



The Maronite Voice



A Publication of the Maronite Eparchies in the USA

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November 2017

Year of Martyrdom and the Martyrs

This past year I had the distinct joy and privilege to celebrate the 100th anniversary of our parishes in Torrington, Conn., and New Bedford, Mass. On the evening before the Sunday Divine Liturgy in New Bedford at Our Lady of Purgatory Church, we spent an hour in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. I recalled the readings from the Book of Revelation in which Jesus, “the faithful witness,” stood in the midst of his persecuted Church signified by lamp stands.

As the Blessed Sacrament was exposed before us, with two lamp stands on either side, all I could think of was what our ancestors in the faith were going through under the Ottomans one hundred years ago; and how this persecution reminded me of the Book of Revelation and the early Church when Christians were once again persecuted and yet, along with Christ, were the faithful witnesses. And still this persecution continues today.

Our Patriarch, Bechara Peter Cardinal Rai, who just finished a two-week visit to us, has declared this year to be the Year of Martyrdom and the Martyrs. [This special year started on February 9, 2017, and will conclude on St. John Maron's Feast Day on March 2, 2018].

What a joy it is to finish the race, as Saint Paul says, and to be faithful to the end, even in the midst of trials and persecutions. This is what our ancestors did a hundred years ago. As those around them destroyed, they built. As some filled their lives with hate, they loved and they forgave. Our churches that began in the 1890s through 1917 had a special message for us today. “Do not return evil for evil but defeat evil with good” (Romans 12:17).

There is a “red” martyrdom (ultimate witness) by the shedding of blood, and a white martyrdom (daily witness). The red is quicker, the white is the daily opposition we face to living Christ's way and his kingdom fully. Most of us will face only the white, but that does not mean it is any less important.

May we have the courage to live as a witness to the One who walks amidst the lamp stands and to be His faithful witnesses.

+ Gregory J. Mansour
Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn



Schedule of Bishop Elias Zaidan

November 5, 2017

Divine Liturgy in Remembrance of Bishop Robert Shaheen, Our Lady of Lebanon National Shrine and Basilica, North Jackson, Ohio

November 10 - 11, 2017

Pastoral Visit to St. Sharbel Mission, El Paso, Tex.

November 12 - 16, 2017

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Annual Conference, Baltimore, Md.

November 16, 2017

Caritas Lebanon-USA Board Meeting, Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Seminary, Washington, D.C.

November 17, 2017

Reception with Archbishop Paul Matar for the "Sagesse Foundation," Los Angeles, Calif.

November 18 - 19, 2017

Feast of Saint Raymond Celebration, Saint Raymond Cathedral, St. Louis, Mo.

November 23, 2017

A Happy and Blessed Thanksgiving

December 9 - 19, 2017

Pastoral Visit to Our Lady's Maronite Parish, Austin, Tex. ☐

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

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Maronite Convention 2018

Our Lady of the Cedars Maronite Catholic Church

Houston, Texas

July 11 - 15, 2018

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

www.Namnews.org
www.Namconvention2018.com

Charlotte, North Carolina 4th Annual Festival

by Amanda Nassar

Lebanese flags and decorations were draped all over the campus. The patriotism roared from each corner. St. Stephen Maronite Church in Charlotte, N.C., had its 4th Annual Festival of Lebanon on September 23, 2017, to share the Lebanese heritage.

Parishioners served Lebanese food all day long after many weeks of preparation. The authentic Lebanese food cuisine left a good impression on all visitors. New and familiar faces enjoyed a day filled with live Arabic music, youth *dabke* dances, a kids' zone, cooking classes, a photo booth, a souvenir shop, and much more!

One of the famous local radio stations came out and broadcasted the festival live, placing the event on the map and contributing to its success. ☐

Food For Thought

God does not disappoint! He has placed hope in our hearts so that it can blossom and bear fruit. ☐

Pope Francis, October 10, 2017



Roanoke, Virginia Centennial Celebration



by Mary Theresa Ferris

This year marks the 100th birthday of St. Elias Maronite Catholic Church in Roanoke, Va. To commemorate this event, His Excellency Bishop Gregory John Mansour, Bishop of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn, attended St. Elias celebrations on September 23 - 24, 2017.

A cocktail hour on Saturday September 23 in the church social hall, was followed by an elegant dinner. On Sunday, September 24, Bishop Mansour celebrated the Divine Liturgy in the morning.

The theme for our 100th anniversary was "A Century of Commitment" commemorating the many contributions that the Lebanese and St. Elias parishioners have made to this community. St. Elias was founded by Lebanese immigrants who settled here before the turn of the century. The church moved to its current location on Cove Road in 1984, opening a 350-seat church on a 10-acre site.

In Discover Magazine, December 2015, The Roanoke Times noted: "The Lebanese in particular, sought to assimilate" into this community. By the turn of the century, Lebanese were Roanoke's most sizable immigrant group, and they sought to preserve their traditions while adapting to change and contributing to the community. St. Elias was no exception. Its parishioners started many well-known businesses, including Melrose Hardware, the New Yorker Deli, Double Cola Bottling Co., Yamine's, and the downtown landmark, Aesy's. Parishioners like Jerry Assaid served on the county board of supervisors, were prominent physicians like Dr. Monsour Wheby, and noted attorneys, like current City Council member Raphael Ferris.

St. Elias proudly claimed Virginia's most decorated soldier of World War II, Lt. Co. Joseph Andrew Moses. The parish sent ninety-seven young men to the Armed Forces during that war; two never returned.

Today St. Elias is a vigorous parish serving second and third generation Lebanese as well as increasing numbers of Roman Catholics attracted by the reverence and beauty of the Maronite liturgy. The Maronite Church is one of the oldest churches within Catholicism, dating back to the early Christian community in Antioch. □

Torrington, Connecticut 100th Anniversary



From left: Fr. Tony Saab, Chorbishop Joseph Kaddo, Bishop Gregory Mansour, Bishop Peter Rosazza, Chorbishop Joseph Lahoud and Fr. Joseph Khoueiry.

by Chris Comeau

On the weekend of September 16 - 17, 2017, Saint Maron Church in Torrington, Conn., celebrated its one hundred-year anniversary. Bishop Gregory Mansour, Bishop of the Eparchy of Saint Maron, joined the community as they reminisced, renewed friendships, and celebrated the Maronite faith.

Saint Maron Parish has been described as a jewel of the Maronite Church in the north end of Torrington. To celebrate a hundred years of faith, service, and communal love, a dinner was held at the local Elks Lodge on Saturday night. Honored guests included: Chorbishop Joseph Lahoud, Chorbishop Joseph Kaddo, Pastor of Saint Anthony of the Desert, Fall River, Mass.; Fr. Joseph Khoueiry, Pastor of Our Lady of Lebanon, Waterbury, Conn.; Fr. Carlos Zapata; Mother Olga with the Daughters of Mary of Nazareth; Fr. Warren Savage; Subdeacons Camille Atallah, George Jabbour, and Norbert Vogl; and the Mayor of Torrington, Ms. Elinor Carbone. Fr. Tony Saab, Pastor, thanked all the guests and promised to continue the work of his predecessors in keeping the light of our Church shining to lead us all to Christ.

The Honor Guard of the Knights of Columbus led the clergy into Sunday's Liturgy. Celebrated by Bishop Gregory Mansour and concelebrated by Bishop Peter Rosazza, along with distinguished clergy members and guests, the Liturgy was followed by a reception in the church hall. □



New Bedford, Massachusetts Centennial Celebration Weekend

by Matthew Thomas

During the weekend of September 29 - October 1, 2017, Our Lady of Purgatory Church in New Bedford, Massachusetts, celebrated the 100th Anniversary of its founding in 1917 by Msgr. Joseph Shabaya. The theme of the Centennial Celebration has been "Celebrating Our 100 Year Pilgrimage of Faith and Witness to God's Love." Joining Fr. Fadi Rouhana, Pastoral Administrator, and the Parishioners and Friends of Our Lady of Purgatory Church (OLOP) for the celebration were Bishop Gregory Mansour, Bishop of the Eparchy of St. Maron; Chorbishop Michael G. Thomas, Vicar General of the Eparchy of St. Maron and a native parishioner of OLOP; Bishop Michel Aoun of the Eparchy of *Jbeil*, Lebanon; Chorbishop Joseph Kaddo, Pastor of St. Anthony of the Dessert Parish in Fall River, Mass.; Chorbishop Joseph Lahoud, Pastor *Emeritus* of Our Lady of the Cedars of Lebanon in Jamaica Plain, Mass.; and Fr. Jack Morrison, Administrator of Mary Mother of the Light Mission in Tequesta, Fla., and former Pastor of OLOP.

