by their actions, not just by their words.

Later in the afternoon, in his presentation on "Jesus as the visible face of the Father's mercy," Msgr. George spoke to the teens about the parable of the Prodigal Son, which he later renamed the parable of the Merciful Father. Msgr. George emphasized to the teens that God is the only constant in their lives; that He is ever-present, ever-watchful, ever-waiting and ever-ready to meet us wherever we are. We need not be afraid of our past or apprehensive about our future, God is always there for us in loving attentiveness to embrace us and bring us home.

In the small group discussions, the teens discussed how they can bring the Father's mercy to others in practical ways, such as community service, praying for the sick and suffering, and befriending the outcast in their schools and playgrounds.

The youths had fun throughout the day with basketball, soccer, kan jam, and potato sack races. A special thanks to Msgr. David George for his presence during the day. It was an absolute blessing! A special thanks to all the chaperones and teens that came from Lawrence, Boston and New Bedford. □



Visit of the Relics of Saint Sharbel

Utica, New York



by Chorbishop John D. Faris

"I approached the relic, knelt down and placed my hand on it," recounted Nick Mariano, "I seldom pray for myself, so I just asked Saint Sharbel to bless everyone present and all my loved ones. I then stopped and asked, 'Saint Sharbel, if you can find it in your heart, I would really appreciate it if you would cure me.'" Nick, a lifetime parishioner of Saint Louis Gonzaga Church and a successful local businessman, then described how he stood up without pain for the first time in two decades. "For years I moved only with excruciating pain - I now walk and get out of a chair as if I were twenty years old. This is because of Saint Sharbel!"

Nick's experience of a physical cure was perhaps unique, but the experience of peace, comfort, consolation and healing was common among the thousands of faithful who came to the Maronite parish in Utica on Monday, May 9, 2016, to venerate the relics of Saint Sharbel. In the words of Father Saba Shofany, the Pastor of Saint Basil Melkite Greek-Catholic Church, the day was an opportunity for all of us in the Utica area to "encounter a saint."

Father Alaa Issa, Administrator of St. Ann in Watervliet [Troy], N.Y., brought the relic to us shortly before noon, and newly-ordained Deacon Peter M. Hobaica presided at the "Little Office" of Saint Sharbel. People continued to pour into the church, ultimately parking cars on the church lawns when the parking lots and streets were filled. The city buzzed for days about the warm welcome they received in a church they may have never before visited. Some took the opportunity to pray in Our Lady of Mercy Chapel, designated as a pilgrim church during this Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy.

The "miracles" of spiritual healing also took place in the church, where the priests heard confessions of people, some of whom had not received the sacrament of reconciliation in decades.

The highpoint of the day was the celebration of the Divine Liturgy that evening in a packed church. In his

homily, Chorbishop John D. Faris explained that the Church does not "worship" relics, but rather venerates them as places in which God - who alone is to be worshiped - has manifested His power and love. St. Sharbel was a monk who sacrificed everything and placed his full trust that God would take care of him and work through him. This life is a challenge for all of us to imitate.

At the end of the day, those who requested it were anointed, and Deacon Paul Salamy led the "Little Office" of Saint Sharbel as people lovingly and gratefully bade farewell to a saint who had become a friend. □

Watervliet, New York



Bishop Edward Sharfenberger and Bishop Gregory Mansour carry the Relics of St. Sharbel. Fr. Alaa Isaa is in back.

by Beverly Traa

On Saturday and Sunday, May 7 - 8, 2016, the faithful community of St. Ann Maronite Catholic Church in Watervliet [Troy], N.Y., led by Father Alaa Issa, and graced by the presence of Bishop Gregory Mansour, Bishop of the Eparchy of Saint Maron, received bountiful blessings from the Relics of St. Sharbel. An aura of peace and brotherhood was shown, especially in the community's gracious hospitality to all who attended the Liturgy and the reception that followed, and to many who came from as far away as the Canadian border or Rhode Island so they could revere the Relics.

Evidence of the blessings were in those who labored over an abundance of primarily Lebanese delicacies and in the conviviality of church members and newcomers. The committee responsible for much of the hospitality included Georgette Hannoush, Gerard Golden, Carole Shufelt, and members of the Daughters of Saint Ann who generously contributed.

Veneration of the Relics began at noon on Saturday. There were evening prayers at 4:30 and veneration continued until 7:00 p.m. Following the Divine Liturgy on Sunday, the veneration continued until early evening.

Sunday's Divine Liturgy was concelebrated. There was

a sense of permanence in the ease of Bishop Gregory Mansour's priestly fellowship with Bishop Edward Sharfenberger of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany as they met and concelebrated the Liturgy together for the first time. Later, they warmly greeted the more than two hundred worshipers who attended the reception. It appeared the Bishops genuinely enjoyed their day at St. Ann, which enhanced everyone's enjoyment.

Bishop Gregory's homily drew the parallel of St. Sharbel's humility and sacrifice to that of a mother for her family. It was both Mother's Day and St. Sharbel's birthday and his message carried particular meaning for both. The Liturgy was exceptional in every detail and prepared by Father Alaa and Subdeacon Richard Thornton. Brother Joshua Abate, TOPSF was the organist. The church was filled with white roses and the altar, decorated by Michel Boutros, was a proper resting place for the reliquary of St. Sharbel. Members of the church practiced the liturgical music and it was beautiful to hear. In all, St. Sharbel's visit to St. Ann Church was truly prayerful and meaningful and all received his special grace.

Undeniably, the people of St. Ann and all who were there for the veneration of the Relics of St. Sharbel were blessed indelibly by its presence, in the new friends that were made, and the spread of greater love, understanding and mercy in this Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy. Following Bishop Gregory's example, St. Ann Church did what it often does best. They embraced others with their faithfulness and hospitality, and extended their welcome to others to come to work and pray and play together in the name of Jesus and St. Sharbel, and share in the Maronite tradition.

The solemnity of the sacred event of the visit of the Relics of St. Sharbel was maintained throughout. It was further enhanced by an honor guard of Knights Of Columbus who ushered in the Relics in solemn procession and throughout the Liturgy.

In appearance, the bishops were like two boys from Brooklyn who found out they have much in common. In fact, they are, because prior to becoming Bishop in 2015, His Excellency Sharfenberger served for many years in Brooklyn, where he was also born. With sincerity he remarked at the end of the Liturgy that his life was forever changed by the Maronite liturgy that day. Later he asked to be reminded of the upcoming St. Ann's Lebanese Food Festival on June 11. Bishop Mansour, Father Alaa and St. Ann's Parish succeeded in helping Bishop Sharfenberger to feel at home.

Along with the Bishop of Albany and new media friends, St. Ann Church can count among St. Sharbel's blessings a number of other new friends who came to the liturgy and for the veneration that weekend.

Local media were generous with their coverage. Two newspapers gave front page coverage to the historic sacred event with large colorful pictures; and two national affiliate television stations also covered it with interviews and ample video of the Liturgy. □

Dover, New Hampshire

Sunday, May 1, 2016, was truly a historic visit. "We have never seen anything so beautiful in all the years of our worship here," said one of the parishioners. "His presence among us is simply beautiful!"



Fr. Tony Saab standing behind the Relics of St. Sharbel.

Celebration at St. George Maronite Catholic Church, Dover, N.H., began with a solemn procession around the church, led by members of the Knights of Columbus in full dress uniforms, followed by the Divine Liturgy. Some people drove two to four hours to attend the ceremonies. "It is a great privilege to host the Relics of a great humble saint, who left the world with no possessions, not even one dollar in his bank account, yet is more famous than any of our world's wealthiest people," proclaimed Fr. Tony Saab, celebrating the Divine liturgy. "He has performed thousands of documented miracles. Why? What was so extraordinary about him? The answer is simple: He left the whole world and spent his whole life and being to worship God, pray and work! His prayers went for all of us who are experiencing pain and suffering, who are lost and drowned in sin, and especially those of us drowned in a world of materialism and selfishness."

Many of those who came to visit the Relics asked for special prayers because they were ill and suffering from different ailments. May St. Sharbel intercede for them and show them the Lord's love and mercy as he did to thousands and thousands of people. □

San Antonio, Texas Lourdes and Fatima Pilgrimage

by Regina Aune

In this Jubilee Year of Mercy, Pope Francis has advocated a pilgrimage to a holy site. Thirty-one parishioners and friends of St. George Church in San Antonio, Texas, led by Father Charles Khachan, MLM, Pastor, embarked on a ten-day pilgrimage to Lourdes and Fatima with visits to Barcelona,Montserrat, and Burgos, Spain, on April 16, 2016.



