



The Maronite Voice



A Publication of the Maronite Eparchies in the USA

Volume XI

Issue No. X

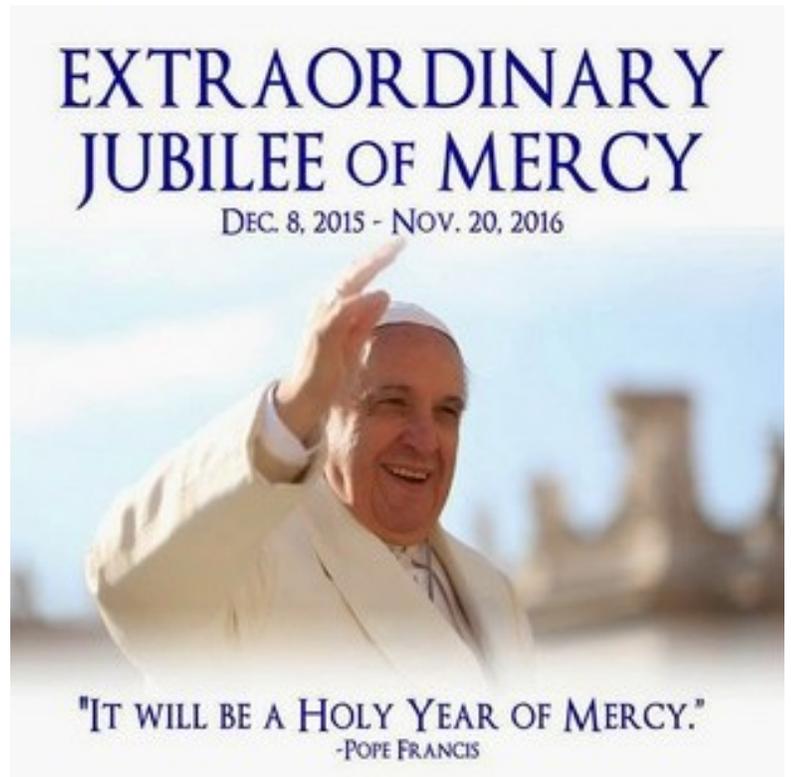
November 2015

Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Our Holy Father, Pope Francis, has called for a Jubilee Year of Mercy beginning December 8, 2015. In order to deepen our personal encounter with the living Christ, to experience the joy of his Gospel, and to bring more mercy into our tired world, with a whole-hearted affirmation, and after having consulted with our Eparchial Pastoral Council and Presbyteral Council, I have decided to embrace the Holy Year with the following Eparchial requests of clergy, religious and laity:

1. Our Pastors will increase their efforts to offer the Sacrament of Penance. On at least two public occasions during the Jubilee Year of Mercy they will invite other priests with them to hear confessions in the parish.
2. Our Deacons, Subdeacons, their spouses and I will redouble our efforts in practical and concrete ways to assist the poor and needy in our own parishes, in our surrounding communities (by connecting with the local Saint Vincent de Paul Societies) and in the Middle East by connecting to Caritas Lebanon and/or Catholic Relief Services.
3. Our Pastors and I will make a special effort to reach out to any parishioner that has left the Parish and invite them to return home.
4. From the Jubilee Year forward, one tenth of our Eparchial Benefit Dinners will assist needy Christians in Lebanon and the Middle East.
5. To anyone whom we (clergy, religious or laity of the Eparchy) have offended or hurt by any actions or decisions, we stand ready to apologize and make amends. I will personally embrace this with all sincerity. Anger lasts but for a moment, but "mercy endures forever" as the Psalmist reminds us (Psalm 136).
6. Every Parish and Mission in the Eparchy is encouraged to do one or more fundraisers for the needs of the local poor as well as those in the Middle East.
7. Every Maronite is asked to re-evaluate his or her way of life to see where more mercy, more patience and more listening can make for better relationships with others, in particular for those closest to us (as well as those estranged from us). We will find creative ways to reach out. For those who are far away or have distanced themselves over the years from us, for any reason, let us reach out as well.



(Continues on page 8)

Schedule of Bishop Elias Zaidan

November 2 - 3, 2015

Visit of St. Sharbel's Relics, St. Raymond Cathedral, St. Louis, Mo.

November 4, 2015

Visit of St. Sharbel's Relics, St. Maron Church, Minneapolis, Minn.

November 5, 2015

Visit of St. Sharbel's Relics, Holy Family Church, St. Paul, Minn.

November 10, 2015

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

November 14, 2015

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

November 16 - 19, 2015

Meetings of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), Baltimore, Md.

November 19 - 25, 2015

Meeting of the Maronite Bishops of the Expansion, Mexico City, Mexico

November 26, 2015

Happy and Blessed Thanksgiving to everyone

December 4 - 6, 2015

Visit of St. Sharbel's Relics, St. Sharbel Church, Portland, Ore.

December 6 - 8, 2015

Visit of St. Sharbel's Relics, St. Jude Church, Murray, Ut.

December 8 - 9, 2015

Visit of St. Sharbel's Relics, St. Rafka Church, Lakewood [Denver], Colo. □

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

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

Publishers

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

Editor Msgr. George M. Sebaali

Editing and proofreading
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Printed in Richmond, Virginia.

Maronite Convention 2016

Our Lady of Lebanon Church

San Francisco, California

July 6 - 10, 2016

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

New Bedford, Massachusetts Maronite Servants Speak on Pope



On Tuesday, September 22, the Maronite Servants of Christ the Light visited the local Catholic school Holy Family Holy Name in New Bedford, Mass. Miss Krystal Moujabber, 5th grade teacher, invited Sr. Therese Maria to give a presentation on His Holiness Pope Francis, in honor of his visit to the United States. Sr. Therese Maria highlighted the Pope's spirituality, particularly his emphasis on mercy and outreach to the poor, the forgotten, the outcasts, the dejected, and the downtrodden. The children were able to learn how Pope Francis truly exemplifies Christ in radiating the Lord's goodness and joy. □

THE ORDER OF SAINT SHARBEL



Perpetual Members

- ★ Dave Boackle
- ★ Norman Bolus
- ★ Carlo Joseph

*St. Elias Maronite Church,
Birmingham, Ala.*

- ★ Robert Lakkis
- ★ Bourjois Abboud
- ★ Micheline Abboud

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

- ★ Marlize Ayoub
- St. John Maron Church,
Orange Calif.*

Annual Members

- ★ Attorney Robert J. Yamin
*St. Anthony Church,
Danbury, Conn.*

- ★ Theresa and Randy Jones
*St. John Maron Church,
Orange, Calif.*

The Order of Saint Sharbel is an organization of lay people and clergy who have pledged their spiritual strength and financial support for Our Lady of Lebanon Seminary and the retired Maronite clergy of the Maronite Eparchies in the U.S.A.

For more information about the Order ask your Pastor, visit www.orderstsharbel.org, or write to:

Eparchy of Saint Maron
109 Remsen Street
Brooklyn, NY 11201
or

Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon
1021 South 10th Street
St. Louis, MO 63104

Brooklyn, New York *Sixth Annual Eparchial Benefit Dinner*



Monir Barakat speaks as Bishop Gregory Mansour and Hayat Barakat look on.

Over 250 people gathered on October 13, 2015, at the New York Athletic Club, Manhattan, N.Y., for the Sixth Annual Benefit Dinner for the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn. It was a memorable evening, honoring Monir and Hayat Barakat, faithful and devoted members of the Maronite community in the New York area. Other special highlights of the evening included:

- It was the largest Benefit Dinner for the Eparchy since the 2011 Dinner that featured Maronite Patriarch Bechara Peter Rai.
- The honoring of Monir and Hayat Barakat featured a video, civic proclamation, several greetings, a film, an introduction from their children, and a gift from Bishop Gregory Mansour. Hayat Barakat gave a heartfelt acceptance speech, followed by a few brief but humorous words from Monir Barakat.
- Parishioners and friends from parishes in Sleepy Hollow, Brooklyn, Manhattan, N.Y.; and New Jersey attended. Many attendees traveled from great distances, including Pennsylvania, Florida, and other places.
- The event featured many special touches, including desserts and colorful centerpieces from Lina Abdo, several rousing pieces from tenor Amine Hachem, an inspirational speech from Dr. Josyann Abisaab, and a beautiful icon gift that pictured five Maronite saints from Bishop Gregory to all attendees.

The preliminary financial report shows that the Benefit Dinner raised over \$130,000 after expenses for the Eparchy. The proceeds will be used to educate seminarians, support poorer parishes and missions, and assist retired priests. The Eparchy is still accepting donations through November 30, 2015, 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 at <http://1drv.ms/1QDulqg>.

People are already looking forward to next Fall's Benefit Dinner, which will include a special tribute for the Eparchy's Golden Anniversary. □

Saint Louis, Missouri *Cathedral's Homecoming*

by Shelly Vitale

The two-day festival took place at Saint Raymond Cathedral in Saint Louis, Mo., on September 19 - 20, 2015. Visitors came from near and far to enjoy the cuisine and entertainment. The weather was perfect for many outdoor activities, including the children's booths and games. The young and old danced merrily to the music while others took the



opportunity to meet with friends and relatives. Parishioners were delighted to visit with Bishop A. Elias Zaidan, Bishop of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon, and Bishop *Emeritus* Robert Shaheen. Many delicacies were provided including food served in the Cedar's Banquet Hall where patrons were offered the traditional Lebanese menu for which St. Raymond is so well known.