The Centennial Celebration Weekend festivities began on Friday Evening at the New Bedford Whaling Museum with a multi-media presentation entitled "We Are Maronites" which recounted the founding of the Parish in 1917, the tragic fire of 1933 which totally destroyed the Church, the death of Fr. George Jowdy in the Hurricane of 1938, the efforts of Chorbishop Joseph Eid of St. Anthony of the Dessert Church and the parishioners of OLOP from 1938 to 1954 to keep the Parish together, the dedication of the new Church on Mother's Day, 1954, the Pastorate of Fr. George I. Saad from 1954 to 1983, and the recent history of the Parish from 1983 to the present. The presentation included photos from the past, interviews from the Parish's Oral History project, and live dramatic readings. There were also multi media presentations celebrating the seven parishioners who have heard the call of the Lord and entered religious life, the permanent diaconate and the priesthood, and celebrating music in the Parish. Following a presentation entitled "Voices," awards were presented to parishioners of OLOP who were over seventy-five years old. The evening ended as more than two-hundred people in attendance gathered for a reception in the Museum's Haborview Gallery overlooking historic New Bedford Harbor.

On Saturday, Bishop Mansour, Chorbishop Thomas and Fr. Rouhana met with some of the children of the Parish's Religious Education Program. The children sang hymns in English and in Arabic and presented the Bishop and Chorbishop with gifts they had made for them. The children and their parents had an opportunity to enjoy some refreshments and conversation with the Bishop and Chorbishop. Early Saturday Evening the parishioners gathered at the Church for the Benediction and Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Later Saturday Evening, more than five hundred gathered for a *Hafli* at the Venus De Milo in Swansea, Mass. Following the meal, the guests danced into



From left: Chorbishops Joseph Lahoud and Joseph Kaddo, Bishop Michel Aoun, Bishop Gregory Mansour, Chorbishop Michael Thomas, Fr. Fadi Rouhana and Fr. Jack Morrison.

the night to the music of Lebanese entertainer Toni Issa.

The centerpiece of the weekend's celebration was the celebration of the Divine Liturgy of Thanksgiving on Sunday morning at Our Lady of Purgatory Church. Bishop Gregory was the Main Celebrant and Chorbishop Michael delivered the homily in which he recounted the history of the Parish, its steadfast devotion to the Blessed Mother, and its special mission to pray for the faithful departed in Purgatory through the intercession of the Virgin Mary. Chorbishop Michael closed his Homily by reminding the parishioners that the Virgin Mary achieved great things through the Grace of God, and so have they. He also reminded them that Mary never abandoned her Son, Jesus, even as He hung on the Cross, and that neither should they. Fr. Fadi spoke after Communion and thanked everyone for their participation and efforts. Bishop Gregory also spoke after Communion and congratulated the parishioners on this celebration and thanked all who participated in the weekend's celebration. The clergy and parishioners sang the traditional hymn to Mary, *Ya Oom Allah*, at the end of the Liturgy which concluded with the blessing of the parishioners with the Icon of Our Lady of Purgatory. Following the Liturgy, a breakfast buffet, attended by approximately 200 parishioners and guests, was held at the Century House in Acushnet, Mass.

The Centennial Celebration Weekend events were the culmination of a year-long celebration that began with an opening Liturgy celebrated by Chorbishop Michael and Fr. Fadi, a three-night Parish Mission led by Fr. James Doran, Pastor of St. Joseph Church in Waterville, Me., and social activities such as parish breakfasts and a whale watch. The parishioners of OLOP would like to thank Bishop Gregory, Bishop Aoun and Chorbishop Michael for joining them during the celebration. They also pray for God's continued blessings, through the intercession of Our Lady of Purgatory, and that Our Lord, through the intercession of Our Lady of Purgatory, have mercy on the souls of the faithful departed. For more information please visit www.olo100.org. □

Lombard, Illinois National MYA Workshop



by Maya Khoury

My name is Maya Khoury, and I'm a young adult from St. Anthony Maronite Church in Glen Allen Virginia. I also serve as a board member on the National Maronite Young Adults Board for the United States.

Every fall season we have our National Maronite Young Adults workshop offered in a different city within the United States. This year, during the weekend of October 6 - 8, 2017, the 9th annual workshop was beautifully hosted by Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Church in Lombard [Chicago], Illinois. Fr. Tony Massad, Pastor of St. Rafka Maronite Church, Livonia, Mich., and Sr. Therese Maria Touma from the Maronite Servants of Christ the Light in Dartmouth, Mass., directed the workshop in coordination with the National Maronite Young Adults Board. The turnout for this year's workshop was incredible with 220 Maronite young adults gathering together from all over the United States for faith, fellowship and fun.

I always look forward to the workshop. It's amazing to meet other Maronites from all over the United States that share the same faith, values and heritage that I do. Our weekend was full of reuniting with old friends, meeting new friends and strengthening our faith together through adoration, catechesis and prayer.

This year's theme was *Defend Your Faith*, and we had two wonderful speakers. Karlo Broussard of Catholic Answers and His Excellency Bishop A. Elias Zaidan, Bishop of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon, spoke on martyrdom and the importance of witness and living out one's faith.

The blessings were many as we participated in a variety of icebreakers to get to know each other, and a service project where we made blankets to distribute to the local children's hospital. We also had the opportunity to worship together within our own Maronite traditions, prayers and Liturgy.

One other highlight during the weekend was the dynamic

vocation testimonies that were given by Christopher Nahra (seminarian), Sr. Natalie Sayde (religious sister), Samir and Jessica Khoury (married couple), and Fr. Pierre Khoury, Pastor of Our Lady of Lebanon Church. They each showed through their unique discernment journey and experiences how God is working in and through the gift of their vocations and lives of service.

The weekend always goes by too fast but something that's great about the annual MYA conference is that you start to see the same faces year after year and so it's something we all look forward to every year.

If you could not make it this year, please join us for the 10th Annual Maronite Young Adults workshop next October in Washington, D.C. Keep an eye out for more details, coming soon! ☐



Deadline for next month's issue of The Maronite Voice is **November 22, 2017.**

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

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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. ☐

Uniontown, Pennsylvania *Rosary Walk*



by *Dr. Mabel George Howard*

September 17, 2017, marked the 28th annual Uniontown Rosary Walk organized and sponsored by the Saint George Maronite Catholic Church Altar & Rosary Society. This spiritual event, honoring the Blessed Mother, Queen of the Holy Rosary, began in the St. George Church "Garden of Prayer" with the recitation of the first decade of the rosary. Dressed in full regalia and carrying a banner dedicated to the Blessed Mother, the Knights of Columbus led the participants in a procession to five other Catholic churches in Uniontown. It was wonderful to experience the faithfulness of three Catholic Rites (Maronite, Roman, and Byzantine), all praying in unison. Worshipers prayed a decade of the rosary at each church followed by religious hymns and concluding with the Litany of the Blessed Mother and the final benediction. This year's religious gathering is especially significant as the 100th anniversary of Our Lady of Fatima (Portugal) is celebrated worldwide. It was reported that in 1917, the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, appeared to three shepherd children in Fatima. She asked the children to devote themselves to praying the Rosary daily to help end the Great War and bring peace to the world. The annual Uniontown Rosary Walk is a time for prayer, reflection, meditation, and spiritual devotion. It allows individuals to join in praying the rosary for the glory and honor of the Blessed Mother.

MYA worked cooperatively to make this event a wonderful success. This collaborative effort reaffirmed our mutual goal to strengthen bonds within the church for the common good of our parish and to celebrate our Lebanese ancestry. □

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania *Heroes' Honored*



by *Jimmy Tayoun*

Annual Church Festival

Relishing in a variety of ethnic foods, children's games, and entertainment among family and friends described the enjoyable atmosphere at the Saint George Church annual festival. August 13, 2017, marked the St. George Church festival in which parishioners and community members gathered to celebrate Uniontown's Middle Eastern heritage. The St. George Ladies Guild prepared traditional Lebanese and American delicacies and foods. The Ladies Guild, Altar & Rosary Society, Maronite Men's Group, Church and Archives Committee, MYO, and

More than 220 members of the Philadelphia Police, Firefighters, Armed Forces, and First Responders, enjoyed Divine Liturgy and a day long buffet hosted by Fr. Vincent Farhat, Pastor, and the members of Saint Maron Church, Philadelphia, Penn. On and off duty members from the city's South District have learned to make every effort to attend the annual Saint Maron Appreciation Day, now in its 4th year.