The first site visited was Montserrat - which means serrated mountain - and the Basilica of Santa Maria de Montserrat. Situated high in the mountains thirty miles west of Barcelona. The church is the home of the Black Madonna of Montserrat. Legend has it that the statue of Our Lady was carved in Jerusalem and brought to Barcelona and then hidden in Montserrat to protect it from the Saracens.

Following the visit to Montserrat, the pilgrims visited La Sagrada Familia in Barcelona. It is an amazing architectural work with intricately carved exterior facades depicting the Nativity, the Passion and the Glory. The interior of the church is "colored and lit" by means of the stained glass windows. All the color within the church comes from the light reflecting through the stained glass windows. The highlight of the visit to La Sagrada Familia was the Maronite Divine Liturgy celebrated in the crypt church.

Leaving Barcelona, we traveled to Lourdes. Nestled in the Pyrenees Mountains, Lourdes is a peaceful and holy place. We participated in two Divine Liturgies; the first was a Latin Mass in the Grotto that Father Charles concelebrated with a priest from the Arlington diocese, and the second was a Maronite Divine Liturgy celebrated in St. Anne's Chapel in the Basilica. There were multiple opportunities to pray, reflect, and go through the Holy Doors. Each night at 9 p.m. we participated in the Candlelight Rosary procession at the Grotto, recited in many different languages. The Eucharistic procession in the afternoon was simple and beautiful. Many volunteers pushed wheelchairs and litters of the infirm in the procession with the Blessed Sacrament that ended with Benediction and the Blessing of the Sick in the underground Basilica of St. Pius X. To our surprise and delight, there is a picture of St. Maron in the basilica next to the picture of St. Bernadette! Most of us availed ourselves of the opportunity to bathe in the Lourdes water – a freezing cold experience but spiritually exhilarating! There were opportunities to receive the sacrament of Reconciliation and to visit St. Bernadette's home and the parish church of her baptism. We could also get our "Jubilee of Mercy Passports" stamped indicating we had participated in a pilgrimage for the Year of Mercy!

After Lourdes we headed toward the city of Burgos, Spain, the major crossroads of northern Spain along the *Camino de Santiago*. In Burgos we visited the Cathedral of St. Mary, the burial place of Rodrigo Diaz de Vivar – better known as El Cid – and his wife, Dona Jimena. In the chapel where Father Charles celebrated the Divine Liturgy, the scene

behind the altar depicts the family tree of Jesus and events from the time of King David to the birth of Christ.

Departing Burgos, we left for Fatima, Portugal. While in Fatima, we visited *Aljustrel*, the village where Jacinta, Francisco, and Lucia, the three shepherd children of Fatima, were born and lived. We visited their homes and the parish church where they were baptized. Father Charles celebrated two Divine Liturgies while we were in Fatima. We participated in the Rosary and candlelight processions at Fatima each evening. As at Lourdes, the Rosary was recited in multiple languages. On the second evening, Father Charles and two parishioners, Jackie George and Souraya Sarkis, participated in leading a decade of the Rosary in both Arabic and English.

All too soon, the days of the pilgrimage were at an end and April 25, 2016, found all of us pilgrims in Lisbon boarding our flight back to San Antonio. Those unable to travel with us to Europe fulfilled a pilgrimage of the heart by participating at a special liturgy on April 22, 2016, at Our Lady of Lourdes Grotto of the Southwest in San Antonio, Texas, an exact replica of the grotto in Lourdes, France. At the Grotto, the San Antonio pilgrims recited the Chaplet of Our Lady of Lourdes dedicated to all who suffer physical, mental or emotional pain and for all the fellow parishioners pilgraming in Europe. The Divine Liturgy was offered by Father Marwan Abi-Nader, MLM, Associate Pastor. We were truly united as a parish and as pilgrims, whether in Europe or San Antonio.

Both those parishioners who traveled to Europe on pilgrimage and those parishioners who made a pilgrimage to the Oblate Missionaries' Grotto are faced with the same challenge Pope Francis poses to us in this Year of Mercy – "May pilgrimage be an impetus to conversion: by crossing the threshold of the Holy Door, we will find the strength to embrace God's mercy and dedicate ourselves to being merciful with others as the Father has been with us" (*Misericordiae Vultus*, 14). □

Houston, Texas Village Night

by Nabil Joubran

The Bi-annual Village Night at Our Lady of the Cedars Church in Houston, Tex., took place on May 7, 2016.

The evening started with a Divine Liturgy to celebrate the beginning of the Marian Month, followed by a procession outside the church with the statue of Our Lady of the Cedars. As soon as the prayer service was over, people flocked to the food and drink stands. Parishioners prepared the food and serving areas.

For the little ones, the Village Night featured face-painting stations, a petting zoo, pony rides, train rides, and moonwalks. The weather was beautiful for people to sit outside, spread out all over the property around the hall building.

Two weeks earlier, Mr. Samir Farah, President of NAM, presented the 2016 Silver Massabki Award to Nadra and Liliane Maakaroun. They are both active on several committees and helped put together many events. They served separately or together on the boards or committees within the Parish Council, the Knights of the Cedars, Village



nights, the children's playground committee, the First Communion Committee, CCE Christmas and Easter programs, Couples Encounter, Family nights, and the Talent Show. Congratulations to Nadra and Liliane for an award that is very well deserved. □

Uniontown, Pennsylvania Consecration of New Altar



Bishop Mansour blesses the newly renovated altar at St. George Church in Uniontown, Penn.

by Dr. Mabel George Howard

A celebration of Lebanese culture, music, dancing, entertainment, fellowship, and worship describes the Spring *Hafli* and the church renovation dedication held on April 2 - 3, 2016, at St. George Church in Uniontown, Penn. To begin the weekend festivities, Bishop Gregory Mansour, Bishop of the Eparchy of Saint Maron, celebrated the Saturday liturgy assisted by Father Sami Chaaya, Pastor, Father Bob Lubic of the Catholic Churches of Connellsville, and Subdeacons Tom "Duke" George of St. George and Robert Farah of Our Lady of Lebanon Church in Washington, D.C. During the liturgy, Bishop Mansour consecrated the new altar in Maronite tradition with prayers, incense, Holy Chrism and a kiss. Bishop Mansour explained the sacred ritual to the congregation as he performed the ancient blessings. Following the evening liturgy, a *Hafli*

entitled "A Touch of Lebanon," was held at the Uniontown Country Club. During the *Hafli*, the Bishop reflected upon the "Year of Mercy" and shared his feelings in a discussion addressing the importance of helping one another. His question and answer forum emphasized the significance of the parish members being actively involved in community and church service.

Following Sunday's liturgy, a reception was held in the church hall for the entire congregation. The Ladies of St. George prepared delicacies for all to enjoy. Bishop Mansour honored St. George Church with the official ribbon cutting, blessing and dedication of the newly renovated social hall, kitchen, catechism classrooms, conference area, candle and archives rooms, portico, and religious artwork. The changes and improvements are absolutely beautiful and will serve the St. George parish family for many years in the future. Bishop Gregory and Father Sami noted that the St. George parishioners are committed to working together for the perpetual care of their church and the spiritual and economic growth of the Lebanese American community. The weekend's event allowed everyone the opportunity to enjoy the newly renovated church, socialize with family and friends, share happy memories, and solidify relationships. Most importantly, it allowed the St. George congregation to spend time visiting with their beloved "son," Bishop Gregory Mansour.

Mother's Day Luncheon



From left: Bobbi Fetsko (presenter), Dr. Mabel Howard (Vice President), Donna George (President), Helen Adams (ARS honoree), Devona Unice (Secretary), Theresa Gilbert (Treasurer), and Father Sami Chaaya (Pastor).

The Altar Rosary Society of St. George Church in Uniontown, Penn., celebrated its annual Mother's Day Luncheon on May 14, 2016. This was a special event for all women of the parish to share personal memories with family and friends and to enjoy a presentation of stories about interesting women from the Bible. It is also a tradition of the Altar Rosary Society to honor one member each year for her important role in the church. This year the Altar Rosary officers recognized Helen Adams as the recipient of this altruistic award.