This great event would not have taken place or have been such a tremendous success without the help of many dedicated volunteers who spent countless hours planning, preparing, and working. A very special thank you goes to Chorbishop Moussa Joseph, Rector, who spearheaded the planning of the festival along with Co-Chairs Rick and Janet Baker and Gina Fanetti. □

Easton, Pennsylvania *An Urgent Request*

My wife, Chafica Koury, has suffered rejection of a kidney transplant that she received in 2003. As such, she is now back on a regular course of dialysis and is in urgent need of a second kidney transplant. Despite her condition, Chafica has been and continues to be, a tireless volunteer on behalf of Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Catholic Church in Easton, Penn. We are hoping and praying that God motivates someone to come forth to donate a kidney to her. Anyone with either O positive or O negative blood type who is willing to be tested as a potential donor is asked to please call me at 610-653-6294 as soon as possible. May God reward you for your kindness in helping my wife to lead a normal life again.

Sincerely grateful, I remain,
Deacon Anthony P. Koury □

Houston, Texas *Jubilee Celebration*



Fr. Pierre El Khoury gives his farewell address to the parish.

by Nabil Joubran

The celebration of the 25th anniversary of Our Lady of the Cedars Maronite Church concluded with an eventful weekend. A dinner banquet was held on September 26, 2015, attended by Bishop A. Elias Zaidan, Bishop of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon, and Father Elias Sleiman, Rector of Our Lady of Mount Lebanon - St. Peter Cathedral in Los Angeles, Calif. During the banquet, Father George BouChaaya was introduced to the community as the incoming interim Assistant Pastor, while the outgoing Associate Pastor, Father Pierre El Khoury, gave an emotional farewell address. The Youth *Dabke* Group performed at the well-attended banquet with entertainment provided by the Lebanese singer Elie Khayat accompanied by Maestro Fadi Abi Hachem.

On Sunday morning, Bishop Zaidan celebrated the Divine Liturgy of Thanksgiving for twenty-five years of parish life at Our Lady of the Cedars Maronite Church. This was special to Bishop Zaidan as he was instrumental in starting the Mission in Houston. It has since developed into the parish it is today under his guidance, hard work and tireless efforts of our only Pastor Father Milad Yaghi. At the end of the Liturgy, Bishop Zaidan inducted a long-time parishioner and benefactor, Mr. Robert Lakkis, into the Order of Saint Sharbel, and awarded Saeid and Melanie Tannous the Silver Massabki Medal. Bishop Zaidan had married the couple in the early days of the Houston Mission.

Before the Dismissal, the various parish organizations presented Father Pierre with symbolic farewell gifts. The service was followed by a reception and slideshow in the Cedar Hall, as all parishioners bid Father Pierre farewell and wished him well in his new assignment as Pastor of Our Lady of Lebanon in Lombard [Chicago], Illinois.

A bittersweet weekend it was! Celebrating the jubilee, welcoming a new priest, and at the same time saying goodbye to a well-loved priest who spent almost eight years ministering to the parish. □

Uniontown, Pennsylvania *Pastoral Visit*



by Dr. Mabel George Howard

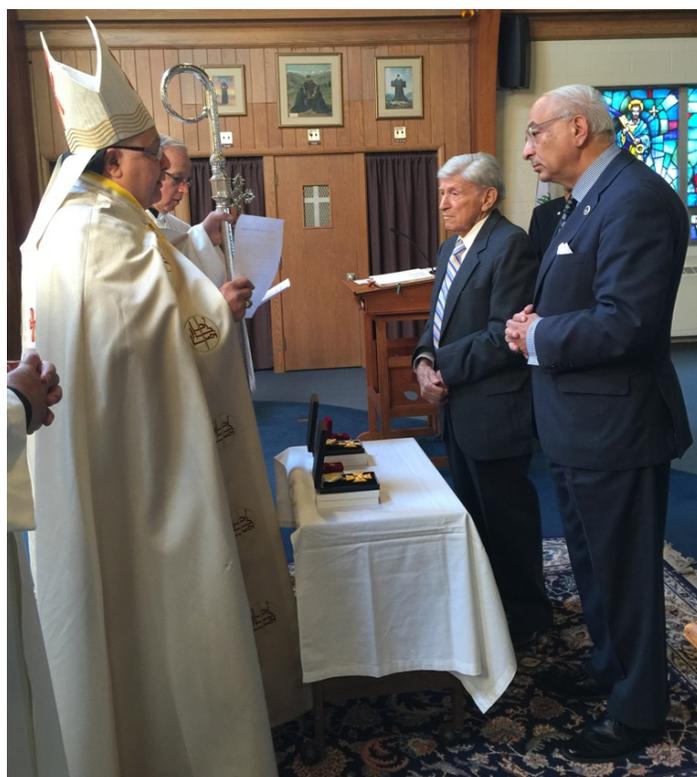
During the weekend of August 15-17, 2015, the congregation of St. George Church in Uniontown, Penn., welcomed its beloved *son*, Bishop Gregory Mansour, *home* with open arms. Accompanied by Seminarian Sharbel El Hajj, the Most Reverend Bishop Gregory Mansour, former pastor of St. George Church (1983-1994), honored the parishioners with a pastoral visit. To begin his mission, Bishop Mansour met with several church organizations to discuss their achievements and future goals including: the Ladies Guild of St. George, the Altar Rosary Society, the Maronite Men's Group, the Maronite Youth Organization, and the church construction committee.

Bishop Mansour also visited and blessed the sick and shut-ins of the parish who were unable to attend the Liturgy. They were overwhelmed by his gentleness and concern for their physical and spiritual well-being. Assisted by Father Sami Chaaya, Pastor, Bishop Mansour heard confessions and celebrated Sunday liturgies. Afterwards, a lunch reception was held at a local restaurant. As the keynote speaker, Bishop Mansour shared with those attending his thoughts and feelings pertaining to the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the feast day celebrated during his visit to Uniontown. To impress upon the group the importance of praying to the Blessed Virgin, Bishop Mansour drew upon a personal spiritual reflection. He spoke of his visit to the Valley of the Saints, a holy site in Lebanon where patriarchs and groups of

Maronites sought refuge centuries ago during times of persecution. While in hiding, they would focus on a statue representing the Blessed Virgin Mary and pray for solitude, guidance and protection. Bishop Mansour also encouraged the group to demonstrate daily devotion to our Blessed Virgin Mary who Maronites affectionately call "Our Lady of Lebanon."

The parishioners of St. George were honored to share time with Bishop Mansour during his pastoral visit. He possesses an unforgettable natural kindness that leaves a positive effect on all who meet him. His calming demeanor and caring disposition demonstrate his mutual love for St. George Church. □

Danbury, Connecticut *Installation of New Members of the Order of Saint Sharbel*



Bishop *Emeritus* Robert Shaheen installs James Jowdy, Sr., (left) and Robert Yamin into the Order of Saint Sharbel.

by Mrs. Ruth Ashkar

Saint Anthony Parish in Danbury, Conn., was honored and pleased to host the Most Reverend Archbishop Samir Nassar, the Maronite Bishop of Damascus, Syria, and the Most Reverend Bishop Robert J. Shaheen, Bishop *Emeritus* of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon and Danbury native. Archbishop Nassar visited for a week, while Bishop Shaheen enjoyed the visit with his family members, cousins and friends in his hometown.

A reception in honor of the two Bishops, sponsored by the members of the Order of Saint Sharbel, was held on Thursday, October 1, 2015, at a local restaurant, preceded by

a pre-dinner cocktail party at the Church Rectory. Some clergy from the Maronite and Latin parishes were invited to the event. Some were able to join and meet with Archbishop Nassar and Bishop Shaheen.

Archbishop Nassar and Bishop Shaheen concelebrated the parish Liturgies the weekend of October 3 and 4, where parishioners enjoyed listening to Bishop Nassar explaining the current situation in Syria, and the plight of Christians in the Middle East in general, and Syria in particular. In addition, a special evening with the two bishops was held on Saturday, October 3, after Liturgy, when Bishop Nassar showed a very interesting slide show of pictures from *Damascus* and *Aleppo*, Syria, and talked about the sufferings and challenges of his parishioners struck by this catastrophic tragedy since March 15, 2011.

The second Sunday in October was designated as the "Order of Saint Sharbel Sunday" in both Eparchies in the United States. For that occasion, Bishop Robert Shaheen installed two new members who recently joined the Order, Mr. James Jowdy, Sr., and Attorney Robert Yamin. Earlier this year four new members joined the Order and were installed by Bishop Gregory J. Mansour during his Pastoral Visit to Saint Anthony Parish. The Order of Saint Sharbel in Danbury is proud to have sixteen active members. We look forward to welcoming other new members as well.