Our heroes, going on and coming off duty, are treated at the Saint Maron Appreciation Day to a buffet offering a huge menu and featuring a whole roast pig, Italian style. Those unable to attend receive take-out dinners requested for them

by fellow officers and firemen who could attend.

Parishioners making sure serving trays were full all day were Denise Eddis, Theresa Barry, Chucky Simon, Patty Impo Baxter, Linda Harkins, Richard Koway, Joan Divon, Roseanne Anthony, Claudine El-Hajal, Rosemarie Marrone, Michline Dib, and others.

This event was an initiative by Fr. Michael Marrone back in 2011. Fr. Vincent soon found his parish was land-locked by housing on all sides, and religious celebrations calling for processions to go outside of the Church itself required calls to the police districts for their use of police cars to block street traffic. Often for those processions traversed several city blocks.

Neighborhood businesses, some with national reputations, made contributions to the event. They include Italian Market Businesses: Esposito's Meats, known for its whole roast pigs, Triangle Tavern, Tallutto's, Taffet's Bakery, RIM Café, Cannuli's House of Pork, Capitolo Playground, the South Ninth Street Business Association, Saint Maron Parish, and others. □

Utica, New York *FORMED*

by James Salamy

On the weekend of September 16 - 17, 2017, Catechetical Sunday, Saint Louis Gonzaga Church in Utica, New York, began offering all parishioners access to the FORMED program. We are one of several parishes in the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn to participate in this multi-media online Catholic resource website prepared by the Augustine Institute, located just outside of Denver, Colorado. It seeks to answer the call for the New Evangelization through academic and parish programs that help Catholics renew the Church and transform the world for Christ.

FORMED has books, videos, audio books, and presentations in several different formats, and resources in Spanish. FORMED has study aides for reading the Bible and for Faith Formation, resources for Sacramental preparation, for the spiritual life, and for prayer. There are also resources that will help one to grow in faith in a more relaxed way, such as books or movies on the lives of the Saints, Our Lord, and the Blessed Mother. It also has resources for moral questions, apologetics, and defending the faith in today's world.

FORMED has Bible stories for young children and guides for couples preparing for marriage or the baptism of their infant children. It also has lengthy books, such as some of the classics, that people with more time on their hands may enjoy reading.

Perhaps the key to FORMED is that its content is not new; it has compiled much of the existing Catholic media resources in one place. The Augustine Institute, Marian Press, Ignatius Press, the Saint Paul Center for Biblical Theology, Sophia Institute Press, the Magis Center, Catholic Answers, and the Knights of Columbus all partner with FORMED to post their products on the FORMED website.

Programs such as: Symbolon, Beloved, and YDisciple, Thirty-Three Days to Morning Glory, and many of the resources on the Divine Mercy are all available on the

FORMED website. The work of many well-known and respected Catholics, such as Doctor Scott Hahn and Bishop Robert Barron are available as well. Also, Lighthouse Catholic Media and Word on Fire, two widely recognized and well-respected existing Catholic programs, are available through FORMED.

All of the content can be accessed through their easy-to-use and easy-to-navigate website. Everything has been categorized under four helpful and easy to use tabs: study, watch, listen, or read. There is also a search tab with a general search function for all of the content available on the FORMED website.

Because it is an entirely web based program, FORMED can also be used by small groups that meet in homes or informally. All you need is an Internet connection and a subscription. FORMED can also be used by individuals at home at their leisure.

At Saint Louis Gonzaga Church we began this spring with a free seven-day trial membership to see if we thought FORMED could be useful in our parish. Realizing the value of having access to all the varied Catholic resources in one place, we decided to purchase a parish membership. We then began introducing FORMED to several of the lay leaders in our Parish, such as the members of the Pastoral Life Council. While they became familiar with the site, plans were also made for giving the entire parish access to FORMED in the fall on Catechetical Sunday. Helpful bulletin inserts were prepared explaining how FORMED can be used and accessed. Announcements were also made at Liturgy.

Then on Catechetical Sunday our Director of Faith Formation was available in the Parish Hall during the Coffee Hour with a laptop to help parishioners to register for FORMED, if they wanted assistance in signing up, or answer any questions they might have about FORMED. We also are working with our Faith Formation classes and other groups within the parish on identifying particular resources from the FORMED website that are helpful and also of interest to them, so that they can utilize the website to its full potential for their needs. Thus far, we are very pleased with the FORMED program. We were able to successfully and easily give our parishioners access to all of the content on FORMED.

We are most grateful to His Excellency Bishop Gregory Mansour and the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn for offering the FORMED program to us. □

Appeal from Caritas Lebanon

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

Fr. Elias Abi Sarkis, Director
8315 South 107th East Ave.
Tulsa, OK 74133
Ph: 918-872-7400

or visit *Caritas Lebanon* at <http://www.caritas.org.lb>.
Checks may be made payable to Caritas Lebanon.
Thank you for your consideration. □



Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon

Deacons and Subdeacons Retreat



by Subdeacon Michael Cunningham

Spiritual growth, fellowship and education are pillars of individual flourishing as well as of the flourishing of the Church. The Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon made this important principle the central point of its recent deacon and subdeacon retreat held on October 12 - 15, 2017, at the National Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows in Belleville, Illinois.

On the first night the retreatants prayed *Ramsho* at the St. Raymond Cathedral, Saint Louis, Mo., and enjoyed an excellent Lebanese dinner hosted by Fr. John Nahal, Rector, and the Chancery's staff. At the Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows, deacons and subdeacons heard from Bishop A. Elias Zaidan, Bishop of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon, on the "Year of Martyrdom and the Martyrs," declared by His Beatitude Patriarch Bechara Peter Cardinal Rai. Fr. Rodrigue Constantin, Director of the Office of Ministries, gave two talks. The first talk was on cohabitation, its impact on couples, and the pastoral approach that could be used to deal with it. The second talk was on "Moral Therapeutic Deism" which looked at the *de facto* problematic religious beliefs of today's youth. Deacon Lou Peters, eparchial Chancellor, also gave a talk on love and mercy.

In addition to the wonderful, uplifting and spiritual talks, the deacons and subdeacons were able to experience daily Divine Liturgies as well as both *Ramsho* and *Safro* prayer services, and to enjoy community time and fellowship in the evening.

The retreat was an experience of spiritual bonding and enlightenment for all who attended, were men and their wives from Alabama, California, Illinois, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, Oregon, and Texas. A retreat at this National Shrine in

its beautiful, peaceful, and spirit filled setting proved to be a real treat for all of those attending.

Learning about the Church, learning about service, and learning about each other were just some of the results of the annual conference. The real result will, God willing, be seen in your parishes. □

Danbury, Connecticut Parish Mission



by Sr. Natalie Sayde

Over the weekend of October 14 - 15, 2017, the Maronite Servants of Christ the Light facilitated a parish wide mission on the "Living Fatima" message to the Maronite Church of St. Anthony in Danbury, Conn., at the invitation of Fr. Naji Kiwan, Pastor, as part of the parish's 85th anniversary events.

The mission began with the combined MYO of St. Anthony Church and St. John Paul II Mission from Westchester, N.Y. The afternoon included fun icebreakers and a presentation on Fatima by Mother Marla Marie. The MYO served in Saturday's Divine Liturgy and afterwards worked on making their own cord rosaries. That evening, the sisters gave a presentation to the adults of the parish highlighting the urgency of Our Lady's message of peace.

On Sunday, the sisters offered a catechesis with the children of the parish which included games, crafts, prizes and praying the Rosary. A big thank you to Fr. Naji and the parish of St. Anthony for their warm welcome and hospitality. □





Eighth Annual Benefit Dinner for the Eparchy of Saint Maron Raises Needed Funds



Approximately 200 Maronite Catholics and friends from the greater New York area and beyond gathered on Thursday, October 5, 2017, at the New York Athletic Club for the Eighth Annual Benefit Dinner for the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn. Highlights of the evening included:

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.

Dr. Josyann Abisaab and Habib Kairouz, were honored with tributes from family members and gifts presented by Bishop Gregory Mansour.