Helen has volunteered as a catechism teacher and participant in several activities with the Altar Rosary Society and Ladies Guild Organization. Most importantly, Helen's true devotion to God and her church is recognized in a vital service that she has provided for many years. She completes

the proper washing, ironing, and folding of the altar linens while adhering to the sacred rituals of the Maronite Catholic Church. The Altar Rosary Society presented Helen with a bouquet of roses and a beautiful wall rosary as a token of appreciation for her labor of love.

As the 2016 honoree, the Altar Rosary Society extends a sincere "thank you" to Helen for her love, respect, and dedication to the church. □

Clinton Township, Michigan Pastoral Visit

Bishop A. Elias Zaidan's pastoral visit to St. Sharbel Church in Clinton Township [Warren], Mich., on March 17 - 20, 2016, was well received indeed. The pastoral visit began with the celebration of the Divine Liturgy on Thursday, March 17. An interfaith luncheon followed at La Saj Lebanese Bistro hosted by Chorbishop Alfred Badawi where Bishop Zaidan was the guest of honor on the occasion of the celebration of the Feast of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Guests included members of the Islamic Community from Dearborn, Michigan, Maronite clergy; the Consul General of Lebanon, Bilal Kabalan, Mrs. Rabab El Sader; and a Mr. and Mrs. Ghassan Saab from St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital. Later that evening, a dinner was given in honor of His Excellency at Luciano's Italian Restaurant. Representatives from the following committees were present to receive him: Religious Education, MYO, Worship Committee, Parish Advisory Board, Stewardship/Finance Committee, Outreach Committee, and the Construction Committee. All joined in a special recognition of the Bishop's birthday with a birthday cake and song.

On Friday, March 18, Bishop Zaidan met with members of the Construction Committee for the new church building. He celebrated the Divine Liturgy and the Stations and the Benediction of the Holy Cross. Rev. Milad Yaghi, Secretary to the Bishop, and Chorbishop Alfred Badawi, Pastor, concelebrated. Subdeacon Michael Magyar assisted. A Lenten dinner with parishioners concluded the evening at La Saj Restaurant. The Bishop eloquently expressed his desire for the community of St. Sharbel to contribute toward the future growth of their church by working together with commitment and dedication. He spoke of the past, of mending differences and showing kindness and forgiveness, and the need for a willingness to work together toward the main goal of bringing the church to its fullest. He spoke about living out the Corporal Works of Mercy during this extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy.

On Saturday, March 19, a meeting took place with representatives jointly serving on an Outreach Committee from St. Maron, St. Sharbel and St. Rafqa Parishes, which was initiated by Bishop Zaidan to encourage the Maronites in Michigan to collaboratively work together. Later he visited the sick and homebound and celebrated Palm Sunday Liturgies.

May Crowning

On Sunday, May 8, 2016, the St. Sharbel Religious Education First Holy Communion Class joined together in sacred space to celebrate the Sunday Liturgy and to crown



the Blessed Mother after Communion! A beautiful flowered crown was placed on the beautiful statue of Blessed Mary inside the worship place. The Crowning of Mary began with the blessing by Chorbishop Alfred Badawi, Pastor, of the Crown of roses, after which all joined in singing the hymn, "Ave Maria." After the Crown was carefully and reverently placed on Mary, Chorbishop Alfred imparted the final blessing. All left the worship place singing, "We Run For Protection To You." The month of May provides wonderful opportunities for Catholics everywhere to rededicate themselves to Mary, the Mother of God and our Mother.

Mother's Day

On Sunday, May 8, 2016, St. Sharbel parishioners in Clinton Township, Mich., celebrated the special vocation of mothers on Mother's Day. They acknowledged all living, deceased, and expectant mothers in their prayers. A special blessing was bestowed by Chorbishop Alfred Badawi, Pastor, who also gave each mother a carnation and a blessed Rosary from Saint Sharbel Monastery in Lebanon. □

From the Book Shelf

The *Miraculous Soil of Saint Rafqa*, written and illustrated by Sister Lea Lahoud, tells the story of Saint Rafqa, "a little girl who loved Jesus so much that she asked Him to share his pains: 'God, why are you distant from me? Why are you leaving me alone? Why have you spared me any disease? Have you forgotten me, after I adored you?'

The Miraculous Soil of Saint Rafqa makes a perfect First Communion gift or a gift to any young person who wants to learn more about Saint Rafqa. The book is available for \$10 plus \$3 shipping from Saint Maron Publications, 4611 Sadler Road, Glen Allen, Virginia 23060 or gmsebaali@aol.com. Saint Maron Publications accepts Visa or Master Card. □





Brooklyn, New York

Seventh Annual Benefit Dinner



Bishop Gregory Mansour honors Jeannette Abi Habib at the Eparchial Annual Benefit Dinner. Bishop Robert Shaheen, Bishop *Emeritus* of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon, stands watching.

Over 170 people gathered on May 3, 2016, at the New York Athletic Club for the Seventh Annual Benefit Dinner for the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn. It was a memorable evening honoring Jeannette Abi Habib and Nohade Boorady and commemorating the Eparchy's 50th Anniversary. Highlights of the evening included:

- ◆ The honoring of all mothers, especially the two honorees, with tributes from family members and presentations of gifts by Bishop Gregory Mansour, Bishop of the Eparchy of Saint Maron, and Bishop *Emeritus* Robert Shaheen from the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles.
- ◆ The presence of His Excellency Archbishop Bernardito Auza, Apostolic Nuncio and Permanent Observer of the Holy See at the United Nations, priests from the Apostolic Nunciature to the United Nations, and Latin and Maronite priests from the area.
- ◆ A special gift of a porcelain rose from Bishop Gregory to all mothers.
- ◆ A beautiful icon to mark the 50th Anniversary of the Eparchy that featured the image of Saint Maron as depicted at the Maronite Chapel at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C., given to each attendee.
- ◆ Participation by parishioners from all three New York area Maronite parishes – Pope Saint John Paul II Mission in Sleepy Hollow, Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral in Brooklyn, and the Maronite Mission in Manhattan – attended, as well as several from New Jersey, Connecticut, Pennsylvania and Florida.

The proceeds from the Benefit Dinner will be used to educate Seminarians, support poorer parishes and missions, and assist retired priests. The Eparchy of Saint Maron is still accepting donations for the Dinner. To make a donation, go to <http://www.stmaron.org/donate.html>, or mail a check to Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn, 109 Remsen Street, Brooklyn, NY 11201. Photos from the event can be found online through the Eparchy's website (www.stmaron.org). □

Fort Lauderdale, Florida

Holy Thursday Service



Chorbishop Michael G. Thomas and the twelve apostles at Heart of Jesus Maronite Church, Fort Lauderdale, Fla., on Holy Thursday. □

Save the Date



THE EPARCHY OF SAINT MARON

CELEBRATING
50
YEARS

1966-2016

PLEASE SAVE THIS DATE

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 7, 2016
AND JOIN US FOR THE

**50th ANNIVERSARY OF
THE PRESENCE OF A
MARONITE BISHOP IN
THE UNITED STATES**

CATHEDRAL OF OUR LADY OF LEBANON,
BROOKLYN, NY and
NEW YORK MARRIOTT AT
BROOKLYN BRIDGE

DETAILS TO FOLLOW



Eparchial Condolences

Mr. John Michael Faris, father of Chorbishop John Faris, Pastor of Saint Louis Gonzaga Church in Utica, N.Y., passed away at his home in Boca Raton, Fla., on May 24, 2016, after a long illness. With him at the time were his wife of sixty-six years, Goldie Bowlen, and family.

John was born on May 12, 1929, in Uniontown, Penn., to the late John and Sophia (Antoon) Faris, Jr. His siblings were Mary Margaret (who died in infancy), James, Ronald, Arleen Wilson and Richard.

In addition to his wife, John is survived by his children, Chorbishop John D. Faris, James and Randi (Weitzen) Faris, Connie Faris Winch, Brian and Richelle (Manges) Faris, Christy and her husband Steven Papp, Shawn J. Faris, and grandchildren, Toni Marie, Derrick, Josephine, Briana, Maxine, Sophia and Scott Michael. He was pre-deceased by his brother Ronald; sons Ronald and Scott, and son-in-law Patrick Winch. John was an extraordinarily hard worker and businessman in southwestern Pennsylvania and south Florida, doing demolition and construction work.

Chorbishop John D. Faris celebrated the Divine Liturgy for the Faithful Departed on Friday, June 3, 2016, at Saint George Maronite Church in Uniontown, Penn. Condolences may be sent to Chorbishop John D. Faris, Saint Louis Gonzaga Church, 520 Rutger St., Utica, NY 13501.