The Order of Sharbel is vitally important in providing financial and spiritual support for the formation of Maronite seminarians, as well as retired priests, who have dedicated their lives to the priesthood, their parishes and their parishioners all through the United States. □

Warren, Michigan *Leonard Thomas Scholarship*

Saint Sharbel Maronite Parish, Warren, Mich., wishes to thank Mr. Leonard Thomas for his generosity in once again granting students from St. Sharbel Community scholarship funds for their school tuition. Sixteen young people from the parish submitted applications for the 2015 - 2016 *Leonard Thomas Scholarship*. All applicants were granted funds towards their education! May God continue to grant each of them wisdom as they journey in their academic endeavors. □



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

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

of Saint Maron.

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

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

San Francisco, California *Kick-off of 2016 Convention*



2016 Nam Convention Coordinators.

by *Elie Antoun*,
President of Parish Council

The members of the NAM Board and the Organizing Committees of Our Lady of Lebanon Church in Millbrae [San Francisco], Calif., officially kicked off the preparations for the 2016 National Convention during a series of meetings over the October 16 - 18, 2015, weekend. These meetings were led by NAM Board President, Samir Farah; Mike Naber, Executive Director of NAM; Joe and Carmen Maroun, Co-chairs of the NAM organizing committee and Fr. John Nahal, Pastor of Our Lady of Lebanon Church.

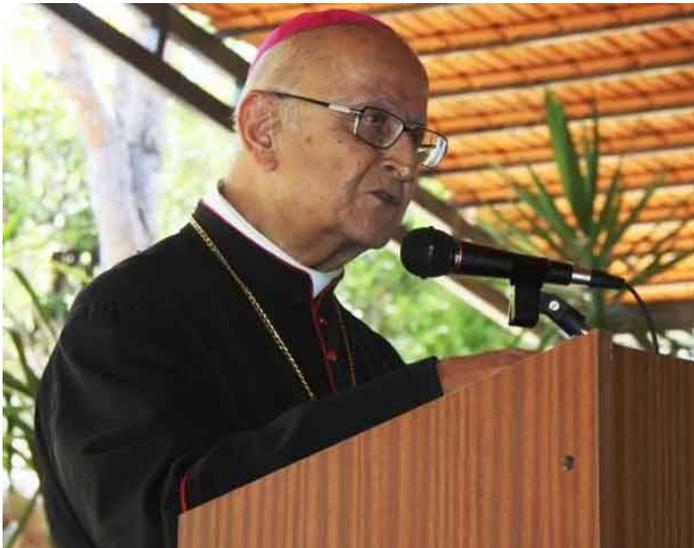
As we have just started, there is a genuinely palpable excitement by the OLOL community to deliver a most memorable NAM Convention. Our Lady of Lebanon Parish is blessed with a community that possesses the unbounded energy and enthusiasm to host the 2016 NAM Convention in one of the most beautiful cities in the world!

The details of the convention activities are in their early planning stages. You can count on an exciting set of spiritual, informational, motivational and fun activities for all groups starting with the children and encompassing the youth, young adults and young adult professionals. The Convention plans to invite an impactful group of speakers and to organize workshops that will blend our native culture with our adopted one, wrapped with the faith and spirituality that we share! And as always, the entertainment and food will make you even more proud of your Lebanese heritage.

The NAM Convention is scheduled for July 6 - 10, 2016. The weather in San Francisco and across the Bay Area will be beautiful with a small note of caution: Do not forget to pack a jacket for San Francisco. Remember the urban legend about what Mark Twain said: "*The coldest winter I ever spent was a summer in San Francisco!*"

Our Lady of Lebanon Parish is truly looking forward to seeing you all next year. We will keep you posted on the progress of the Convention preparations over the next few months. One thing we can guarantee is that you will have a phenomenal time! Mark your calendars. □

Eparchial Condolences



Bishop Youssef Dargham, Bishop Emeritus of Egypt, Sudan and Visitor to the Maronites in Africa, passed away on Tuesday, October 27, 2015, in Lebanon. Born on April 22, 1930, to Sharbel Dargham and Barbia Khachan in *Ebrein*, Lebanon, he was ordained a priest on April 12, 1959. From 1965 - 1971 he was assigned as Prefect of Curriculum at Saint Maron Seminary in *Ghazir*, Lebanon. In July of 1971, he became Rector of the same Seminary. In June of 1989, he was appointed Bishop of Egypt, Sudan, and Visitor to Africa, and resigned from his position in 2005, for having reached the canonical age. After his resignation he returned to Saint Maron Seminary as Spiritual Director for future priests.

Bishop Gregory Mansour, along with the clergy and faithful of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn, and 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 His Beatitude Patriarch Bechara Peter Cardinal Rai; to the Maronite Synod of Bishops; to Bishop Mounir Khairallah Bishop of the Eparchy of *Batroun*; and to Bishop Dargham's family and relatives.

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

George M. Thomas, the father of Chorbishop Michael G. Thomas, Vicar General of the Eparchy of Saint Maron and Administrator of Heart of Jesus Mission in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., passed away of natural causes on October 27, 2015, at the age of 96. George was born in New Bedford, Mass., on March 7, 1919, to immigrant parents, Mitchel and Helen Thomas, both from Lebanon. He had four brothers and sisters: Mary, Arthur, Fred, and Janet. He worked his way through Providence College and then onto Boston University School of Law, where he graduated in 1943.

He was sworn into the Massachusetts Bar on May 20,

1944. He then went on to serve our country in Iwo Jima and, during his last few months, in Guam. When he returned to New Bedford in 1946, he and his older brother, Fred, formed the law firm of Thomas and Thomas, the firm that was later joined by his son Peter, and Peter's wife Cynthia. In 1950 he was admitted to practice before the United States Supreme Court.

In 1956 he married Rejeanne (Reggie) Valois. For almost sixty years she stood by his side and took care of him until his last breath. They had four boys: Michael, Daniel, Peter, and James. Daniel passed away at a very young age becoming the angel who continues to watch over all the family. Peter is currently the clerk-magistrate of the New Bedford District Court, and James a physician specializing in Emergency Medicine at Good Samaritan hospital in Brockton and Saint Anne's hospital in Fall River, Mass.

George lived and worked for his wife and family. George and Reggie made a great team and worked tirelessly to make their boys proud of their ethnic backgrounds: the foods, the languages, the music, and the Faith. The family always attended Mass together on Sundays. As a family man, George never wavered from trying to do the right thing, teaching his boys to do the same.

George has always been proud of his Catholic Faith and his Maronite Rite. He was life-long Communicant of Our Lady of Purgatory Church in New Bedford, and a member of the Knights of Columbus since 1946, where he served in every chair of the third and fourth degrees, as well as District Deputy. For over thirty years he has been a member of the Order of Saint Sharbel, and he was an active member of the New Bedford Serra Club. At the age of 92, he was honored as the first recipient of the Joseph P. Harrington Founder's Award, presented to him by the Most Reverend George Coleman, the Bishop of Fall River.

George is survived by his wife, Reggie; his son Chorbishop Michael; his son Peter and his wife Cynthia, and their two daughters, Alexa and Casey; and his son James. He is also survived by his sister, Janet (Thomas) Lalor; and many family members here and in Lebanon.

The Funeral Service took place at Our Lady of Purgatory Maronite Church, New Bedford, Mass., on Tuesday November 3, 2015.

Condolences may be sent to:

Mrs. Reggie Thomas
60 Mandell Street
New Bedford, MA 02740

Or

Chorbishop Michael Thomas
Heart of Jesus Mission
1800 NE 6th Court
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33304

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 Msgr. Michael and his family.

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

Jubilee Year of Mercy

Continued from page 1

8. The Marriage Tribunal will reduce fees from \$600 to \$500 as we redouble our efforts to do all we can to help those, who because of financial or time constraints, find this process a hardship. We will continue to do all we can to build on the good work already done by our Tribunal to help those seeking the Church's help.
9. Seven parishes including the Cathedral will be designated as places of pilgrimages:
 - Our Lady of Mercy in Worcester, Mass.
 - Saint Louis Gonzaga in Utica, N.Y.
 - Our Lady of Victory in Pittsburgh, Penn.
 - Our Lady of Lebanon in Washington, D.C.
 - Saint Joseph Church in Atlanta, Ga.
 - Saint Jude Church in Orlando, Fla.
 - Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral in Brooklyn, N.Y.

We will also promote a special spiritual Pilgrimage to Washington, D.C., for the Annual March for Life in January, as well as a pilgrimage to the National Shrine in North Jackson, Ohio, for the Feast of Assumption on August 15.

10. The Relic of Saint Sharbel from Lebanon will be present in the Eparchy from February 2016 until June 2016. This is intended to be a special grace for every parish for spiritual renewal.
11. On the third or fourth Friday of October 2016, at Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral in Brooklyn, N.Y., our Eparchy will celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the presence of a Maronite Bishop in the United States of America. Archbishop Francis M. Zayek, God rest him in peace, came to us at that time. Every priest, deacon, subdeacon, monk, religious sister and lay person is welcome to join in the gathering. Every parish is asked to send at least five couples (and their families if possible) to the celebration to enrich marriage and family life. The anniversary will be done simply and in the spirit of the Jubilee Year of Mercy.
12. Our Eparchy will continue, and in fact, redouble its efforts to collaborate with ecumenical and charitable organizations such as Christian Arab and Middle Eastern Churches Together (CAMECT), Catholic Near East Welfare Association (CNEWA), Aid to the Church in Need (ACN), In Defense of Christians (IDC), Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and others to make mercy more a reality for those in need.