All attendees received a beautiful holy card of the statue of Our Lady of Fatima which resides in front of Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Catholic Cathedral in Brooklyn, N.Y.

Parishioners attended from all three New York area Maronite parishes - Saint John Paul II Mission in Sleepy Hollow, Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral in Brooklyn, and the Maronite Mission in Manhattan - 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. Photos from the event can be found online through the Eparchy's website (www.stmaron.org). □

Eparchial Decrees

His Excellency Bishop Gregory J. Mansour, Bishop of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn, has issued the following eparchial decrees effective on November 1, 2017:

★ Canonically erected and established **Saint John Paul II Maronite Mission** in Sleepy Hollow, N.Y., as a Parish of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn. The newly erected Parish will embrace all the Maronite faithful residing in the entirety of the civil jurisdiction of Westchester, Rockland, Putnam, Orange, Dutchess, Ulster, and Sullivan counties in the State of New York.

Schedule of Bishop Gregory Mansour

November 1 - 2, 2017

Ordination to Deaconate and Subdeaconate, and Pastoral Visit, Most Holy Trinity Monastery, Petersham, Mass.

November 5, 2017

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

November 10 - 11, 2017

USCCB Administrative Committee Meetings, Baltimore, Md.

November 12, 2017

Parish Visit to Our Lady Of Lebanon Church, Washington, D.C.

November 13 - 15, 2017

USCCB Meetings, Baltimore, Md.

November 16, 2017

Meetings with Caritas Lebanon in the morning and with the Eparchial Child Protection Review Board in the evening, Washington, D.C.

November 18 - 19, 2017

Parish Visit to St. John Paul II Church and NAM Regional Convention, Sleepy Hollow, N.Y.

November 21 - 28, 2017

Family Visit, Flint, Mich.

December 1 - 3, 2017

125th Anniversary of Saint Maron Church, Philadelphia, Penn.

December 6 - 7, 2017

Oriental Orthodox - Catholic Dialogue, New York, N.Y.

December 8, 2017

Perpetual Vows of Sister Therese Marie Touma, St. Anthony of the Desert Church, Fall River, Mass.

December 13 - 14, 2017

Catholic Relief Services Meetings, Baltimore, Md. □

★ Canonically erected and established **Our Lady Star of the East Maronite Mission** in Pleasantville, N.J., as a Parish of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn. The newly erected Parish will embrace all the Maronite faithful residing in the entirety of the civil jurisdiction of Atlantic, Cape May, Cumberland, Salem, Gloucester, Camden, Burlington, and Ocean counties in the State of New Jersey.

Bishop Mansour issued these two decrees after the two Missions exhibited spiritual, pastoral, and temporal growth and after consulting with the Eparchial Presbyteral Council in compliance with the provisions of *CCEO* canon 280, § 2. □



What is Happening at Mass?

by
Bishop Robert Barron

As many Catholics know, the Second Vatican Council famously referred to the liturgy as the "source and summit of the Christian life." And following the prompts of the great figures of the liturgical movement in the first half of the twentieth century, the Council Fathers called for a fuller, more conscious, and more active participation in the liturgy on the part of Catholics.

That the Vatican II dream of a revived liturgical awareness and practice has, at least in the West, largely remained unrealized goes without saying. In the years following the Council, Mass attendance in Europe, North America, and Australia has plummeted. The numbers of Catholics who regularly attend Mass in those parts of the world hover between 10% and 25%. Therefore, it is not surprising that an extraordinary number of those who self-identify as Catholics in the West have very little idea what the Mass actually is. My thirty-one years of priestly ministry convince me that, even for a great number of those who attend Mass, the liturgy is a kind of religiously-themed jamboree.

So what is the Mass? What *happens* during this paradigmatic prayer? Why is it the beginning and culmination of what it means to be a Christian? In the course of this brief article, I will share just a couple of basic insights.

First, the Mass is a privileged encounter with the living Christ. Christianity is not a philosophy, ideology, or religious program; it is a friendship with the Son of God, risen from the dead. There is simply no more intense union with Jesus than the Mass. Consider for a moment the two major divisions of the Mass: the liturgy of the Word and the liturgy of the Eucharist. When we meet with another person in a formal setting, we typically do two things. We get together and talk, and then we eat. Think of the first part of Mass as an exchange, a conversation, between the Son of God and members of his mystical body. In the prayers and interventions of the priest, and especially in the words of the Scriptures, Jesus speaks to his people, and in the songs, responses, and psalms, the people talk back. There is, if you will, a lovely call and response between the Lord and those who have been grafted onto him through baptism. In the course of this spirited conversation, the union between head and members is intensified, strengthened, confirmed. Having talked, we then sit down to eat, not an ordinary meal, but the banquet of the Lord's body and blood, hosted by Jesus himself. The communion that commenced with the call and response during the first part of Mass is now brought to a point of unsurpassed intensity (at least this side of heaven), as the faithful come to eat the body and drink the lifeblood of Jesus.

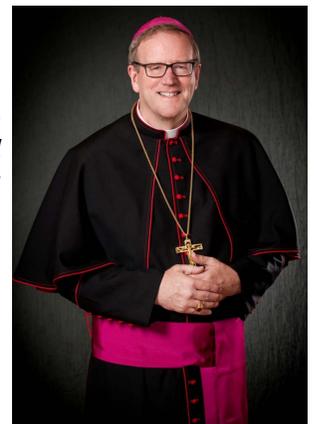
A second rubric under which to consider the Mass is that of play. We tend quite naturally to think of play as something less than serious, something frivolous and far less important than work. But nothing could be further from the truth. Work is always subordinated to an end beyond itself; it is for the

sake of a higher good. So I work on my car that I might drive it; I work at my place of employment that I might make money; I work around the house so that it might be a more pleasant place to live, etc. But play has no ulterior motive, no end to which it is subordinated. Hence, I play baseball or watch golf or attend a symphony or engage in philosophical speculation or get lost in a sprawling novel simply because it is good so to do. These activities are referred to in the classical tradition as "liberal," precisely because they are free (*liber*) from utility. When I was teaching philosophy years ago in the seminary, I would gleefully tell my students that they were engaging in the most useless study of all. Invariably they laughed - revealing the utilitarian prejudice of our culture - but I always reminded them that this meant the highest and most noble kind of study.

The Mass, as an act of union with the highest good, is therefore the supreme instance of play. It is the most useless and hence sublimest activity in which one could possibly engage. Recently, I had the privilege of attending the Mass for the installation of new members of the Knights and Ladies of the Holy Sepulcher. For the solemn liturgy, the Knights wore dashing capes emblazoned with the Jerusalem cross and jaunty black berets, while the ladies donned elegant black gowns, gloves, and lace mantillas. Two bishops, in full Mass vestments and tall mitres, welcomed the new members into the order by dubbing them on both shoulders with impressively large swords. As I watched the proceedings, I couldn't help but think of G.K. Chesterton's remark that children often dress up when they engage in their "serious play." Capes, hats, ceremonial gloves, vestments, and swords for dubbing are all perfectly useless, which is precisely their point. So all of the colorful accoutrements and stately actions of the Mass are part of the sublime play.

Why is the Mass so important? Why is it the "source and summit" of the Christian life? I could say many more things in answer to these questions, but suffice it to say for the moment that it is the most beautiful encounter between friends and that it is an anticipation of the play that will be our permanent preoccupation in heaven. □

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



The Holy Cross: The Symbol of God's Love

by
Reverend David A. Fisher

The Holy Cross upon which the Savior of the world opened the gates of the Kingdom of God is the symbol of God's love for us, his sons and daughters. Indeed, as we look upon the Cross of Jesus, and contemplate the meaning it gives our lives, we come to realize that we are like the two thieves that hung on each side of him, but unlike Jesus we are guilty, incomplete, lost, and uncertain of what the very meaning of our lives has been. All four Gospels relate that there were two criminals crucified with Our Lord, but it is Luke's Gospel that tells us that one came to faith:

"One of the criminals who was hanged railed at him, saying, 'Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!' But the other rebuked him, saying, 'Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.' And he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' And he said to him, 'Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise'" (Luke 23: 39 - 43).