Bishop Gregory Mansour along with the clergy and faithful of the Eparchy of Saint Maron extend their heartfelt sympathy and the promise of our prayers to Chorbishop Faris and his family.

May the Lord God grant John eternal rest in His Kingdom and consolation to his family and loved ones.

Deacon William "Bill" Murray, 78, passed away on May 10, 2016, at this home in Lake Worth, Fla. Deacon Bill spent much of his adult life in public and religious service. He retired in 2008 from the American Red Cross as CEO of the Jersey Coast Chapter, a position he held for close to three decades.

Deacon Bill was ordained a deacon for the Diocese of Trenton, N.J., dedicating years of service to the parishes of St. Mary's in Deal, N.J.; Holy Spirit in Asbury Park, N.J.; and Precious Blood in Monmouth Beach, N.J. For the past several years he served as a deacon at Mary, Mother of the Light Maronite Church in Tequesta, Fla. He carried with him a sense of responsibility and selfless pride in helping to establish new roots for that church. He also held the rank of Volunteer Major of the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Department, helping to oversee volunteer deputies throughout South Florida.

He is survived by his children, William II, of Wilmington, N.C.; JaLyn (Cipriano) Apicelli, of Kenosha, Wis.; Richard (Amanda), of West Allenhurst, N.J., and Christian, of Eatontown, N.J., and nine grandchildren.

The Funeral Liturgy was celebrated at Mary, Mother of the Light Maronite Church on Saturday, May 21, 2016. Bishop Gregory Mansour along with the clergy and faithful of the Eparchy of Saint Maron extend their heartfelt sympathy and the promise of our prayers to Deacon Murray's family.

May the Lord God grant Bill eternal rest in His Kingdom

and consolation to his family and loved ones.

Mr. George Khalil Akiki, the father of Father Wissam Akiki, Pastor of Saint Joseph Maronite Church in Phoenix, Ariz., passed away in Lebanon. He is survived by his wife, Hayat Jameel Assi, by his three sons, Khalil and his wife Katia Makhlof, Fr. Wissam and his wife Manal Kassab, and Robert and his wife Lena El Ashkar, and six grandchildren: Georgio, Angela, Perla, Katherine, Karen and Sharbel.

The funeral Liturgy took place Thursday May 19, 2016, at *Mar Elias el Towak* in *Zahle*, Lebanon. Expressions of sympathy may be sent to Reverend and Mrs. Wissam Akiki and Family, 5406 E. Virginia Ave., Phoenix, AZ 85008. Bishop A. Elias Zaidan along with the clergy and faithful of the Eparchy of our Lady of Lebanon extend their heartfelt sympathy and the promise of our prayers to Fr. Akiki and his family.

May the Lord God grant George eternal rest in His Kingdom and consolation to his family and loved ones. □

Schedule of Bishop Gregory Mansour

June 2, 2016

Anniversary of the Sisters of Life, Saint Patrick Cathedral, Manhattan, N.Y.

June 3 - 19, 2016

Annual Synod of Maronite Bishops, *Bkerke*, Lebanon.

June 22, 2016

His Beatitude Patriarch Bechara Rai arrives in New York

June 23 - 24, 2016

With His Beatitude Patriarch Rai, St. John Maron Church, Buffalo, N.Y.

June 24 - 25, 2016

With His Beatitude Patriarch Rai, St. Anthony Church, Lawrence, Mass.

June 25, 2016

With His Beatitude Patriarch Rai, St. Joseph Church, Waterville, Me.

June 26, 2016

With His Beatitude Patriarch Rai, Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral, Brooklyn, N.Y.

June 27, 2016

Evening Prayer Service with Patriarch Rai for Peace in the Middle East, hosted by Cardinal Dolan, Manhattan, N.Y.

June 28, 2016

Press Conferences and Interviews with Patriarch Rai, New York, N.Y.

June 29, 2016

Patriarch Rai Leaves for Detroit and for the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon

July 3, 2016

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

July 4 - 11, 2016

Clergy Conference and NAM Convention, San Francisco, Calif. □

“Miracles from Heaven” and the Problem of Theodicy

by

Bishop Robert Barron

As any apologist worth his/her salt will tell you, the great objection to the proposition that God exists is the fact of innocent suffering. If you want a particularly vivid presentation of this complaint, go on YouTube and look up Stephen Fry's disquisition on why he doesn't believe in God. (Then right afterward, please, do look at my answer to Fry). But the anguished question of an army of non-believers remains: how could an all-loving and all-powerful God possibly allow the horrific suffering endured by those who simply don't deserve it? Say all you want, these critics hold, about God's plan and good coming from evil, but the disproportion between evil and the benefits that might flow from it simply rules out the plausibility of religious faith. The skilled and experienced apologist will also tell you that, in the face of this problem, there is no single, unequivocal "answer," no clinching argument that will leave the doubter stunned into acquiescence. The best approach is to walk slowly around the issue, in the manner of the phenomenologists, illuminating now this aspect, now that.

It is precisely this method that is on display in the surprisingly thoughtful and affecting film *Miracles from Heaven*. The true story revolves around the devout Beam family from Burleson, Texas: Christy, Kevin, and their three daughters. At the age of ten, their middle child, Annabelle, develops a devastating disease whereby her intestines are no longer able to process food. After consulting local physicians and surgeons to no avail, Christy and her mother make their way to Boston to see a nationally renowned children's doctor. But after many more months of treatment, her condition remains grave. During this horrific ordeal, Christy's faith in God is seriously shaken, since her ardent prayers have remained, it appears, unanswered. In fact, she explicitly voices to her pastor the confounding puzzle referenced above: how can a loving God permit this innocent and God-fearing child to suffer?

When it seems that things cannot get any worse, Annabelle suffers a freak accident, falling headlong down the trunk of a hollowed-out tree. When she comes around after being unconscious for many hours, she is, against all expectations, cured. Unable to account for the sudden improvement, the Boston specialist declares that she is in "complete remission," just the medical way, he says, of explaining what cannot be explained. Annabelle herself, however, tells of an out of the body experience, a journey to heaven, and God's assurance that she would be fine.

I would like simply to explore a few of the aspects of the problem of suffering - theodicy, to give it its formal title - that are illuminated in the course of this film. First, miracles are rare. As the etymology of the word itself suggests - *mirari* (to be amazed) - miracles don't happen everyday, for if they did, we wouldn't "wonder" at or be amazed by them. Indeed, Annabelle's hospital roommate, a little girl suffering from cancer and deeply loved by her father, does not receive a

miracle. So we shouldn't expect God to intervene anytime someone experiences pain or tragedy.

Secondly, God customarily delights in working through secondary causes. To give just one example from the film, the Boston specialist, Dr. Nurko, is portrayed as a man who is not only medically skilled, but profoundly compassionate as well. The incomparable good that he does for dozens of children should be construed as an expression of God's loving care, as the vehicle through which God operates. Why would God not act directly? Thomas Aquinas answered that the supreme cause is pleased to involve us in his causality, giving us, as it were, the joy and privilege of sharing his work.

A third lesson is that believers in the God of the Bible should not expect that they will be free of pain, just the contrary. It is actually a bit of a puzzle that so many readers of the Bible seem to think that the love of God is incompatible with suffering, when every major figure in the Scriptures - Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Peter, James, and John - goes through periods of enormous suffering. And this puzzlement only deepens when we recall that the central person in the Bible is typically displayed to us nailed to a cross and in the throes of death. What becomes clear in the course of *Miracles from Heaven* is that the agony of the Beam family is not meaningless, but rather a participation in the salvific agony of Christ.

A fourth and final insight is that suffering tends to give rise to love. Frequently throughout the film, people perform acts of kindness toward Annabelle and her family, precisely because the girl's ordeal has awakened compassion in them. In a word, the girl's pain had a saving effect on those around her; she was, to use the language of the Bible, suffering on their behalf (Col 1:24). As Charles Williams pointed out, *coherence* - being with and for others - is the master dynamic of the Christian life. Our triumphs and joys are never utterly our own; they are for the sake of others. And the same is true of our tragedies.

Does this film "solve" the problem of innocent suffering? Obviously not. But does it shed light in a creative way on key aspects of it? Yes, indeed. □

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.