The purpose of the Jubilee Year of Mercy is to bring more mercy and love into our world, which is so divided and partisan, and to create what Pope Francis calls a culture of dialogue.

Mercy also begins with me, with each one of us. Therefore,

with God's grace I ask that we find ways to forgive ourselves, and seek God's forgiveness through a deeper, and more personal, and devout union with God by frequent Penance and Holy Communion. Thus, in turn, after having experienced the great mercy of our loving God, we may be even more merciful to others.

May the prayer and love of Our Lady of Mercy be with us. □

Sincerely yours in Christ,
+Gregory John Mansour

Broken Dreams

*by Archbishop Samir Nassar
Maronite Bishop of Damascus, Syria*

Exodus of Youth

This absurd war, which has torn Syria for five years, pushes a number of young Syrians to flee violence, military service, death and chaos.

With the closure of consulates and refused visas, the young spend their fortune and ruin their families to join illegal underground immigration which is costly and dangerous; some drown, and others are vandalized.

Often unwelcome and ignorant in foreign languages, these young Syrians live in isolation wrought with suffering and a bitter silent hatred. They lost everything only to live in solitude and perdition. They want their Church, now powerless and able to do little to help and hold them, and their country, now borderless and torn by a war that feeds hatred and intolerance.

Syrian youth, asset of the future, losing hope, turn their back on their homeland so much in need of them. Their dreams are broken in the ruins of their beautiful country. A one-way trip. What a waste.

Military Children

The tragedy does not stop at the departure of young children. Syrian youth, who have awaited peace for five years, revolt against lives of misery and abandonment. Driven by academic failure, by poverty and by blocked prospects, they join armed groups and prove to be audacious fighters and executioners with hearts of stone, war machines drawn into violence without fear or goals. This is an issue which worries the Church and troubles the minds of its pastors.

This terrible consequence of a war that has lasted too long is that instead of saving the children from these atrocities they were plunged into total violence. To destroy childhood is to break innocence and to kill hope. The most beautiful dream of life is broken. How do we restore the pure spirit of these children?

What will the Resurrection be in a country with the absence of young people and children?

"Rescue me from my enemies, Lord, in You, I take refuge" Psalm 143:9. *"You who control the course of world events..."* Daniel 2:21. □

Brooklyn, New York Every Life is Worth Living!

by Marise Frangie

It seems that our culture focuses on the "quality of life" and doesn't believe in the sanctity of every human life. A person's worth is measured today by his ability to contribute to society. But what about elderly, bedridden people who might not be able to move or talk? Their lives are worth living.

In my own life, the Lord blessed me with a wonderful woman who has been an inspiration to me and other women; my friend Jane (name changed) has been married to John (name changed) for thirty-four years. Six years ago John was diagnosed with dementia and Alzheimer's. Jane would drive him everywhere and hold his hand while walking. His health deteriorated until the point he became unable to walk or talk, two years ago. He was first placed in a nursing home; he spent only one night there because Jane felt he wasn't being cared for well, so she decided to bring him home despite the opposition she faced from the family. "I'd rather he dies at home with me than stay here in this situation" Jane said.

John was transferred home after a feeding tube was inserted in his abdomen. Since that day Jane had been taking care of John like a baby (feeding him baby food once a day, changing his diaper, etc.). You can feel how loved and cared for John is.

Jane provided her husband with necessary means for his survival, yet people still reprimand her, "Is this a quality of life?"

Quality of life?! Life is not measured by our ability to give to people but by God's great love for us which makes us heirs of eternal life, life beyond any quality life on this earth. Sure, there is suffering, but we know there is no Easter Sunday without Good Friday and we believe in a risen Lord who promised us eternal happiness with him if we carry our crosses daily and faithfully.

God is the giver of every life and He alone has the right to decide when it is the time to put an end to our earthly life.

"I have set before you life and death ... choose life" (Deuteronomy 30:19) - not good quality of life.

Jane chooses life for John and never stops loving John, caring for him and praying to Our Lady and Saint Sharbel for a healing miracle. She understands that every life is worth living and didn't give up on John's life. Jane also reminds me that the vocation to marriage is the path to eternity by carrying the crosses sometimes caused by the spouses. Every wife is called to help her husband get to heaven and vice-versa. "Your husband is God's will for you and he is your path to sanctity" - words that I heard from a priest and resonate always in my mind and my heart.

How many marriages are being destroyed because couples forgot that their married life will lead them through all its difficulties to eternal joy in heaven?! Will you help them in carrying their crosses and uphold the sanctity of their marriage?

How many people like John cry out to God repeating the psalmist words "I have lost all means of escape; there is no one who cares for my life" (Psalm 142:4). Will you care and reach out to families like this one to support them, pray with them and for them?

May Our Lady, who was standing at the foot of the Cross and witnessed Her Son giving His life in expiation for our sins, be our guide, helper and companion on this earthly journey as we defend and promote the sacredness of every human life. □

Schedule of Bishop Gregory Mansour

November 6 - 8, 2015

NAM Regional Convention, Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral, Brooklyn, N.Y.

November 9 - 10, 2015

Caritas Lebanon-USA Board of Directors Meeting, Saint Louis, Mo.

November 15, 2015

Pastoral Visit to St. Maron Church, Philadelphia, Penn.

November 16 - 19, 2015

Meetings of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), Baltimore, Md.

November 19 - 25, 2015

Meeting of the Maronite Bishops of the Expansion with Patriarch Rai, Mexico City, Mexico

November 25, 2015

Family Visit, Flint, Michigan

December 2 - 3, 2015

Catholic Relief Services, Board of Directors Meeting, Baltimore, Md.

December 5, 2015

Salam Club Dinner, Brooklyn, N.Y.

December 6, 2015

Opening of the Year of Mercy, St. Sharbel Church, Somerset, N.J.

December 8, 2015

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

December 12 - 13, 2015

Pastoral Visit to Archangel Michael Maronite Church, Fayetteville, N.C. □

Holiness in Solitary and Communal Living From The Family of St. Maron to San Francisco



The Priority of Love: Reflections on 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

"Do you realize how much you are worth in the eyes of God? Do you know that you are loved and welcomed by him unconditionally?" - Pope Francis

Introduction

The First Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians, chapter thirteen, verse one through thirteen, is often called Paul's *Hymn of Love*. Paul the Apostle to the Gentiles, who is the Acts of the Apostles tells us he had very little success in "philosophical Athens," comes to Corinth, a raucous port city, which was, in a sense, the Las Vegas of ancient Greece, and is able to establish a vibrant but often capricious and somewhat difficult Christian community.

In this *Hymn of Love*, Paul is reminding the Corinthians of the truth of the Gospel which he had preached to them and that it is grounded in "love."¹ In giving this corrective to the Corinthians, he has given all Christians throughout the ages a reminder of what is at the heart of the Christian message and life.

Love is Greater than Any Spiritual Gift (13:1-3)

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

To appreciate the force of St. Paul's preaching, we must remind ourselves of the proclamation of 1John 4:8 which states that "God is love."² In being baptized into Christ and anointed in the Holy Spirit, our human nature is transformed and is no longer constituted by the limitations of a created being; rather we are reconstituted by adoption through eternal communion with God. In other words we become "god-like," that is to say beings constituted by "love." Given this greatest gift in becoming sons and daughters of the Eternal God, there is no other gift that comes even close. If we, as Paul points out, are prophets, or speak in tongues, or sacrifice our bodies for martyrdom and do not mirror in our lives the love that has reconstituted our being in Jesus Christ, then "we gain nothing."

¹In some translations of the Holy Bible into English, the Greek word *agape* is translated as charity, instead of love. This is because the translation is taken from the Latin Vulgate, which translated *agape* as *caritas* in Latin.

² Christos Yannaras, in *Against Religion: The Alienation of the Ecclesial Event*, translated by Norman Russell, Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2013, writes: "From the first moments of its historical existence, the Christian Church has proposed a single and unique definition of true existence and life...it has defined God in terms of love: "God is love" (1John 4:8).

Love is Expressed by Supernatural Responses (13:4-7)

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

St. Paul instructs what the character of a Christian should be like. Remember he was always in battle against those who wanted the Gentile converts to also embrace the Law of Judaism. He sees no need for them to embrace the character of those who embraced the Law, before it was possible to embrace the new life in Christ. To live in Christ is not to live by laws but to live by love. While laws are meant to restrict, love is an extension of the freedom of salvation. While laws are for behavior in this world, love is of the Kingdom of God. St. Paul proclaims that the person who has embraced God's adoption is patient, kind, not arrogant or rude. The person of love rejoices in the truth and bears and endures all things because of it.