Like the "Good Thief" known in tradition as St. Dismas, all we can do in our inability to save ourselves, our inability to re-construct our lives, in our uncertainty about the future of our existence, is to cry out to the Holy One, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom." It will be at that moment of totally letting go of our own failed powers, that we will be opened to receive the "love that saves and redeems," the love of God poured out from the "blood of the Savior" who was crucified so that we can truly live. One of the earliest Church Fathers, Saint Irenaeus (c.202 AD), said in his famous work *Against Heresies*: "For the glory of God is the living man, and the life of man is the vision of God."

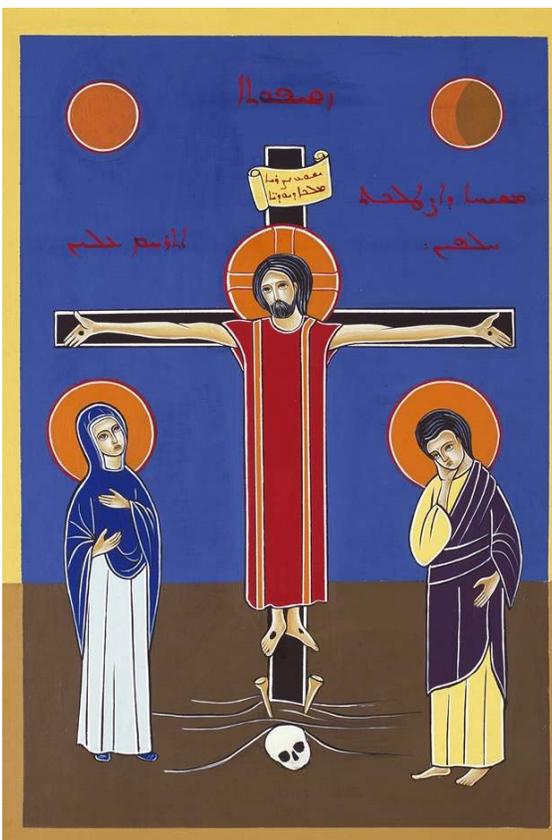
The Fathers of the Church, especially the Eastern Fathers, in their preaching and writings constantly express that the Christian life is a process of *metanoia* (transformation), *theosis/deification* (becoming god-like), because the Father has bestowed the Holy Spirit upon those who have been baptized and entered into the community of faith - the Church. What we call the "life of grace" is nothing more than living in and with the Holy Spirit, the Spirit that Scripture says, "groans within us," shaping us into the "image and likeness of God" as we were intended to be from the moment of creation.

In a very real way the Holy Cross speaks to us of God's intention in creating us. If we examine Sacred

Scripture we find that the first words of Genesis in the Septuagint Version (Greek Version) of the Old Testament are the same words that we find in the first verse of John's Gospel, " (en arché) "In the beginning..." In the beginning according to Genesis unlike all the other things God created, on the sixth day, "God created mankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." John's Gospel proclaims:

In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.
He was in the beginning with God.
All things came to be through him,
and without him nothing came to be.
What came to be through him was life,
and this life was the light of the human race;
the light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness has not overcome it. ...
And the Word became flesh
and made his dwelling among us,
and we saw his glory,
the glory as of the Father's only Son,
full of grace and truth (John 1:1 - 5, 14).

What Genesis and John's Gospel reveal to us is that the Word of the Father, the Word who is God, was present from the moment of our creation, in fact we are created in his image.



When from the Holy Cross, Jesus says, "It is finished" (John 19:30), we must ponder, what is finished? What is finished in this sacrifice, in this act of redemption, this victory of love over hate, this act of freedom from the bondage of ignorance and sin? What is finished is the act of creation, for now through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can truly enter the path of *theosis*, of being formed in the image and likeness of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh.

Jesus on the Holy Cross reveals to us the God who is love. From the Holy Cross the veil that has veiled the truth of God has been lifted. Now with eyes that see in the light we see that God has never left us alone, that he calls us to be formed into the image of the Son, which means we too must take up our crosses and follow him, to learn, imitate, and become the children of God - beings of love. □



God is Realistic
by
Dr. Anne Borik

As we continue to explore the book authored by Fr. Jacques Philippe entitled *Interior Freedom*, I would like to suggest a simple ABC approach that will help us understand more fully this concept of Interior Freedom.

us as we are, who wants to be available to us if we allow Him and who loves us unconditionally if we give Him our consent. □

A: Accepting Ourselves

What often blocks the action of God's grace in our lives is our failure to accept our own weaknesses. We must accept ourselves just as we are, if the Holy Spirit is to change or transform us. According to Fr. Philippe, accepting ourselves is one way to "set grace free" in our lives, thus paving the way for deep transformation leading to interior freedom.

B: Be Available to God

One of the most important things in our lives is not so much what we can do as leaving room for what God can do. Jesus said, "Apart from me, you can do nothing" (John 15:5). We must have the humility to recognize that we cannot change by our own efforts. It is a gift of God's grace. Interior freedom results when we accept this gift and let God act by being available to Him.

C: Consent to What We Are

According to Fr. Philippe, "People who hate themselves cut themselves off from God." This attitude or behavior is offensive to our Father. It is important to accept ourselves or consent to what we are with all our deficiencies and limitations in order for God to change and transform us. Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. In other words, happy or free are those that consent to the fact that they are nothing without God.

In conclusion, Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). There is no better form of "relaxation" or interior freedom than to rest in the tenderness of a Father who accepts

North Jackson, Ohio
Novena of St. Therese



The Basilica and National Shrine of Our Lady of Lebanon, North Jackson, Ohio, celebrated the long honored tradition of a novena to St. Therese of the Child Jesus on September 24 and ended with the Feast Day celebrated on Monday, October 2, 2017.

For nine days, many attended the Divine Liturgy and novena prayers asking the intercession of St. Therese for themselves, their friends and those in need. Many placed beautiful roses at the Shrine of St. Therese.

On the last day, the faithful were invited to place their intentions in a basket at the foot of the statue. In return, they received a rose to take home in remembrance of the days of prayer. St. Therese continues to intercede for so many. □

Lord, I Seek You Alone!

A reflection on her discernment journey by Sr. Natalie Sayde Salameh, a novice in the Maronite Servants of Christ the Light congregation.

I discerned and discovered my vocation as a Maronite Servant of Christ the Light in a number of ways. First of all, and most importantly, I had to recognize that I was searching for a happiness and fulfillment that the world just wasn't giving me. After six years in a very successful career, I knew I had a gnawing feeling of emptiness that no amount of shoes, clothes, fancy cars or fine houses could fill. That was really step number one, but the most important step in my discernment because it opened me up to seeking God and His will for my life. As soon as I turned to God for my happiness and fulfillment, which I did primarily in prayer, this reoccurring thought of becoming a sister just kept coming into my heart. I couldn't ignore it and it wasn't something I had fabricated. You don't just wake up one morning and say, "Hey, I want to be nun." This is a desire that He put there, which grew more and more as I started going to daily Mass, frequent confession and adoration. When I finally said, "Yes, Lord, this is what I want," I knew it was the right decision because I felt elated, like I was on cloud nine, and I felt a joy and peace that were indescribable. Sure signs of the Holy Spirit!

In my discernment journey, as in all journeys, I needed help to respond to God's call in my life. As soon as I got in contact with the Maronite Servants, Mother Marla Marie helped me discern my call through weekly skype meetings. I also had an excellent spiritual director in Sydney whom I saw every 4-6 weeks to help me discover God's voice amid the many voices I had going through my head at the time, whether it was from my work colleagues, my family or friends. Some of those voices were very discouraging, so I needed help to sift through all that.

What also helped me to discern were two key things in any discernment journey – prayer (especially adoration,



there is nothing so valuable as much as spending time with Jesus), and frequenting the sacraments (especially, Eucharist and Confession). Frequent confession changed my life. I hadn't gone in years, but when I started going in my discernment, I felt like this whole purging process was taking place in my soul, that God was being born anew within me. I was being washed, being made more receptive to the voice of God again in my life.

Both my journey of discernment and my vocation have helped me to flourish as a Maronite Catholic tremendously! My sense of worship now, especially in the Liturgy, and our Maronite Liturgy is so rich, has just come alive. That is really the best way to describe it. It is living and active now. It is not a sense of obligation for me to attend and participate in our Maronite Liturgy. It is my true joy and the delight of my life. I have experienced such a fire, a sheer captivation of everything in me during Divine Liturgy, and this can only be a

beautiful fruit of my vocation and the deepening of my faith journey with God's grace.