My Call by Deacon Peter M. Hobaica

Not very long after his arrival at St. Louis Gonzaga Parish in Utica, N.Y., Chorbishop John D. Faris placed his hands on my shoulders and gently asked: "Peter, have you ever thought about ministry in the Church?" I had not a clue what he was asking me and I must have looked at him quizzically when he continued and said, "The Church needs Deacons and Subdeacons." I'm sure there was more he said, but I went rather situationally deaf at that point. Immediately, I was looking for the nearest exit! I thought, not in a million years, not me.

I thought, after many years of study, work, raising a family, improving my golf game, travel with Judy, etc., this is the last thing I need to do! So I politely said to Chorbishop,

"Gee, Father, I have never considered it; but, tell you what, I'll give it some thought," never intending to give it a serious moment...but looking to find a way to gently exit the situation. So I left the rectory and walked the short distance to my car, got in, put the key in the ignition and then was paralyzed for a moment. Let me pause here for a moment and explain something to you (the reader).

You see, for almost all of my adult life whenever I concluded my daily prayers, I would ask Our Lord to tell me, show me, what it is He wants me to do for Him.

So, back to my car...in my moment of paralysis, it came. I'm not sure it was a voice, it certainly was a moment of clarity, an awareness. "Well, Peter, you've been asking me all these years what it is that I want you to do with your life...what it is I want you to do for me...do I have to hit you with a brick?" Now, I trembled, more than a bit. I thought "Oh My God." When the tremor stopped, I took the keys out of the ignition, walked back into the rectory, and told Chorbishop, "I've given it enough thought...my answer is Yes."

That was nearly seven years ago. Chorbishop arranged a meeting for me with Fr. Jack Morrison, Director of the Diaconate ministries, and another meeting with Bishop Gregory J. Mansour. A plan of study, discernment and formation began, directed by Chorbishop Faris and overseen by Father Jack. I was ordained by Chorbishop John as a Subdeacon on December 12, 2012, near the Feast of Our Lady. In September 2012, a few months before my ordination, I entered the Diaconate Formation Program in the Diocese of Syracuse, under the tutelage of Father Louis Aiello. That program of continued study, discernment and formation concluded with my ordination as a permanent Deacon with the imposition of hands by Bishop Gregory John Mansour on May 7, 2016, the Feast of Our Lady of the Apostles. I trembled again! I wept. The



Bishop Mansour with Deacon Peter Hobaica.

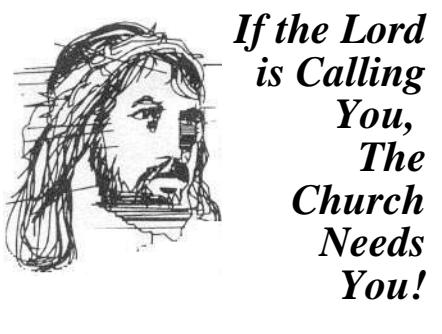
Bishop said to me on the altar, "The Holy Spirit is powerful!" I am so blessed.

During these past four years, I have also been blessed to be with a number of men "called" into His service, especially, my diaconate classmates, each of whom holds a special place in my heart. We are as diverse a group of people as I imagine the Apostles were when called by Christ to be fishers of men. We have pledged ourselves to serve His people and His Church.

Let me pause here again to say without any reservation or doubt that my calling was inspired by His Holy Spirit...but would not have been remotely possible without the help and guidance of so many people, especially, my wife Judy. Her sacrifice has been as deep as mine. Her patience and understanding in support of my calling has been a source of strength for me.

Also, as I mentioned in my first homily on Mothers Day, I am grateful to Chorbishop John Faris for watering the seed he recognized in me almost seven years ago; to deacon mentor Paul Salamy, whose decades of service are extraordinary and laudable; and to those priests who have served our parish over the years and who have each been a source of encouragement and support.

My prayer today is that we, men and women, who believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, ask that His Holy Spirit guide us to know just what it is He wants us to do in service to Him and His Church. The truth is we are all called! □



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 10th 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

The Gift of Friendship

by Faith Jarvis

Each person has a unique spiritual journey. Growing up in the small town of Mason, Michigan, in a family of Methodists, I was not exposed in any meaningful way to the Catholic faith, and certainly not the Maronite Church. My spiritual journey and journey to the Maronite Church is the story of friendship and how one friend can change one another's life.

I was a young widow working in state government when a woman named Dolores came to work in the office. Dolores was baptized a Melkite but worshiped with the Maronites. Single herself, she began to invite me to the many family gatherings of her large, extended family. It was clear from the beginning I was always welcome, and it also seemed so natural being around these large, happy families. It was clear God was at the center of their lives. There were not necessarily overt statements, but it was a given – God and His Church were at the center of everyday life and always to be recognized. My previous experience of God, although recognized, was more of a Sunday event and not incorporated in such a natural way into daily life and relationships. While I did not understand at the time, I was beginning to look at my own relationship with God and His Church differently.

When the State Senator for whom Dolores and I worked was elected to Congress, we moved with him to Washington, DC. In many ways our friendship deepened as we continued our journey in a new large city with no family and few friends. Yet, there was something additionally important – the presence of Our Lady of Lebanon and the Maronite Seminary. It was significant that Dolores' cousin, now Bishop Gregory Mansour, became a seminarian at this time. Dolores and I attended many Church functions and invited seminarians over for dinners. This sense of welcome continued, and as I discovered, it permeated the entire Maronite community.

It is important to understand there had been little talk about beliefs but just a reaching out to say you are included. In addition, the natural, joyful, and sincere faith of the seminarians could not help but impact me. It was also at this time I begin to get to know my now husband and deacon, John. He often attended the Maronite functions with us and was Catholic himself. Dolores encouraged our relationship and was thrilled when we were married. She was even more thrilled when I joined the Catholic Church. This step in my journey would not have happened if it were not for my friendship with a woman, to be honest, with whom I had little in common. Unfortunately, Dolores died suddenly but her friendship had and will always have a profound impact on me.

Even though Dolores was gone, our relationship with her family remained and grew as did our involvement with the Maronite Church. At that time, however, living some distance from the Maronite Church, we had both become very active in our local Latin Rite Church. After a few years, it became clear it was time to make the final journey into the Maronite Church. John had been studying for the diaconate. I had been following his work, and as a sacristan in our local parish, realized the special beauty of the Maronite Divine

Liturgy. When the time came to ask for an official change of rites, it was not a hard decision. I am sure Dolores would have been proud we became active Maronites, and it is all due to the power of friendship. □

Cincinnati, Ohio Parish Council



From left to right: Front row: Mr. Adel Chemaly, Dr. Lina Anaissie, Mrs. Maggie Samaan (Secretary), Mr. John George (Outgoing President), Mrs. Linda Conour (President), Mr. Paul Masadeh, and Mr. Kam Misleh. Back row: Mr. John Sarky, Dr. Joe Hamad, Father George Hajj, Mr. Chad Smedley (Vice President), and Mr. Jeff Nicholas.

by Linda Conour

St. Anthony of Padua Church in Cincinnati, Ohio, recognized and thanked its outgoing Parish Council for all of their hard work and efforts over the last three years during a special ceremony after the Divine Liturgy on May 1, 2016. The newly elected Parish Council for 2016 was also welcomed during the ceremony. □

the Deadline is... **Deadline** for next month's issue of *The Maronite Voice* is June 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:

The Maronite Voice
4611 Sadler Road
Glen Allen, Virginia 23060
Phone: (804) 270-7234; Fax: (804) 273-9914;
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. □

Dallas, Texas *Traveling Monstrance for Vocations*



by Mattye Thompson

The St. Pope John Paul II Traveling Monstrance for Vocations visited Our Lady of Lebanon Church in Dallas, Texas, for an afternoon of prayer and adoration with Fr. Assaad ElBasha on Sunday, May 1, 2016, the Feast of Our Lady of Lebanon. Hundreds of adorers came from all across the Dallas/Ft. Worth area to venerate the monstrance. During the final hour of the visitation, Fr. Assaad led the adorers in Eucharistic prayers. The Traveling Monstrance is one of six monstrances that Pope John Paul II personally blessed on November 24, 2004, and sent to each of the six continents of the world for the purpose of prayers for the increase of vocations to ordained ministry and consecrated life. These six monstrances are now third degree relics of St. Pope John Paul II. It was quite an honor to host the Traveling Monstrance!