Love is an Eternal Gift (13:8-13)

Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

In the fullness of God's Kingdom there will be no need for prophecies, tongues, and super intelligence. The things we need in our spiritual infancy here in space and time will not be needed when we are born fully unto eternal life and communion with the Holy Trinity. For now we live by three principles of Christian life: faith, hope and love. In the Kingdom of God we will not have faith, for we will have the fullness of knowledge of God. As Paul said, what we see now in a mirror dimly, then we will see face to face. We will not need hope in God's Kingdom, for the hope we held in this life will be complete. Love will remain, love which constitutes our being in Jesus Christ. We will stand within the Holy of Holies in communion with Eternal Love, the Holy Trinity. Our faith in God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is not faith in three individuals, but the One Eternal God. As Love, the three are One and through adoption we, too, become beings of love. □

(Rev.) David A. Fisher
Philadelphia, Penn.

The Family's Role in Fostering Vocations

by
Deacon John Jarvis

Recently I had the opportunity to speak with Mrs. Reggie Thomas, mother of Chorbishop Michael G. Thomas, Vicar General of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn and Administrator of Heart of Jesus Maronite Mission in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., about how the family and the church fosters vocations. She reinforced the reality that most vocations are the result of growing up in a home with a solid and robust spiritual life and having a pastor that is a faithful and loving priest. For the Thomas family, this began on their wedding day when Mrs. Thomas married her husband George at Our Lady of Purgatory

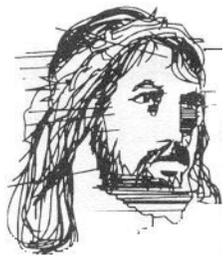
Maronite Church in New Bedford, Massachusetts. They were both faithful Catholics attending Mass regularly and taking seriously their Catholic faith. George was already the Grand Knight in the local chapter of the Knights of Columbus and went on to be District Deputy for several years. It is clear they had the foundation of a family based on God and His Church. When the children came they were prepared.

When I asked her when they knew Chorbishop Michael might have a vocation she laughed and said they always knew. He seemed born for the priesthood. She indicated he always loved Church, but it is clear that this love, this inclination to God, was nurtured and encouraged by family life and his church. The family also took prayer seriously, praying at meals and saying the rosary at bedtime. And in another more unique form of prayer and reverence, Mrs. Thomas spoke of the "little altar." Chorbishop Michael had been given a small altar and, after receiving it, he would return from Church and say his own *Mass* at the "little altar." In many households, this would have been seen as cute but soon forgotten. In the Thomas house this act of devotion was encouraged. Sometimes Chorbishop Michael's uncle would assist as the altar server. This pretend *Mass* was taken seriously. Anything that encouraged devotion to God was welcome and not to be taken lightly. It truly was an act of prayer.

As for the church, Chorbishop Michael was blessed to have a wonderful pastor, Fr. George Saad, who by example showed what a pastor could be. He was a priest twenty-four hours a day, guiding his parishioners while administering the sacraments. He led with truth and love. He worked closely with Chorbishop Michael, nurturing the desire he saw in the young boy. For instance, when he was six years old, he made his First Holy Communion and immediately Fr. Saad accepted him as an altar server. It was something he

looked forward to every Sunday and the family was always there. He remained an altar server until he became the organist and choir director. After he left for college, he would fill in during his breaks. It was important for Chorbishop Michael to be involved deeply in the Mass, and Fr. Saad encouraged that desire. He was also there when Chorbishop Michael took his first steps toward ordination after leaving for Providence College and for the North American College and the Gregorian University in Rome, Italy. Fr. Saad walked with the new vocation from the beginning.

The day of Chorbishop Michael's ordination to the priesthood was living proof that a devout and loving family and a faithful priest can work wonders in a young man's life, always with the help of the Holy Spirit. The truth of his journey is symbolized by the fact when the new priest, Fr. Michael, held his first Mass at Our Lady of Purgatory, the party following was centered on a beautiful cake topped by the "little altar." □



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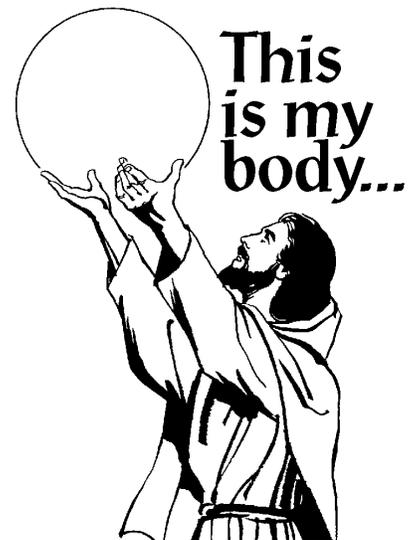
Fr. Gary George, Director
Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon
Office of Vocations
1021 South 10th Street
St. Louis, MO 63104

Or

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

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Our Lady of Lebanon Seminary
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Newtown Square, Pennsylvania *Special Visit*



by Lillian Shahade

At St. Sharbel Church in Newtown Square, Penn., on September 20, 2015, Very Reverend Abbot Semaan Abou Abdou, O.M.M., was the main celebrant at the Divine Liturgy with Fr. Richard Canulli, O.S.A., and Fr. Raymond Khallouf, Administrator.

Abbot Semaan Abou Abdou is the Patriarchal Administrator for the Eparchy of *Aleppo*, Syria. He came to the U.S. to visit and talk with Pope Francis at the 2015 World Meeting of Families; and at St. Sharbel's in Newtown Square he celebrated the Liturgy for Peace in the Middle East and for the people of *Aleppo*, Syria.

The parishioners were very attentive as Abbot Semaan spoke of the many wrongs and injustices plaguing the Christians in the Middle East, and he asked us to continue to pray to right the wrongs there, for the many refugees left sick and homeless, for the leaders of the Middle East and for him.

After the Liturgy, a picnic luncheon, prepared by the parishioners, was held in the hall for all to enjoy, while having an opportunity to speak to Abbot Semaan. □

Waterville, Maine *Birthday Fundraiser For Refugees*

by Lyn Rowden

For years we have been hearing of the horrors in the Middle East and the desperate situations which have driven millions from their homes: nearly two million people from Syria alone and those from Iraq are increasing daily. Then there are the countries such as tiny Lebanon which is bursting at the seams with refugees who are trying to escape ISIS and civil wars. They come literally running by day and night usually with nothing more than the clothes they wear, all their possessions confiscated or used to flee. Personnel at the growing refugee camps are doing their best, but can you even imagine the illness, the unsanitary conditions, the poverty? Our ordinary comforts have become

luxuries in the face of this horror. It has come to the point where we can no longer stand idly by thinking someone else will fix the problems.

St. Joseph Maronite Church in Waterville, Maine, agreed to do something to help. We held a fundraising spaghetti and bean supper with a silent auction on Saturday, June 27, 2015, to raise some cash for Caritas International for refugees in Lebanon. Lyn Rowden organized the event to celebrate her 60th birthday. The Immaculate Heart of Mary Knights of Columbus, based at St. Joseph, contributed food and manpower while parishioner and professional chef Kevin Michaud prepared the dinner with many eager assistants. Local friends as well as some from across the nation donated money and all the items for the event. The \$3,456 proceeds from the event were given to Caritas. You can learn more about Caritas and its work at www.caritas.org. □

Glen Allen, Virginia *St. Anthony's Annual Golf Tournament*



On September 20, 2015, on a beautiful and sunny Sunday afternoon, St. Anthony's Maronite Catholic Church in Glen Allen, Va., held its annual Golf Tournament to benefit some of the orphaned children in Lebanon. The tournament was held at the Hunting Hawk Golf Course in Glen Allen (Richmond), Va., and the proceeds were sent to His Excellency Bishop Gregory Mansour to forward to His Beatitude Patriarch Bechara Peter Cardinal Rai for this purpose. First, second, and third prizes were awarded, and door prizes were given. Lunch and drinks were served before the tournament. Following the tournament, a dinner of Lebanese and American food was served.

The Golf Tournament was the first phase of the annual charitable drive at St. Anthony to benefit orphaned children in Lebanon. The second phase is the annual benefit dinner planned for December 6, 2015. □

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. □

Eparchy of Saint Maron *Clergy Retreat*

The Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn will hold its annual clergy retreat on January 11 -15, 2016, at Our Lady of Florida Retreat House in North Palm Beach, Florida. □

Cardinal Mauro Piacenza Explains Jubilee of Mercy and Answers Questions on Holy Year “Between Earth and Heaven”

What is the Jubilee? How is it different from that celebrated by the Hebrew Community in ancient times? Why has Pope Francis proclaimed an Extraordinary Holy Year on the subject of Mercy? And what is Mercy? What does the remission of sins mean? Who has given the Church this power? And does mercy apply also to non-believers and faithful of other religions? Why was the date December 8 chosen to begin the Jubilee of Mercy?

To answer these and other questions, ZENIT interviewed Cardinal Mauro Piacenza, Major Penitentiary of the Tribunal of the Apostolic Penitentiary.

Q. *We are now at the doors of the great Extraordinary Jubilee proclaimed by Pope Francis. Could you explain what a Jubilee Year is?*

A. A Jubilee is an “apocalyptic” time, in the etymological sense of the term; a time, that is, of “revelation” of the true Reality, of the new meaning and value that Christians confer on human life, on the “present time.”