My vocation means everything to me. It is my life and the true source of my joy and peace. I love Our Lord and I love the mission He has called me to. I love our life of prayer and sacrifice, which is so fulfilling and life-giving. I love our life in common where we come together as sisters to enjoy a meal and recreate together. I love being with our people, listening to them and accompanying them as a spiritual mother on their journey of faith. That doesn't mean that there aren't challenges and moments of difficulty, trial or suffering but I have come to realize that even in these moments God is still telling me that He loves me, and is helping me to grow and mature, to build up my endurance which beautifully paves the way to hope only in Him and nothing else.

The biggest aspiration has always been

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★ **Paul Azzi**
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St. Maron Church, Detroit, Mich.

★ **Pierre Bechelany**
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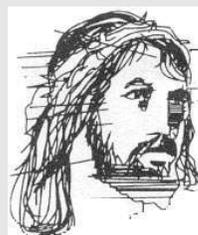
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for me to take my vows, which thanks be to God is close at hand. As a religious we take three vows, obedience, chastity and poverty, and for me this will be the happiest day of my life, when I finally get to wed Jesus, the true groom of my heart.

There have been beautiful moments of joy, even powerful moments in ministry when I have seen the Lord's healing hand at work in people's lives, which has freed and transformed them. It's a beautiful thing to witness and be a part of. You don't have to ask the question, "Lord, how are You going to use me?" Honestly, He uses me in the way and moment I least expect to bring joy into another person's life. It's very powerful. I have experienced very beautiful moments in community when we come together as sisters and enjoy some laughs in recreation, whether it is playing a game, eating an ice cream (by the way, sisters really love ice cream), or just sitting together to enjoy a movie (minus the commentary at times.) I have experienced beautiful moments in prayer and communion with Our Lord who always sheds light and illumines everything He touches. I have experienced great peace and consolation in prayer that I never experienced whilst I was in the world.

I would even count as blessings the moments of challenge and difficulty because I have always, always learned from them. These have been my biggest growing experiences, the challenges. The challenge of community is a very real one. I always say that life in common as sisters is the most beautiful but most challenging aspect of our lives. We are all very different women, with different upbringings, different ideas, different temperaments and personalities, so this is always going to make things interesting, and sometimes quite difficult. But I can honestly say that I have matured so much as a person in reconciling with and embracing the other as they are. Another very real challenge for me personally has been really surrendering my life to God. We are all so used to being in control and I came from a work environment where control and order were so key.

So really allowing God to take me wherever He wishes and however He wishes has been very challenging, because I have had to grow in my love and trust in God. This is a very brief snapshot of my discernment journey so far, I'd just like to conclude by saying that I am very satisfied and very fulfilled, and I know that sounds cliché but it's really an accurate description of my life. When Jesus said that He promises us a peace that the world cannot give, He who is always true spoke truthfully. In the world, I had no peace. I had constant activity, constant busyness, constant noise, but no peace. I thank God everyday for calling me out of the world into life as He intended us to live it. I don't call it a vocation, I call it life as He intended it to be lived, that is, in union with Him. ☐



***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 10th Street
St. Louis, MO 63104

or

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

or

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

Emmitsburg, Maryland *Dedication of Saint Sharbel's Shrine*



by the Family of Saint Sharbel, USA

The miracles we attribute to the saints have their origin in Jesus Christ, Who tells His disciples: "If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you can move mountains," and "Nothing will be impossible for you (Mt. 17:20)." One such disciple is Saint Sharbel, a Maronite hermit-priest from Lebanon, who died on the eve of the commemoration of the Birth of our Lord in 1898 and was canonized forty years ago on October 9, 1977. Countless miracles all over the world, from his days in the monastery to the present day, have been attributed to his intercession.

The impact of Saint Sharbel on the faithful became a worldwide phenomenon, which led to the formation of the "Family of Saint Sharbel," a lay organization whose spirituality is centered on the life of this holy monk. To promote awareness of their patron saint, the "Family of Saint Sharbel, USA" (<http://www.familyofsaintsharbel.org>) erected the first official shrine in the United States in honor of this Maronite monk at the National Shrine Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes, (<http://www.nsgrotto.org>) in Emmitsburg, Md.

On September 30, 2017, approximately 1,500 people, coming from near and far, gathered at the National Shrine Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes to participate in the blessing and dedication of Saint Sharbel's Shrine. This historical event started early in the morning, when volunteers came to set up for the occasion. Monsignor Peter F. Azar, Rector of Our

Lady of Lebanon Maronite Seminary in Washington, D.C., presided over the liturgical celebrations, representing His Excellency the Most Reverend Gregory John Mansour, Bishop of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn. He was accompanied by Father Kamil Al-Chouefati, Pastor of Our Lady, Star of the East, Maronite Catholic Church, Pleasantville, N.J.; Father Armando Elkhoury, Vice Rector of the Maronite Seminary; Deacons Michel Touma and Robert Farah of Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Catholic Church, Washington, D.C.; Subdeacon Fahid Nammour of Our Lady, Star of the East, Maronite Catholic Church; and the seminarians of the Maronite Seminary. Three Priests of the National Shrine Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes heard the confessions of the faithful who took the opportunity to benefit from the mystery of reconciliation.

The celebration started at 10:30 a.m. with the Choir of Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Church leading the singing of Maronite hymns specifically related to Saint Sharbel. At 11:00 a.m., Msgr. Azar, along with the priests in attendance, blessed the shrine and unveiled the statue of Saint Sharbel. Mr. Raymond Nader, founder of the Family of Saint Sharbel, had brought a first-class relic (*ex ossibus*) of the Maronite saint encased in a cedar reliquary from *Annaya*, Lebanon. He handed it to the celebrant, who led the assembly in procession to the Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes, where he blessed those present with the relic of Saint Sharbel. Afterwards, Msgr. Azar presided over the Maronite Service of the Holy Mysteries at noon. The choir sang hymns appropriate for the occasion during the Divine Liturgy.

In his uplifting homily, the main celebrant thanked the Lord Jesus Christ for His grace that made this day a reality for the Family of Saint Sharbel, USA, who endeavored to establish this shrine dedicated to their patron saint, and the many who prayed for the intercession of Saint Sharbel. The Rector covered highlights of Saint Sharbel's life, his love of God, and his devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. He emphasized that the Lord's mercy knows no bounds, which God pours abundantly on all His children. Accordingly, Christians and non-Christians have been healed from devastating illnesses through the intercession of Saint Sharbel. Thus, the Maronite saint is an example of holiness for us to imitate, and he reminds us that Jesus Christ, Our Lord and God, is the True Bread Who sanctifies all.

At the end of the Divine Liturgy, the faithful returned to the newly-dedicated shrine where they venerated Saint Sharbel's relic. The Family of Saint Sharbel, USA provided light refreshments and sweets baked for this festive event. In addition, Saint Bernadette's Shoppe of the National Shrine Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes carried books in Spanish, English, and Arabic about Saint Sharbel and other memorabilia for visitors.

Looking back at this long, arduous journey leading to this day, one is reminiscent of Jesus's saying to His disciples, "Nothing will be impossible for you" (Mt. 17:20). This is true not only in the life and miracles of Saint Sharbel, but also in the many graces by which God has brought to completion this project of a shrine dedicated to Saint Sharbel in the United States in a place associated with healing and with the love and protection of the Virgin Mother of God. □

Father Khalil Semaan Martyr of the Church

by Maria Gebara

Father Khalil Semaan, a Maronite Catholic priest, gave his life for the faith. Refusing to deny Jesus Christ, ministering to others during his years of captivity, he shows how faith in Jesus Christ and His Church strengthens persons to even care for others during the darkest hours of life.

Father Semaan was born on September 16, 1934, in *Kfour, Nabatieh*, Lebanon. He married Alia Semaan on May 17, 1959, and together they had seven children, four sons and three daughters. He was ordained as a Maronite priest on September 6, 1959, and served his village Parish of Our Lady of Salvation in *Kfour* as well as other neighboring parishes in South Lebanon. It was this service that made him a target for others who hate the Christian faith.

On December 2, 1987, while on his way to celebrate liturgy, armed Islamic men kidnapped him and took him to an unknown location. The intent of kidnapping him by these men was to inflict terror among Christians in that area of Lebanon. His kidnappers documented the interrogation Father Khalil Semaan was put through during his captivity, a time period lasting three years and seven months. The documents, later seized from the captors after they fled, showed Father Khalil Semaan as a man who feared for his life. Having a condition of high blood pressure and diabetes, he would faint frequently during his captivity, and even remained unconscious for a period of time on several occasions. He slept little out of fear of being taken away to another location while asleep.