Mercy Icon Visitations

Fr. Assaad ElBasha, Pastor of Our Lady of Lebanon Church in Dallas, Tex., has been sharing a beautiful prayer practice with his parishioners throughout this Jubilee Year of Mercy. On December 8, 2015, the inception of this Jubilee Year of Mercy, Fr. Assaad blessed the image of the Divine Mercy for the parishioners. Since December 13, 2015, the parishioners have been granted the blessing of hosting the Divine Mercy icon in their homes for a special week of prayer. Each week, the receiving families are called to the altar by the pastor to receive the icon to focus as a

family on personal intentions and prayer. The families are very blessed by their home visitations of the icon. They are quick to reserve their time with the icon, and are always so joyous to receive it at the altar. They take it home and give it a special place to stay for the week where the families may gather in prayer together. This practice of sharing the Mercy icon in prayer has brought many blessings to the parishioners of Our Lady of Lebanon. □

Orlando, Florida *Faith of the Mountain Award*

by Diane Manhire

Bogdan Stolarz was awarded the Faith of the Mountain Award at St. Jude Maronite Church, Orlando, Fla., on May 22, 2016. This award recognizes Maronite young adults (18 - 25) who are serving Maronite parishes. Those young NAM members deserve to be recognized for their hard work and dedication to the Apostolate and to the Maronite Church on a local, regional and/or national level. Bogdan is a true example of his service to St. Jude as an altar server and youth volunteer on church activities. He also attended the Maronite Youth Conference these last years. □



Newtown Square, Pennsylvania *May Crowning*



On May 1, 2016, The Feast of Our Lady of Lebanon, the parishioners of St. Sharbel Maronite Church, Newtown Square, Penn., held the Crowning and

Procession in honor of our Blessed Mother. Julia Hobeika carried the crown of flowers, and Alessandro Sleiman and Jimmy Sleiman followed in procession with flowers for the altar. Because of the height, Fr. Raymond Khallof actually placed the crown on Mary's head. These three children will also be making their First Communion at the end of the month. All of the school children have also been leading the recitation of the Rosary every Sunday before the Liturgy. Following the Divine Liturgy a brunch was held in the Church hall for everyone to enjoy. □

Boston, Massachusetts Knights of the Virgin Mary



Msgr. Georges El-Khali with the Knights of the Virgin Mary.

by Randa Yasbeck

On Sunday, May 22, 2016, ten new members of the Knights of the Virgin Mary were consecrated after they recited their Ritual Promise to Msgr. Georges El-Khali at Our Lady of the Cedars of Lebanon, Jamaica Plain [Boston], Mass. As we are approaching the end of the year in the Religious Education Program, the Knights of the Virgin Mary will be joining last year's group (total 26 Knights), and will be preparing over the summer to start a new chapter learning about the Maronite Faith. It is amazing to look back at all the hard work of the leaders Ibtissam Chahwan and Nisrine El-Hachem who went the extra mile and will continue to teach the group to grow in their faith. □

Food For Thought

With the weapons of love, God has defeated selfishness and death. His son, Jesus, is the door of mercy wide open to all.

Pope Francis, May 25, 2016

Saint Louis, Missouri *The Plight of Christians in the Middle East*

by Ramona Milford

On March 13, 2016, Deacon Louis Peters, Chancellor of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles, was the guest speaker at the annual St. Joseph Forum of the Credo organization in St. Louis, Mo., to speak on the *Plight of Christians in the Middle East*. Credo members were present as well as Chorbishop Moussa Joseph, Rector of St. Raymond Maronite Cathedral in St. Louis.

It is daunting to take on such a broad and complicated subject matter, but the forty plus years Deacon Peters spent in the Catholic education system enabled him to provide an organized and informative presentation. Understanding the reason for so much anger and hatred to manifest itself in the region where Jesus walked has been debated by historians, theologians and religious scholars for years. On a daily basis Christians in the Middle East are tortured, terrorized and slaughtered by extremists identified as ISIS. Some would call this a religious war. Some would say it is a battle of good versus evil. Deacon Peters presented the following considerations:

- Consider - The Universal Catholic Church is comprised of twenty-four Churches categorized among eight different rites. All twenty-four are Catholic with twenty-three of them recognized as Eastern Catholic Churches and then the Roman Catholic or Western Church.
- Consider - Religious belief for Middle Eastern Christians is not taken lightly. Their religious belief defines their way of life, their culture as they are all woven into one.
- Consider - In the Western world, if individuals do not like the Church they are attending they can walk down the street or drive to the next neighborhood and attend another Church. It is difficult for Middle Eastern Christians to leave their faith because it often defines their civil status. It is not just considered a "personal" decision.
- Consider - As the Western world debates about whether or not the daily atrocities and murder committed by ISIS against Christians meets the definition of "genocide," more and more Christians are joining the ranks of refugees.

The audience at the presentation listened intently and asked so many questions that the time was extended. The reaction of those listeners indicated that there are people who do care and want to know what can be done to stop ISIS from perpetrating these horrible acts of torture and murder on the Christians. Though unspoken, it seemed many attendees wanted to ask, if left unchecked, who becomes the next target and ultimate victim of ISIS? □

Mary, Help of Christians



Below is a reflection of Cardinal Donald Wuerl, Archbishop of Washington, entitled 'Mary, Help of Christians.' Published on May 24, 2016, it is from Cardinal Wuerl's blog.

The Blessed Virgin Mary is a beautiful, beloved, essential and pervasive figure in Christian life and in the Church's calendar. She has been since the early days of the Church. Her feasts are as varied as the cultures of the world, with each having special traditions, customs, and habits of piety. For example, the Church honors Mary every Saturday, recalling both the one full day that Jesus spent in the tomb and the traditional belief that Mary was the disciple who best kept the faith on that day. The early Church took up the practice of keeping faith with her on that day each week.

Since the Middle Ages, the Church has devoted the month of May to Mary. Many parishes have "May Crownings" during this time in which a statue of the Blessed Mother is adorned with a diadem or a wreath of flowers. Many Christians also undertake pilgrimages during this month to shrines associated with the Blessed Virgin. In May, there are also three Marian feasts that are celebrated which help us to understand what Mary can teach us about being disciples.

Earlier this month, on May 13, we commemorated the Memorial of Our Lady of Fatima which recalls the appearance of the Blessed Virgin to three young children in Portugal in 1917. Mary encouraged penance, conversion and praying the rosary, warning the world of a great war and suffering, but that, "In the end, my Immaculate Heart will triumph."

The Feast of Our Lady, Help of Christians, which is celebrated on May 24, is an older feast, dating back to the sixteenth century, which was not a peaceful time in Europe. In 1571, Catholics throughout the continent joined in praying the rosary in hopes of prevailing over Muslim military forces that had long sought to expand into Europe. These prayers were answered at the Battle of Lepanto on October 7, 1571, which is now the Feast for Our Lady of the Rosary.

Both of these feasts highlight not only the strength we find in asking Mary's intercession, joining our prayers to her intercession, but also the confidence that God continues to act in the world. God hears the cry of those who suffer and God responds.

The third Marian feast for May is the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin on May 31. We remember how Mary journeyed to the home of her kinswoman Elizabeth to care for her as the birth of her son, John the Baptist, drew near. In the greeting that is so beautifully recounted in the first chapter of Luke, Mary first announces the arrival of the Messiah to the people of Israel as she prays what is known as the Magnificat. "My soul magnifies the Lord and my Spirit rejoices in God, my Savior" (Luke 1:46). This is a prayer of joy and of confidence that, in staying close to Christ, we are never alone.

These celebrations, like all Marian feasts, are really celebrations of Jesus Christ, for she has no privilege that she has not received from God. In these days, we learn how to stay close to him in prayer and through the practice of charity, such as caring for a relative in a time of need, with confidence that our prayers will be answered.

To rejoice in Mary is to celebrate God's greatest creation – the vessel he fashioned to be his own mother, the woman who would bear him into the world. In the life of the "handmaid of the Lord," we learn what it means to say "yes" to life in the Lord and to discover in him the meaning of life.

With maternal love for us, Mary wants what is best for us – she wants Jesus for us, so she urges us, "Do whatever he tells you" (John 2:5). Then she helps us as we lead others to know and love her Son too. Her feasts not only empower us to turn to her in prayer, but also to love Jesus and others with a greater love.

To learn more about these and the other Marian feasts, I invite you to see the book that my long-time collaborator Mike Aquilina and I wrote, entitled *The Feasts: How the Church Year Forms Us as Catholics* (2014). □

Syria's Catholic and Orthodox Children to Pray Together for Peace



Children from Syria's different Christian denominations will be joining together to pray for peace in the country on International Children's Day. The plan, which is being backed by Syrian Church leaders, was described in a joint message from the country's Catholic and Orthodox Patriarchs.