In Hebrew antiquity, the Jubilee consisted of a year, every fifty years, opened by the sound of a ram’s horn (in Hebrew *yobel*) during which this “novelty” of life was awaited, with symbolic and concrete gestures, a time of rest for the earth, the restitution of confiscated land and the liberation of slaves. However, it is only in Christianity that this rest, this reconciliation, this liberation finds full and definitive fulfilment!

In fact Christianity - that is the coming of Christ into the world and into history, the clothing of the Son of God in our poor humanity - conferred on time a new value, an infinite value! From the time that God became Man, died and resurrected, every instant has become an “occasion” of the relationship with Him, of the living and vivifying Encounter with Him, and of the offer to Him of one’s life. Therefore, the Jubilee Year is a year in which our time, understood in the chronological sense, is as though “absorbed” into another measure of unity, that of grace. In a Jubilee Year, the Church as loving Mother does her utmost to multiply the “occasions of grace,” especially in regard to the remission of sins, through Sacramental Confession! To symbolize this entry into a time of special grace, the rite of the beginning of the Jubilee is carried out: the opening of the Holy Door.

Q. *The Jubilee will begin next December 8, Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. Why was this date chosen?*

A. The Pope wanted this date to celebrate a particularly significant event in the Church’s more recent history: the conclusion of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council. Many are the fruits of grace that the Lord has given through the last Conciliar assembly -- one thinks, only by way of example, of the powerful call to holiness to all the baptized and the great flowering of Ecclesial Movements -- but many more are the riches enclosed in its texts, which call for being properly studied, understood and received in the life of the Church. At the foundational level, especially the Pontificates of Saint John Paul II, of the Holy Father *Emeritus* Benedict XVI and of Pope

Francis are permeated by this endeavor to promote the correct reception of the conciliar texts.

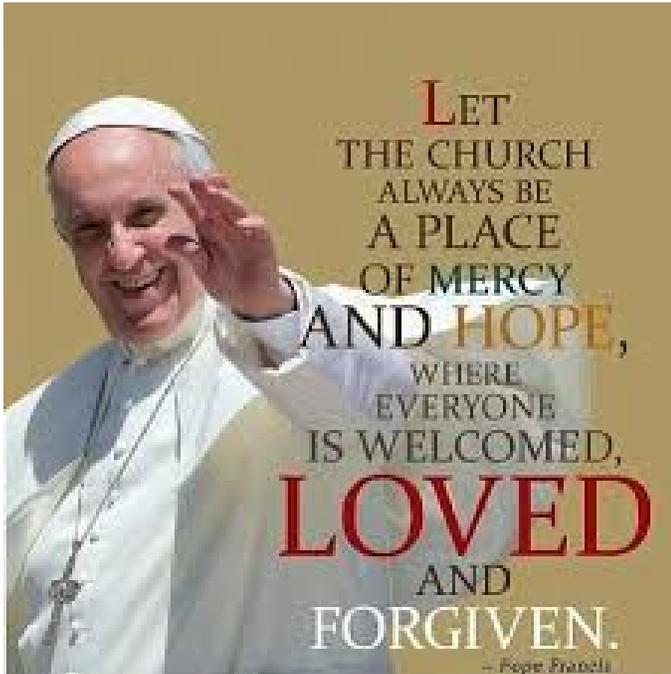
Moreover, this “Marian” date of the beginning of the Jubilee calls all of us to fix our eyes and heart on the Immaculate Conception, Mother and Model of the Church, and pre-redeemed, that is saved first in view of Christ’s future merits from her conception. We know that the entire Church and, in her, our lives themselves are in her hands, under her protection and by her “omnipotent supplications” we await all the gifts of grace more necessary today, to serve Christ, the only true Lord of the cosmos and of history.

Q. *Pope Francis has dedicated this Jubilee Year to the subject of Mercy, which, from the first instances, has occupied a central role in his Pontificate. What must one understand by this word? What, in fact, is Mercy, and, on the other hand, what is it not?*

A. Well, as Saint Thomas does, we begin by saying what Mercy “is not.” Mercy isn’t blind tolerance, it isn’t justification of sin and, above all, it isn’t a right.

Mercy isn’t tolerance, in as much as it does not limit itself to “endure” the sinner, leaving him to continue to sin; rather, it denounces sin openly, and, precisely in this way, it loves the sinner: it recognizes that the sinner doesn’t consist of his sin, but is more; it leads his actions to the light of truth, the whole truth: and thus offers him salvation. Hence, Mercy doesn’t justify sin, in virtue of the socio-cultural, political-economic or personal circumstances that exist, but it so esteems man as to ask him to give an account of all his actions, thus recognizing him to be “responsible” before God. Finally, Mercy isn’t a right; it cannot be presumed either in relations with God or in relations with the Church, Minister of Divine Mercy.

Now we come to what Mercy properly is. Mercy is first of all a reality, living and true, immutable and forever, which comes to meet human misery, by a mystery of absolute and divine liberty, and “saves” this human misery, not by cancelling or ignoring it and even less so by forgetting it, but taking charge of it “personally.” In the splendid celebrations of Holy Week that take place in the South of Spain, as well as in many other places where popular piety is fervent, when the dead Christ is led in procession outside the church, from the people



recollected in prayer, a moving voice of profound piety often rises that cries: “Mercy!”

See, Mercy is a Person; it is Christ! -- Incarnated, Dead and Risen. He wishes to weave with each man a personal relation of truth and love, and all this, which from our perspective of poor sinners, astonishes and marvels us, is called “Mercy.

Q. *Your Eminence, where can people find mercy today? Is there a limit to Divine Mercy? Are there such grave sins that they cannot be forgiven?*

A. This mercy is found, with certainty, where Christ himself willed to meet man: in his own Flesh! This Flesh of Christ, Risen and Living, is mysteriously prolonged by the power of the Holy Spirit, by the Church, which is His Mystical Body. In the Church, through the men that Christ himself has chosen, called and constituted ministers, mercy awaits sinners, and goes to encounter them personally in the sacraments, especially those of Reconciliation and the Eucharist.

All the Sacraments – and the Church herself – are the work of Christ’s mercy, in as much as, through them, not only does He “remove” sin but attracts sinners into the fullness of life, unmerited and unthinkable, so much so as to render them, together with Him and “in” Him, children of God. This happens first of all through Baptism. Our Orthodox brothers would say that man is “divinized” by Christ. The Sacrament of Reconciliation, then, renews the Gift of our Baptism, removing what contradicts or is opposed to it: sin.

This Divine Mercy, which is Christ, is boundless in as much as it is His Love, which is the same Love of the Father. Yet, despite this, it has a limit, one and only one, which coincides with that limit that God himself wished to put to His Omnipotence: man’s freedom. If man

doesn’t accept and doesn’t open to the Mercy that God offers him, but with his own choices and his own concrete acts refuses it, God doesn’t impose it. He however, with divine patience, without ever tiring – Pope Francis repeats to us – waits for man to convert, during the time of his earthly pilgrimage, and offers him all the graces necessary for that to happen.

Q. *And when the time of this earthly pilgrimage ends, what happens?*

A. When the fundamental and sacred time arrives – too forgotten today -- of the “passing away,” the so-called particular judgment opens for man: the soul, temporarily despoiled of its body, finds itself in the presence of Christ, Just Judge and Savior, who assesses it, not first of all on the basis of its subjective convictions and not even in regard to the circumstances in which it found itself living, but according to its works, according to the ultimate orientation that the works conferred on its heart.

Fundamentally, the passing away and thus the eternal destiny itself, is nothing other than a sudden “expansion,” we could say an “eternization” of our last “present instant,” which, stripped of the passing of time, will find itself before the Light and Truth of Christ, in that same “interior position” that we matured on earth. An integrating part of the works judged by Christ are, obviously, our having asked for and obtained mercy for our sins, our having ourselves been merciful in our dealings with our neighbour, and our having persevered in prayer. The particular Judgment will be followed, at the end of time, by the Universal Judgment and the Resurrection of the flesh, with the soul – we could say – immediately admitted in its last condition: on one hand if it has eternal Salvation, which can see us immediately immersed in the Beatific Vision of God in Paradise, together with all the Saints, to which the next Solemnity is dedicated, or see ourselves in the purifying fire of Purgatory; or, on the other hand, – God forbid! – in eternal perdition, which we call Hell.

Q. *The reality of Purgatory seems to be particularly forgotten today in much of preaching. Do you think it’s still important to speak about it? What can you say to the man of today?*

A. That nothing of what concerns our person is lacking in importance in God’s eyes. The reality of Purgatory, always important because always true, affirms that God has such an infinite “esteem” for the human creature and, therefore, takes “tremendously” seriously our created freedom that – we could say – He “obeys it.”

In the Book of Ezekiel we read that He does not want the death of the sinner, but that he be converted and live (cf. Ezekiel 33:11). Nevertheless, God only wishes to give life to man. He has decided to respect man’s freedom, to such a point as to permit him to decide to “reject” His Love definitively, or to receive it in the measure in which he consents to it, always with his freedom, which is documented in his works.