Father Semaan was tortured in many horrific ways: shocked by electricity and repeatedly beaten. During the time of his cruel captivity, other Christian prisoners who were with him and who were later freed tell of how Father Semaan remained true to his faith and his calling as a priest. One former captive mentioned how Father Semaan would consecrate bread and give it as a communion to the Catholic prisoners with him. He remained a prayerful priest, and brought as much comfort to the other prisoners as he was able. His health deteriorated as a result of his treatment and due to lack of daily medications, and Father Semaan became blind and suffered hearing loss. Yet, through it all, he never lost his faith in Christ.

Father Semaan died at the hands of his captors, and his body was thrown in a cave in South Lebanon. Fifteen months after his death, his body was recovered and transported from the cave to Beirut, where it was received by Maronite Bishop Khalil Abi Nader, Bishop of the Diocese of Beirut. Father Semaan was buried on July 28, 1991, in *Ain Saadeh*, Beirut, instead of in his village of *Kfour*, due to a



concern at that time that his kidnappers, who still lived in *Kfour*, might desecrate his tomb.

Almost twenty-four years later, on July 26, 2015, Father Semaan's remains were returned to his village in *Kfour* and interred in a ceremony worthy of martyrs. Subdeacon George Klaiany, who represented Patriarch Bechara Rai at the interment, asked Bishop Shukrallah Hajj to open the beatification case of Father Semaan. What happened to Father Khalil Semaan did not stop his son, Youssef Semaan, from becoming a Maronite priest as well as serving in the same village parish as his martyred father.

As sad as the story of Father Semaan's martyrdom may be, it brings light on how persecuted Christians have over the centuries faced their death with joy, the joy that comes from believing that God is their strength. As it is written: "For the sake of Christ, then I am content with weakness, insults, hardships, persecutions and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:10).

May Our Lord and God, Jesus Christ, strengthen us in our faith amidst the many challenges that living in a world that resists Him poses to His disciples. May we take Father Khalil Semaan as an example of perseverance in faith through persecution and death for Christ. Father Khalil Semaan, pray for us. Amen! ☐

Editorial Note: We pray that the High Priest, Jesus Christ, accepts Father Khalil Semaan's ultimate sacrifice and that one day his name will be inscribed among the Righteous and the Just in the Church.

Catholic Population Growing to 1.3 Billion



The number of Catholics in the world is increasing: almost 1.3 billion, 17.7 percent of the world's population, reported *Agenzia Fides* on October 20, 2017. *Agenzia Fides* is the information service of the Pontifical Mission Societies.

According to figures from the Church's Book of Statistics (data related to 2015) and elaborated by *Agenzia Fides*, the baptized are 12.5 million more than the previous year (2014). This is one of the data in the Dossier published by *Agenzia Fides* on the occasion of the 91st World Mission Day, which was celebrated on Sunday, October 22, 2017. The Dossier offers a wealth of statistical information about the Catholic Church around the world.

A few statistics of interest:

- ◆ Africa has 222 million Catholics, 19.42 percent of the population.
- ◆ The Americas have 635 million Catholics, 63.6 percent of the population.
- ◆ Europe has 285 million Catholics, 39.87 percent of the population.
- ◆ Asia has 141 million Catholic, 3.24 percent of the population.
- ◆ The Catholic Church runs 216,548 schools in the world, attended by more than sixty million pupils.
- ◆ There are about 118,000 Catholic social and charitable institutes (hospitals, care homes for people with leprosy, orphanages, homes for the elderly) scattered throughout the world. ☐ *(Zenit.org, October 20, 2017)*

Brooklyn, New York *Passion and Purpose for Marriage*



by Marise Frangie

On Friday September 8, 2017, Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral in Brooklyn, N.Y., hosted a dynamic Catholic event, "Passion and Purpose for Marriage." About 250 persons enjoyed acoustic music by George Lower and went back home refreshed by what Dr. Allen Hunt had in store for them.

Dr. Hunt was a mega church pastor for many years before converting to Catholicism in 2008 and had counseled countless number of couples and helped them to strengthen their marriages. Based on his experience with married couples, he presented a variety of topics broken into three faith-centered sections: The Five Things Women Need to Know about Men; The Five Things Men Need to Know about Women; and finally the Most Important Word in a Marriage and all relationships ... and it's not Love.

Dr. Allen Hunt backed up every fact he presented with a scripture quote and a real life story. Perhaps the most moving part of the event was the last section where he touched the hearts of everyone present, single and married, old and young, when he shared two great real stories about the power of forgiveness.

He reminded us of the great lesson Our Lord Jesus Christ taught us on the cross: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do" when He prayed for his persecutors. He shared a powerful story from the time of the genocide in South Africa where white police officers brutally killed a black man and his sons, then burned them and spread their ashes in the backyard. Later President Nelson Mandela decided that every person who committed a crime will be forgiven if they come forward and admit their actions, because South Africa needed healing and not justice. The police officer confessed his brutal killing of the family to the surviving wife, who forgave him publicly at the court and asked him to come over for coffee to spend time with her so she could share her motherly love with him since her children are no longer there. To his shock, he passed out, and every one present at the court that day started singing "Amazing Grace," which was sung again very beautifully at the

Cathedral by George Lower.

Dr. Hunt also talked about the five love languages: receiving gifts, quality time, words of affirmation, acts of service, and physical touch. Everyone was encouraged to know his love language and that of the people around him so they can communicate love better. (If you want to discover your love language, check out the link below and take the quiz online: <http://www.5lovelanguages.com/>).

Christie and David who were very grateful for attending the event, are already feeling the fruits and the blessings from being equipped with great tools to strengthen their marriage. Even single young adults enjoyed the event a lot and learned a lot about relationships.

If you want to give yourself an opportunity to grow in learning more about relationships, check the Dynamic Catholic website for upcoming events.

<https://dynamiccatholic.com/events/passion-and-purpose-for-marriage>. □

Spiritual Reading

by Vivian Akel

In the Fall of 2016 a new column was introduced in the Maronite Voice titled "Going Deeper into the Spiritual Life." The objective of this column was to welcome our readers to explore their personal spirituality, while encouraging further reading on the subject.

Spiritual reading is meant to encourage growth and a greater closeness to God. Thus, it should be read slowly to allow self-reflection and contemplation. It is no coincidence that some of our most beloved Saints began their conversion through spiritual reading of either the Sacred Scriptures or the works of Christian spiritual writers. For example, St. Augustine, inspired by the Scriptures, ultimately underwent a conversion which impacted the future of Christianity. Similarly, St. Ignatius of Loyola, while recovering from a battle injury began spiritual reading and eventually changed his life. He later founded the Jesuits and introduced Ignatian Spirituality to the world.

In modern times, spiritual writers such as Thomas Merton and Henri Nouwen began their conversions and vocations through spiritual reading. Thomas Merton read a book by French author Etienne Gilson out of curiosity, which led to his vocation as a Trappist monk and spiritual writer. Henri Nouwen read and studied extensively at the Jesuit Aloysius College in the Hague before pursuing a degree in clinical psychology and pastoral counseling. He went on to author forty books and hundreds of articles on Spirituality.

The reading of Sacred Scripture should never replace the reading of Sacred Scripture, but should supplement it. When reading, it is always advisable to place oneself in God's presence through the Holy Spirit, free from distractions. For anyone interested, suggested titles include but are not limited to the following:

Spiritual Direction by Thomas Merton

Interior Freedom by Jacques Philippe

Reaching Out by Henri Nouwen

Called to Love by Carl Anderson

The Holy Longing by Ronald Rolheiser. □

Houston, Texas *MYO Kickoff*



by Samantha Georges

On Saturday October 14, 2017, the MYO of Our Lady of the Cedars Maronite Church in Houston, Tex., had their kickoff event, marking the beginning of a year filled with faith and fun. The youth and their families began the evening by celebrating the Divine liturgy together, led by Fr. Edward, and continued with a cookout and fellowship. The very Texan dinner of brisket, baked beans, ribs and barbecue sauce, were prepared by one of our youth leaders and parents, Said Tannous, whose wife, Melanie, was the head of the youth group for almost ten years. She was an incredible leader and had a great influence on the youth, doubling the size of the group over the years. While the youth are sad that she will be stepping down as their leader this year, they are very excited to welcome their new leader, Marie Karam, who was an active member of the MYO both in Houston and in San Antonio.