They wrote: "On this International Day of the Child, Christian children in many of the towns and cities of Syria

are going to gather together and pray that peace may come at last."

On June 1, hundreds of children are expected to gather together for processions in Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, Tartus and Marmarita to pray for peace.

The Patriarchs added: "The children in our own home country of Syria are the little brothers and sisters of the suffering Child Jesus.

"For more than five years now they have been dragged through a cruel war, wounded, traumatized or even killed.

"Many have lost their parents and everything that was dear to them. Innumerable children were born during the war and have never experienced peace. Their tears and their sufferings cry out to Heaven."

This prayer campaign grew out of an initiative organized by Catholic charity Aid to the Church in Need (ACN).

Last month the charity arranged a visit by an international Catholic-Orthodox delegation to representatives of all the Christian Churches in Syria to talk about joint initiatives for peace and reconstruction in Syria.

Syria is a priority country for Aid to the Church in Need and the charity is providing food, shelter, medicine and pastoral support for Christians and others suffering poverty and persecution.

Maronite Bishop Antoine Chbeir of *Lattakia* told ACN that he hopes that the children's example will mark the beginning of a renewed prayer initiative for Syria.

He said: "We are hoping that this campaign will continue, so that the light of peace can shine forth brightly."

Aid to the Church in Need is also asking children in schools and parishes throughout the world to join together with Syria's young people to pray for peace.

The Patriarchs' message goes on: "The defenseless Child, in whose form God chose to become man, is at the same time the Lord of history.

"The Prophet Isaiah foretold this Child as 'Prince of Peace' and 'Wonderful Counselor.'

"That is why the Christ Child is often portrayed, not only as a naked child in the manger, but as a King, holding in His left hand the globe, representing the world, and with His right hand blessing the whole Earth. "The Christ Child has come to bring peace."

The campaign has been placed under the patronage of the Child Jesus – and two similar images in which Jesus is dressed as a king are being used as part of the prayer campaign.

These are the Catholic image of Infant of Prague and the Orthodox icon of The Mother of God of the Never Fading Rose, in which the Blessed Virgin Mary holds the crowned Christ Child in her arms.

The children will carry both these images in procession on the First of June.

The patriarchs concluded their message with this appeal: "We pray to Him – the Christ, the King of the Universe, who carries the world in His hand, in the arms of His mother – to bless all the children of Syria.

"We implore Him, who alone can bring peace: 'Protect and save the children of this land! Hear our prayers, now! Delay no longer in granting peace to our land!'

"Look upon the tears of the children; dry the tears of the mothers; let the cries of grief at last fall silent!" □"

Aid to the Church in Need is an international Catholic charity under the guidance of the Holy See, providing assistance to the suffering and persecuted Church in more than 140 countries. www.churchinneed.org (USA).

(Zenit.org, May 26, 2016)

Pope Francis Reminds Faithful: Pray Always, Don't Lose Heart



We are to pray always without becoming weary, for God always answers us. Pope Francis reminded the faithful of this reality during his weekly General Audience on May 25, 2016, in St. Peter's Square, as he continued his catechesis for the Holy Year of Mercy, turning to Jesus' parable of the unjust judge and the widow (Lk 18:1-8).

The Holy Father recalled that Jesus tells us that even an unscrupulous judge will finally render justice to a poor woman because of her persistence. In the Lord recounting this, the Jesuit Pope explained, He encourages us to persevere in prayer to our Heavenly Father, who is infinitely just and loving.

"The Lord," the Pope suggested, "also assures us that God will not only hear our prayers, but will not delay in answering them." In giving us this parable, Francis explained that Jesus tells us to "pray always and not lose heart."

"All experience moments of fatigue and discouragement, especially when our prayers seem ineffective. But Jesus assures us: unlike the unjust judge, God answers His children promptly, although this does not mean necessarily doing it in the time and manner that we would like."

"Prayer is not a magic wand! It helps to keep faith in God, to trust in Him even when we do not understand His will."

The Gospels tell us that Jesus himself prayed constantly. His own intense prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane is a model for our own: it teaches us to present our petitions with complete trust in the Father's gracious will.

Concerned about his upcoming anguish, Jesus prayed to the Father to deliver Him from the Passion, but ultimately His prayer is overtaken by trust in the Father. Although Jesus' wish was not the Father's will, He trusted. "The object of

prayer," the Pontiff explained, "is of secondary importance; what matters above all is the relationship with the Father."

"This is what prayer does: it transforms the desire and moulds it according to the will of God, whatever it is, because one who prays, aspires first of all for union with the Father, Who is merciful love."

The Pope, then, reminded those present that the parable of the unjust judge and the widow ends with a pointed question: "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" (v. 8). Stressing that perseverance in prayer keeps our faith alive and strong, the Holy Father noted how, in our prayer, we experience the compassion of God "who, like a Father filled with love and mercy, is ever ready to come to the aid of His children."

Pope Francis concluded, urging those gathered to ask the Lord for an unceasing, persevering faith, like that of the widow in the parable. □

(Zenit.org, May 25, 2016)

Pope Francis: Heaven's Doors are Closed to Those Who Close Their Hearts to the Poor

Continuing his series of Wednesday catecheses on mercy, Pope Francis devoted his May 18, 2016, general audience to the parable of the rich man and Lazarus.

"Lazarus, lying outside the closed door of the rich man's house, longs to eat even the scaps that fall from his table," Pope Francis told the crowds gathered in St. Peter's Square, according to the official English-language synthesis of his remarks. "Lazarus represents the silent cry of the poor in every time and place, and the paradox of a world in which astonishing wealth coexists with scandalous poverty."

"When both men die, their situation is reversed," the Pope continued. "Lazarus, whose name means 'God helps,' is brought to the bosom of Abraham, while the rich man is in torment, thirsting even for a drop of water."

The Pope added: Abraham has to explain to him how, in the mystery of divine justice, the mercy we seek from God is linked to the mercy we show to others. The doors of heaven are closed to those who close their hearts to the needs of the poor. Only conversion can open hearts to the truth of God's Word and its saving message, which, as Our Lady sings in her Magnificat, overturns the situations of this world by the triumph of God's justice and mercy. □

(Catholic World News, May 18, 2016)

Bishop Cries Out as ISIS Devastates Syrian Towns

A Syrian prelate has described desperate efforts to tend to the injured and the dying following multiple ISIS attacks on *Tartous* and *Jableh*, which have left more than 200 dead and nearly 650 injured.

Maronite Bishop Antoine Chbeir told international Catholic charity Aid to the Church in Need that the May 23, 2016, attacks in his diocese were the first of their kind in an



Bishop Antoine Chbeir of Latakia.

area where displaced Syrians had gathered by the hundreds of thousands. The coastal region has remained under Syrian government control and was considered to be one of the country's last remaining safe havens for Muslims and Christians alike.

The prelate warned that the attacks on the two coastal cities may prompt a surge in people fleeing Syria: "If there are no safe areas in Syria, still more people will leave the country - probably for good. Many of them will go by sea."

According to local news reports, the apparent aim of ISIS was to strike the Assad regime in its core stronghold, which is backed by the nearby Russian fleet.

The Maronite Bishop of *Latakia* described the desperate efforts of clergy and laity to come to the aid of victims, adding that now priests have begun burying the dead. Bishop Chbeir said: "We are trying to help the people and are taking care of the wounded. It is a very dramatic situation and when the disaster struck we wondered if we could cope.

"Right now, our priests and people are on the scene. They are visiting the people – many of them have broken legs and deep wounds, not to mention the psychological effects."

Bishop Chbeir continued: "First of all, we need physical and material help, just to help those affected to have something to eat and to help them take care of those who are suffering the most." He added: "We care for people not because of their particular religion but because they are human beings. In this month of May, we are praying to Our Lady to help us." □

(Zenit.org, May 25, 2016)

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. □



San Francisco, California, Continues Preparation for the 53rd Maronite Convention

With the convention a short few weeks away, the committees are hard at work preparing for their guests. This year's convention starts on July 6, 2016, and everyone has been working on a full schedule of informative and inspiring activities, colorful excursions and fun events.

The 53rd Maronite Convention is sponsored by the National Apostolate of Maronites (NAM) and is hosted by Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Church, San Francisco Bay area, Calif. For more information about the Convention, NAM and its activities, please log on to www.namnews.org.