If this “last opening” of the heart is not yet total, although clearly oriented to the Truth of God, then the soul would be in need of a further “dilation,” that is, to let itself be prepared for the vision of God by the living flame of His Love, as the treatise explains of the great Saint and Theologian of Purgatory Catherine of Genoa, and as the Holy Father *Emeritus* has taught in his second Encyclical, *Spe Salvi*, 48.

As for those who are in Purgatory, however, their time of freedom having ended, they no longer have any possibility to “merit,” that is, to collaborate voluntarily with Christ’s Grace. These brothers can only “receive” such a Grace, which is obtained by the prayer of the Church, the so-called “prayer of suffrage,” which consists, particularly, in the offering of the Eucharistic Sacrifice, in works of charity, and in almsgiving. Protagonists of this prayer then are first of all Mary Most Holy, perfect Icon of the Church and Dispenser of every grace, and then us, who in virtue of Baptism live in communion with the faithful of all times.

Q. *So suffrage is also a form of mercy? And who can benefit from it?*

A. Suffrage is certainly an irreplaceable work of Mercy! It is rooted first of all and always in the Mercy of Christ, who alone can save and purify man’s heart, but who, in his Goodness, associates us in his work of Salvation, thus rendering us “co-operators.” In this co-operation first of all, in this being associated in Christ’s work, there is the first, an exalting benefit: we are conformed to the Lord, we become more participants in His thought and in His sentiments.

It also brings benefit to our faith, because it extends in the main to the invisible realities and thus is “strengthened.” Finally, it brings sure benefit to the souls in Purgatory, which receive the “relief” of our suffrage until their final liberation.

This work is so great and indispensable, that the Church, on the occasion of the Commemoration of all the Deceased Faithful -- which we will celebrate November 2 -- enriches it with the gift of a Plenary Indulgence, that is, the remission of all the temporal punishments due to sin, which “keep” the soul in Purgatory. It will be possible in this circumstance to gain the indulgence only for the deceased faithful, under the usual conditions: Sacramental Confession, in the eight preceding or successive days, Communion, prayer for the Intentions of the Supreme Pontiff, detachment from all sin, also venial, and a visit to a cemetery from the 1st to the 8th of November, or to one’s parish church, from the afternoon of the 1st to the evening of November 2.

At bottom, in fact this is the Mercy of Christ: it traverses Heaven and earth, it gathers everything in unity, it helps men in time and prepares them for Paradise, it does not mortify man’s freedom, but rather exalts it to a height unthinkable before, calling him to let himself be loved, to love in Him and for Him, and thus co-operate in His Work of Salvation. May Mary Most Holy, Mother of

Mercy, teach us to seek Mercy, to love Mercy, thus to truly live Mercy! □

(*Zenit.org*, October 26 - 27, 2015)

Synod's Final Document: 'We Continue on Our Path'

The Synod Fathers approved by 177 votes out of 265, a two-thirds majority, the final *Relatio* of the 14th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod on the Family, made up of ninety-four paragraphs, each one of which was voted on individually. The director of the Holy See Press Office, Fr. Federico Lombardi, S.J., gave a briefing on the document, which was authorised for publication in Italian by Pope Francis.

Fr. Lombardi remarked that the text takes into account the many difficulties faced by the family, but also its great capacity for facing and reacting to them. The conclusive document of the Synod includes many of the amendments to the *Instrumentum Laboris* presented by the Synod Fathers and therefore reflects the voice of the Assembly.

With reference to the two paragraphs dedicated to complex family situations, which were approved by a very slender majority of 178 and 180 votes, Fr. Lombardi noted that they regard the pastoral approach to wounded families or those that are irregular from a canonical point of view and in terms of the discipline of the Church: in particular, cohabitation, civil marriage, divorced and remarried persons and the way of pastorally addressing these situations.

Fr. Lombardi underlined that the tone of the document is positive and welcoming, and that it has greatly enriched the *Instrumentum Laboris*. Similarly, the Pope's *Motu Proprio* on the reform of marriage annulment procedures made an effective and decisive contribution to the theme of the Synod.

The final *Relatio* reaffirms the doctrine of the indissolubility of sacramental marriage, which is not a yoke but rather a gift from God, a truth based in Christ and in His relationship with the Church. At the same time, it underlines that truth and mercy converge in Christ, which leads to welcome to wounded families. Without expressly mentioning access to the Eucharist for remarried divorcees, the Synod document recalls that they are not excommunicated and refers the analysis of complex family situations to the discernment of pastors. This discernment, the text underlines, must be applied in accordance with the teaching of the Church, with trust in God's mercy that is denied to no-one. With regard to cohabiting couples, the text reiterates that this situation should be faced constructively, seeking to transform it into an opportunity for a path to conversion towards the fullness of marriage and family, in the light of the Gospel.

Other salient points of the document refer to homosexuality. There must be no discrimination against people with homosexual tendencies, but at the same time the text states that the Church is contrary to same-sex unions and external pressure on the Church in relation to this matter is not accepted. There are special paragraphs dedicated to

immigrants, refugees and persecuted families who are often divided and whose members can become victims of trafficking. A welcoming approach was invoked for them too, recalling their rights and also their duties in their host countries.

There are specific paragraphs on women, men and children, the mainstays of family life: the text emphasizes the need for the protection and the recognition of the value of their respective roles. It is hoped that a more prominent role will be identified for women in the formation of ordained ministers, while in relation to children mention was made of the beauty of adoption and fostering, practices which reconstruct ruptured family bonds. The Synod does not forget widows and widowers, the disabled, the elderly and grandparents, who enable the transmission of faith in the family and must be protected from the throwaway culture. Unmarried people must also be acknowledged for their commitment to the Church and society.

Among the “shadows” that are frequently cast on the family, the Synod notes the presence of political and religious fanaticism hostile to Christianity, growing individualism, gender ideology, conflicts, persecution, poverty, precarious employment, corruption, economic difficulties that can exclude families from education and culture, the globalization of indifference in which humanity's place at the center of society is usurped by money, pornography, and the declining birth rate.

The *Relatio* therefore gathers together suggestions for strengthening preparation for marriage, especially for the young who appear intimidated by it. They are in need, says the Synod, of an adequate emotional formation, following the virtues of chastity and self-giving. In this regard, mention was made of the bond between the sexual act and procreation between spouses, of which children are the most precious fruit, since they bear the memory and hope of an act of love. Another bond is that between the vocation of the family and the vocation to consecrated life. Education in sexuality and corporeality and the promotion of responsible parenting would also be central, in accordance with the teachings of Paul VI's encyclical “*Humanae Vitae*” and the primary role of parents in the education of their children in faith.

An appeal is launched to institutions to promote and support policies in favor of the family, and Catholics engaged in politics are exhorted to protect the family and life, as a society that neglects them loses its openness to the future. In this respect, the Synod reaffirms the sacredness of life from conception to natural death, and warns against the grave threats posed to the family by abortion and euthanasia. Paragraphs are dedicated to mixed marriages, whose positive aspects in relation to ecumenical and interreligious dialogue are underlined, while confirming the need to protect religious freedom and the right to conscientious objection in society. The text includes extensive reflection on the need to modify the language of the Church, making it more meaningful so that the proclamation of the Gospel of the family may truly respond to the deepest human aspirations. This means not only presenting a series of regulations but rather announcing the grace that gives the capacity to live well the good of the family.

Finally, the *Relatio* emphasizes the beauty of the family: as a domestic church based on marriage between a man and a woman, the fundamental cell of the society whose growth it contributes, a safe entry to the deepest sentiments, the sole point of connection in a fragmented age, and an integral part of human ecology, it must be protected, supported and encouraged, also by the authorities.

The document concludes with a plea to the Synod Fathers by the Pope, regarding the possibility of producing a document on the family. “The Synod Fathers do not say that all is complete, but affirm that they offer the *Relatio* to the Holy Father to enable him to evaluate whether to continue on this route with a document, on the basis of the Synod text, to further examine the theme of the family from the perspective he wishes to offer. 'We continue on our path.'” □

(*Zenit.org*, October 26, 2015)

God's Love Is Free, Don't Try to Control Salvation

“**G**od's love is free, so don't try to be a controller of salvation.” According to Vatican Radio, Pope Francis stressed this during his daily morning Mass at Casa Santa Marta on October 15, 2015, urging those gathered to not be fooled by those who want to limit God's love.

"One of the hardest things for all Christians to understand," the Pope said, "is the gratuitousness of salvation in Jesus Christ."

The Holy Father observed that some of us have gotten too used to hearing that Jesus is the Son of God, who came to love, save, and die for us, to the extent that some "prefer not to understand this truth."

Francis spoke on how Jesus and St. Paul were criticized for promoting this idea by those scholars who did not understand. St. Paul, the Pope pointed out, met great difficulty in making his people realize that the "gratuitousness of salvation" is true doctrine.

In reference to the feast day of St. Teresa, Pope Francis noted how this year marks the 500th anniversary of St. Teresa of Avila's birth.

"How many saints," the Holy Father lamented, "have been persecuted for defending love, the gratuitousness of salvation, the doctrine. Many saints. We think of Joan of Arc."

The Holy Father reminded those gathered that the Lord has given faithful the grace "to understand the horizons of love" and warned them against those who try to convince us otherwise.