The Maronite Youth Organization is looking forward to the many events Marie already has planned for the year, including a lock-in, monthly liturgies dedicated to the youth, and several volunteer events.

2018 NAM Convention Update

Since kicking off the preparations for the 2018 NAM Convention last July, many things have taken place at the organizing committee level. Several committees were formed

and staffed, to plan the Convention's workshops, excursions, entertainment, ad book sales and layout, auctions and raffle, and banquet organization. Other committees are gearing up with volunteer sign-ups and plans to be ready and in action closer to the convention dates, July 11 to 15, 2018.

An aggressive public relations campaign is about to be launched, advertising the convention, and promoting attendance to all age groups from all over the United States. Meetings are being held to plan and coordinate, and behind the scenes communication is constant between the local committee and the NAM Board and Executive Director to ensure everyone is up-to-date.

Soon, the various committees will be presenting budgets to the NAM Board for approval, and a meeting is planned for all committee chairpersons with the NAM Board during the Board's Fall meeting, which is scheduled for October 27- 29 in Houston, Tex.

Stay tuned for more updates, and keep checking the website created specifically for the 2018 NAM Convention at www.NAMconvention2018.com. □



Vancouver, Washington *Monks of Jesus Mary and Joseph*



by Paulette Peynet

Monk John Michael was ordained a priest on September 9, 2017, at the Cathedral of St. James the Greater in Vancouver, Washington, by Bishop A. Elias Zaidan of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles. Fr. John Michael is the second priest to be ordained in the Northwest in the Maronite Catholic rite.

Ordained a deacon in February 2017, Fr. Michael is a monk in the Order of The Maronite Monks of Jesus Mary and Joseph in Portland, Oregon. He is an *alumnus* of De La Salle North Catholic High School and served in the parish of St. Sharbel in Portland, under Fr. Jonathan Decker. Ordination excerpts can be viewed at www.maronitemonastery.com. □

Lebanese Citizenship and Christianity in Lebanon

A Statement by Bishops Mansour and Zaidan

As many of you know, at this moment in history the status of Christians and the very presence of Christianity in Lebanon and throughout the Middle East is under great pressure. It is important for Lebanon, with the largest percentage of Christians of any country in the Middle East, to maintain a vibrant and significant Christian presence and witness. Our Maronite Patriarch Bechara Peter Cardinal Rai, is asking those in a position to do so, to step forward and make a difference by helping to secure the role that Christians can play.

On November 24, 2015, the Lebanese Parliament ratified the Lebanese Nationality Law which gives descendants of Lebanese immigrants the right to acquire or reacquire their Lebanese citizenship. "The Lebanese Nationality Program" is an initiative launched by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants for people of Lebanese heritage around the world in order to apply for Lebanese Citizenship and to benefit from their business, financial, consular, personal, social and political rights as Lebanese, wherever they are. In particular, this initiative is relevant for the large Lebanese communities in different countries all over the world. Through this law you can now find your story, connect to your roots, and claim you Lebanese citizenship.

Among other advantages of acquiring or reacquiring your Lebanese citizenship and registering marriages and births in Lebanon, you will be able to vote for your preferred Lebanese politician, inherit property, reclaim any inheritances due you, and be exempt from the payment of taxes to Lebanon. More importantly, by obtaining your Lebanese citizenship, you will be helping to preserve both Christianity in Lebanon and the true cultural diversity that has always been a source Lebanese pride. Obtaining your Lebanese citizenship will not compromise or jeopardize in any way your American citizenship. This law is in effect for only ten years and expires in 2025.

You are eligible to participate in this program if your name or the name of any of your male ancestors is registered on the 1921 - 1924 emigrants' or residents' census or on the 1932 emigrants' census. The application process has been simplified and can be started by checking your eligibility and completing and submitting the form found at the link, <http://lebanity.gov.lb>. To apply and check your eligibility, start by filling in the online application. A professional team will review your application and will notify you within five business days of your eligibility. Once you are considered eligible for Lebanese citizenship you will be asked to submit supporting documents such as Lebanese civil registry extract of your ancestors and marriage and birth certificates. Once your application is submitted you will be

able to track your application through a mobile app. You will be notified about the status of your application at each step of the process. The process is free of charge and requires six to twelve months to be finalized.

If you need assistance in applying and completing the forms, contact your pastor or the Project Roots coordinator in your parish or contact the Christian Lebanese Foundation in the World/Project Roots through their email, info@projectroots.net, or via telephone 917 - 755 - 0499. Help with applying for citizenship can be obtained through the following site, <http://www.projectroots.net/registration-requests.html>.

As descendants of Lebanese immigrants, it is your right to claim your Lebanese citizenship and we encourage you to do so. We must work hand-in-hand to connect with our homeland and preserve our heritage. Let us step forward and make a difference.

Sincerely yours in Christ,
+ Gregory Mansour
Bishop of the Eparchy of St. Maron of Brooklyn

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



Grand Anniversary Celebration

December 1-3, 2017

<p style="text-align: center;">FRIDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2017</p> <p style="text-align: center;">7:00PM <i>Divine Liturgy</i> <i>(Bishop Antoine Chbeir)</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">8:00PM <i>Reception & Exhibition</i> <i>(Saint Maron Church Hall)</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">GRAND HAFLI FEATURING</p>  <p style="text-align: center;">Amin & the Sultans</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Tickets</u> Adults: \$100.00 Children (11 & under): \$50.00</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">SATURDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2017</p> <p style="text-align: center;">10:00AM – 11:30AM Maronite History in the US <i>(Chorbishop Seely Beggiani)</i> <i>(Saint Maron Church Hall)</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">1:00PM – 2:30PM Witness of a Shepherd in the Midst of Conflict <i>(Bishop Antoine Chbeir, Latakia, Syria)</i> <i>(Saint Maron Church Hall)</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">6:00PM <i>Divine Liturgy</i> 7:30PM <i>Grand Hafli</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Grand Hafli Location</u> Double Tree Ormandy Ballroom 237 S. Broad Street Philadelphia, PA 19107</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">SUNDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2017</p> <p style="text-align: center;">11:00AM <i>Divine Liturgy</i> <i>(Bishop Gregory J. Mansour)</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">12:30PM <i>Brunch</i> <i>(Saint Maron Church Hall)</i></p>	

FOR RESERVATIONS: CALL (215) 389-2000
or email at: saintmaronphiladelphia@hotmail.com
Church Address: 1013 Ellsworth Street, Philadelphia, PA 19147

Phoenix, Arizona *A Shrine for Saint Sharbel*

by Maroun Ghorayeb

The 18th of January, 2016, is a date that can never be forgotten at St. Joseph Maronite Catholic Church in Phoenix, Arizona. On that day, while the Relics of St. Sharbel were at St. Joseph, a blind woman who came faithfully seeking God's help, had her eyesight fully restored in both eyes through the intercession of St. Sharbel.

The story of the woman's experience with St. Sharbel is well documented on social and standard media. For us at St. Joseph Church, not only was the woman's eyesight restored, a new era in the history of the church arose, a new transformation of hearts began, and life at St. Joseph Church changed forever. The 18th of every month is now a celebrated date, where we gather to recite healing prayers, sing hymns, and anoint the faithful who come from in and out of state with the Holy Oil in remembrance of the Healing from this exceptional day.

In addition to the many places where St. Sharbel has interceded to show God's love for us, and in honor of the special grace received from God through the intercession of Saint Sharbel in Phoenix, the shrine dedicated to Saint Sharbel in the U.S.A. was built under the leadership and guidance of Father Wissam Akiki, Pastor. The shrine is open to visitors to come pray, meditate and be in the presence of the Lord twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.

The Shrine of St. Sharbel was dedicated on March 26, 2017, by His Excellency Bishop A. Elias Zaidan, Bishop of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles, and in the presence of His Excellency Bishop Thomas Olmsted,



Bishop of the Diocese of Phoenix, and also in the presence of Phoenix Mayor Greg Stanton, dignitaries, parishioners, our large newly adopted Hispanic community of faithful, and visitors from out of state as well.

The Maronite Church in the U.S. now has a special landmark for St. Sharbel in Phoenix at St. Joseph Church, named for the Father of the Holy Family, on Virginia Avenue, named after our Blessed Mother. May their prayers be with us always. Amen. ☐