Children's Schedule (Ages 5 - 11)

Thursday, July 7, 2016

10:30 a.m. – 12:00 noon

- Under the Sea Treasure Chest
- Decorate your own Prayer Box
- Free Play

3:30 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

- Movie and Snack

Friday, July 8, 2016

10:30 a.m. – 12:00 noon

- Bingo Bottles - Create your own Design
- Create your own Mosaic

3:30 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

- Jewel Cross Mosaic
- Beads/Making Necklaces and Bracelets

Saturday, July 9, 2016: 10:30 a.m. – 12:00 noon

- Natural Sea Shell Picture Frame Craft Kit

3:30 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

- Color Zone Shrink Art
- Head Bands

Young Adults (MYA) Day Schedule (Ages 18 - 35)

Thursday, July 7, 2016

12 noon Divine Liturgy served by MYO/MYA

1:15 p.m. Excursion to San Francisco Golden Gate Park, Academy of Sciences, Tea Garden, Botanical Garden, Buffalo Paddock, Young Museum Tower, Ocean Beach, and Cliff House for a wonderful ocean view. Return by 5:00 p.m. (Park fees not included. Different buses/tours for different age-groups.)

6:00 p.m. Theology on Tap with Fr. Tony Massad, Pastor of St. Rafka Maronite Church, Livonia, Mich., and Eparchial Director of Maronite Young Adult Apostolate (MYA)

Friday, July 8, 2016

8:00 a.m. 5K Run organized by Our Lady of Lebanon Youth Ministry. All proceeds will be donated to St Jude's Children's Hospital.

10:30 a.m. Excursion to Alcatraz. The federal prison on Alcatraz Island (The Rock) housed some of America's most dangerous criminals from 1934 to 1963. Among those who served time at the maximum-security facility was the notorious gangster Al "Scarface" Capone (1899-1947). Alcatraz Island was also the site of a U.S. military prison from the late 1850s to 1933, and is now a popular tourist destination.

5:00 p.m. Theology on Tap with Fr. Guy-Raymond Sarkis, Doctoral studies and Research on Islam, and Pastor of St. Ignatius of Antioch Maronite Catholic Church, Dayton, Ohio

Saturday, July 9, 2016

10:30 a.m. Scavenger Hunt in San Francisco. Return by 2:30 p.m.

Youth Day Schedule

Ages 12 – 18 (not a college student)

Thursday, July 7, 2016

10:30 a.m. "Experiencing the Grace of Jesus" during this Year of Mercy, Fr. Gary George

12 noon Divine Liturgy served by MYO/MYA

1:15 p.m. Excursion to San Francisco Golden Gate Park, Academy of Sciences, Tea Garden, Botanical Garden, Buffalo Paddock, Young Museum Tower, Ocean Beach, and Cliff House for a wonderful ocean view. Return by 5:00 p.m. (Park fees not included. Different buses/tours for different age-groups.)

Friday, July 8, 2016

8:00 a.m. 5K Run organized by Our Lady of Lebanon Youth Ministry. All proceeds will be donated to St Jude's Children's Hospital.

12 noon: Divine Liturgy served by MYO

3:30 p.m. "Faith and Technology," Fr. Fadi Chidiac

Saturday, July 9, 2016

1:15 p.m. MYO Sight-seeing. San Francisco, Pier 39, Fisherman's Wharf, Golden Gate Bridge, Sausalito. Return by 5:00 p.m.

Excursions

Wednesday, July 6, 2016

10:30 a.m. Napa Valley wine country, known world-wide as a premium wine-growing region. Wine Tour to include visiting three wineries and lunch box. Return by 5:00 p.m. (Wine tasting fee not included).

Thursday, July 7, 2016

1:15 p.m. First Excursion to San Francisco Golden Gate Park. Academy of Sciences, Tea Garden, Botanical Garden, Buffalo Paddock, Young Museum Tower, Ocean Beach, and Cliff House for a wonderful ocean view. Return by 5:00 p.m. (Park fees not included. Different buses/tours for different age-groups.)

Friday, July 8, 2016

8:00 a.m. 5K Run organized by Our Lady of Lebanon Youth Ministry. All proceeds will be donated to St Jude's Children's Hospital.

1:15 p.m. Second Excursion to Downtown San Francisco, Union Square, Lombard Street, Pier 39, Fisherman's Wharf, and the world-famous San Francisco Golden Gate Bridge. Return by 5:00 p.m. □

Pope Reflects on Priestly Renewal

Pope Francis opened the meeting of the Italian Episcopal Conference on May 16, 2016, and reflected on the renewal of the priesthood.

"I do not wish to offer you a systematic reflection on the figure of the priest: let us rather try to turn the perspective on its head, and make ready to listen," the Pope said. "Let us approach – almost in tiptoe – one of the many parish priests who spend themselves in our communities, let us let his visage pass before the eyes of our heart, and let us ask with simplicity: What gives life its flavor? For whom and for what does he do such dedicated service? What is the ultimate reason for his self-giving?"

Reflecting on these questions, the Pope stressed the importance of the fire of the love of the Lord, service to the people of God, and generous self-giving for the sake of the Kingdom.

The Pope also recommended that clerics should be careful in their handling of material goods, avoiding the tendency to accumulate wealth. The Church, he said, should "maintain only what may be needed for the experience of faith and charity of God's people." □

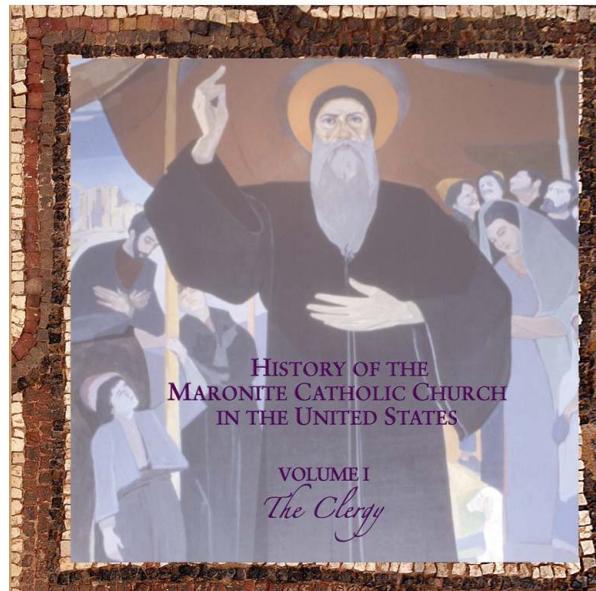
(Catholic World News, May 17, 2016)



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.

The Family in the Life of the Church

Continued from page 1

We have always understood the truth that children learn many things first and foremost within their family: they learn how to deal with others; they learn how to share with others; they learn how to be patient and giving to others; they learn the meaning of sacrifice; they learn the value of relationships. In short, it is within the family that children learn the meaning of love. They learn to love and they learn to be loved.

I would ask the question: "Do we know what a healthy and strong Catholic family might look like?" What might be some of those characteristics to recognize? Certainly, family prayer and family worship (Church attendance) is among them. A strong Catholic family may be aware and live the understanding that "Love" is a "Gift," first and foremost a gift from God. Do we truly see our children as visible signs of the union of love between a husband and a wife? The openness to life within our families is a very real example of this recognition. Do we as pastors and as parents practice those virtues that we seek to instill in the young?

Last year at one of his general audiences (and he also mentioned it in his Exhortation) Pope Francis made some comments about a happy family life. He said there are three phrases that are key to building a happy family life and they do not require higher education or financial means.

They are:
1) "May I?"
2) "Thank you," and
3) "Forgive me."

"These simple phrases," said the Pope, "are not so easy to say or to put into practice. But when they are ignored, their absence can cause cracks in the foundation of the family,

which can lead to its collapse. If these words are part of our daily lives, not just as a formal expression of good manners, but as a sign of deep love for one another, they strengthen a happy family life."

If we consider our society weak and dysfunctional; if we consider our Church irrelevant and unable to address the needs of people, perhaps we must start with our families. "As the family goes, so goes the nation." □

+Bishop A. Elias Zaidan
Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon

Orlando, Florida Confirmation



Martha Sebaaly, Matthew Vac, Joel Jimbo, Nicholas Landomo, Sebastian Piriou, Eduardo Ratto and Maria Escalante Ratto received the Sacrament of Confirmation on May 14, 2016, at St. Jude Maronite Church, Orlando, Fla. □