The Pope concluded, posing two questions: "Do I believe that the Lord saved me gratuitously, freely? Do I believe that I have done nothing to merit salvation?"

"Let us ask ourselves these questions," the Pope urged, adding that, "only in this way will we be faithful to this merciful love: the love of a father and a mother, because God also says He is like a mother with us; love, expanded horizons, without limits. And let us not be fooled by scholars [of the Law] who limit this love." □

(*Zenit.org*, October 15, 2015)

"How Do You Solve A Problem Like Maria?"



by Brother John M. Samaha, S.M.

Do you remember this question from the song in the popular musical show *The Sound of Music*? Those lyrics also apply to the God-given role of Mary in salvation history.

Many non-Catholics - and some Catholics -- often misunderstand doctrines about the Blessed Virgin Mary and devotion to her. But these doctrines and devotions explain and highlight her unique role in Christ's redemptive mission.

Confusion

Recently a Catholic gentleman met a Protestant woman at a social event. The conversation turned to the topic of religious beliefs, and the Protestant asked why Catholics worship Mary. The Catholic explained that we do not worship the Virgin Mary, but that we venerate her as the most exalted of God's creatures. He went on to show that Mary is totally unique because she gave Jesus, our Divine Savior, his human nature. The Protestant nearly choked on her drink. She didn't think that Jesus took his human flesh from Mary. Her idea was that Jesus somehow came through Mary as if she were a conduit for him to come from heaven into the world.

While it sounds harsh to consider that lady a heretic, she simply did not understand the doctrine of the Incarnation. She believed a partial truth, and that is precisely what a heresy is -- not a total lie but a half-truth.

One of the marvelous treasures Catholics possess is their understanding of and devotion to Mary, Mother of the Lord. While other Christians also claim and share this treasure, how unfortunate that some believing, God-fearing people do not cherish and value the magnificent gift of Mary in their lives. To know and love the Blessed Virgin Mary and to give her prominence in our faith-life is a special gift of God. Jesus Christ himself has given us the example of how to cherish this gift of his mother and ours. And he invites our cooperation with her to present him, our Redeemer, to all people.

What a waste that some believers carelessly overlook this great gift of God, or brush it aside. We should be reaching out to her to help put us in closer touch with her Son.

The Testimony of the New Testament

All Christians, not only Catholics, know and revere the Virgin Mary in the New Testament. How can she be overlooked in Scripture? Here we encounter the appearance of an angel to tell her she is to be the mother of Jesus, the Savior; the birth of Jesus in a stable; the fretful mother looking for her child during a pilgrimage to the temple in Jerusalem; her intervention at the wedding feast at Cana; her deep sorrow at the foot of the cross; her calming presence awaiting Pentecost. Theologian Lawrence Cunningham has observed: "The New Testament portrait of Mary is, like everything in the Biblical text, artlessly simple, tantalizingly enigmatic, and religiously inexhaustible."

To appreciate how inexhaustible the New Testament verbal portrait is, simply trace the development of Marian theology and devotion since her earthly life. From Christianity's origin, both its leaders and its followers have engaged in frequent, passionate, and thoughtful consideration of Mary's role in the mystery of Christ and of the Church. Professor Cunningham reminds us that the pursuit of deeper and more complete understanding of Mary "helps to explode the oft-repeated charge that Mariological beliefs are late accretions to Christianity."

The universal acclaim of Mary throughout history is nothing short of phenomenal. The greatest painters, sculptors, composers, poets, authors, and scholars repeatedly paid tribute to her, and did so rhapsodically. To name but a few, consider the inspiring poetry of Dante, the stirring music of Bach and Schubert, and the soulful art of Fra Angelico, Giotto, Murillo, Raphael, and Michelangelo. They and others have consistently sung Mary's praises in the media of their expertise.

Deviations in the History of the Faithful

Historically we may cite two reactions that adversely affected our appreciation of and devotion to Mary. The Protestant Reformation is the first. In the words of Lawrence Cunningham, "Despite a lingering devotionism in the writings of Martin Luther, veneration of the Blessed Virgin was swept away with the same vigor and finality as monastic institutions, a celibate clergy, the Mass in Latin, and devotion

to other saints. For the Reformation, devotion to Mary derogated from the worship of Christ."

The Catholic Counter-Reformation was the second reaction, and also proved unfortunate by swinging to the opposite extreme. In the effort to combat the Protestant errors, it "protested too much." Some made Marian devotion a litmus test of Catholic orthodoxy. They pushed devotion to Mary to the limit, almost seating her on a throne next to God, or promoting bizarre devotional practices. The consequent reaction was damaging. Some devout Catholics who mistook the extremism as authentic were turned off and turned away from the genuine devotion that is part and parcel of the glory and beauty of Catholicism. Paradoxically some of the extremists were theologically educated.

Restoring the Proper Balance

Then came the Second Vatican Council to restore the balance and set Marian devotion in proper order. The Council fathers exhorted "theologians and preachers of the divine word to abstain from all gross exaggerations as well as petty narrow-mindedness in considering the singular dignity of the Mother of God." After rejecting "sterile or transitory affection," and "a certain vain credulity," Vatican II situated Mary and Marian devotion firmly in the total context of Catholic faith.

We love Jesus, and we love his mother too. We appreciate that she is the greatest of God's created beings. And she always points us to her Son. Without Mary, Jesus would not have been born. If we could never have had Jesus without Mary, why would anyone want to have Jesus without Mary?

Recovering our Blessed Mother and maintaining her in correct and full perspective is an ongoing process in our faith formation. How are you doing with this challenge? How do you solve the problem of Maria?

Christian life without Mary is inconceivable! ☐

Church Dedicated to Slain Coptic Christians

A Coptic Orthodox bishop has dedicated a church to the 21 Christians who were beheaded in Libya in February by members of the Islamic State.

Shortly after the murders, the head of the Coptic Orthodox Church declared that the slain Christians would be venerated as martyrs. "We are extremely proud of our martyrs," said Bishop Paphnutius of *Samalut*, the home diocese of most of the slain Christians.

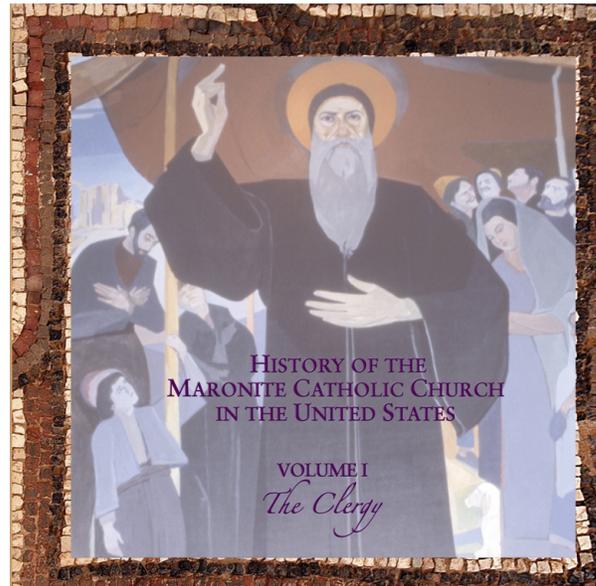
"Although they were forced to kneel before their executioners, they were the stronger," he added, according to Aid to the Church in Need. "Their murderers were the weaker, despite their weapons. Why would they have concealed their faces otherwise? It could only have been because they were afraid. Our sons by contrast were very strong and called on our Lord until their very last breath." ☐

(Catholic World News, October 15, 2015)

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.

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania *MYO Activities*



Fr. Rudolph Wakim, Pastor, with members of Our Lady of Victory Church's Youth Organization.

by Therezia Alchoufete

The Maronite Youth Organization of Our Lady of Victory Church in Pittsburgh, Penn., rounded up the parish's unwanted items and held its annual Yard Sale on Saturday, October 10, 2015. This is one of the Pittsburgh MYO's biggest fundraisers of the year. Some of their other fundraisers include hosting parish brunches and organizing the games and activities during the annual parish festival. As the holidays approach, the MYO is looking forward to hosting the parish Halloween and Christmas parties, as well as participating in Bible study potluck dinners to prepare themselves spiritually for the season. They also offer service to the community by volunteering at parish events, such as serving at the OLOV Legacy Benefit Gala and babysitting at the upcoming Comedy Night Spaghetti Dinner. □

Food For Thought

Dear young friends, ask the Lord for a free heart so as not to be ensnared by the false pleasures of the world. □

Pope Francis

Utica, New York *15th Annual Festival of Baskets*



by Chorbishop John D. Faris

The 15th annual Festival of Baskets hosted by St. Louis Gonzaga Church in Utica, N.Y., on October 18, 2015, was the largest and most successful ever. More than four hundred people participated in raffles of the 225 baskets ranging in value from \$25 to \$500. The fundraiser, a major attraction in the Utica area, was organized by Betty Karrat with a lot of help from her husband, Nazih Karrat, Glory Rasi, Mary Mazloom and Bernadette Sunderlin and others too many to mention. A special thanks goes out to everyone who made the beautiful baskets, to the vendors and benefactors who contributed gift certificates, to the volunteers and to all the patrons who made the event such a success. □

