

the Maronite Voice



*“Having freed those held by Death,
He guided them to the Paradise of Light.”*

— Wednesday of Easter



the Maronite **Voice**

BISHOP'S MESSAGE

4 **The Joy of Easter**
by Bishop Gregory Mansour

6 **Bishops Schedules**

8 **Eavesdropping on Death**
by Reverend Michael Shami

12 **The Resurrection and the Children of Adam**
by Reverend Armando Elkhoury

14 **Saint Thomas and His Christians**
by Reverend David A. Fisher

WORKER IN THE VINEYARD

16 **Building a Church from Scratch –
Msgr. Donald Sawyer**
by Brandon Shulleeta

LIVING CHURCH

18 **St. Maron Philadelphia: Maronite History
in the City of Brotherly Love**
by Anna Salloum

22 National MYA Lenten Happenings

23 2021 MYO Lenten Retreats

24 The Psalms: A Book of Liturgical Songs *by Father David A. Fisher*

28 Parish News

GOING DEEPER INTO THE SPIRITUAL LIFE...

34 The Faith Witness of a Mother *by Frances Jane Mourani*

35 From the Editor

THE MARONITE VOICE

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The Joy of Easter

In the American Musical, *Fiddler on the Roof*, a wedding takes place in the midst of the many difficulties faced by their tiny community. In one of the lines from the wedding song, entitled To Life, they sing:

“God would like us to be joyful,
even though our hearts lie panting
on the floor”

These famous lines remind me of this Easter (and also last Easter!) in the midst of all the troubles of the world. Yes, “God would like us to be joyful” even in the midst of all the troubles we face. The verse of the Negro Spiritual also comes to mind: “Nobody knows the troubles I face, nobody knows, but Jesus”.

Brothers and Sisters, the Church has faced troubles in every age, and will face troubles until the return of her spouse, Jesus Christ. Nonetheless, Christ has not left us orphaned (JOHN 14:8). He has given us his Holy Spirit, has bequeathed to us his Church and his Blessed Mother (JOHN 19:26), and has given us the example of how to stand before the “powers” of this world and to say “you have no power over me,” as he said to Pontius Pilate (JOHN 19:11).

In fact, by his grace and example we are fully equipped to face every difficulty, and to say with Saint Paul, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (PHIL 4:13).



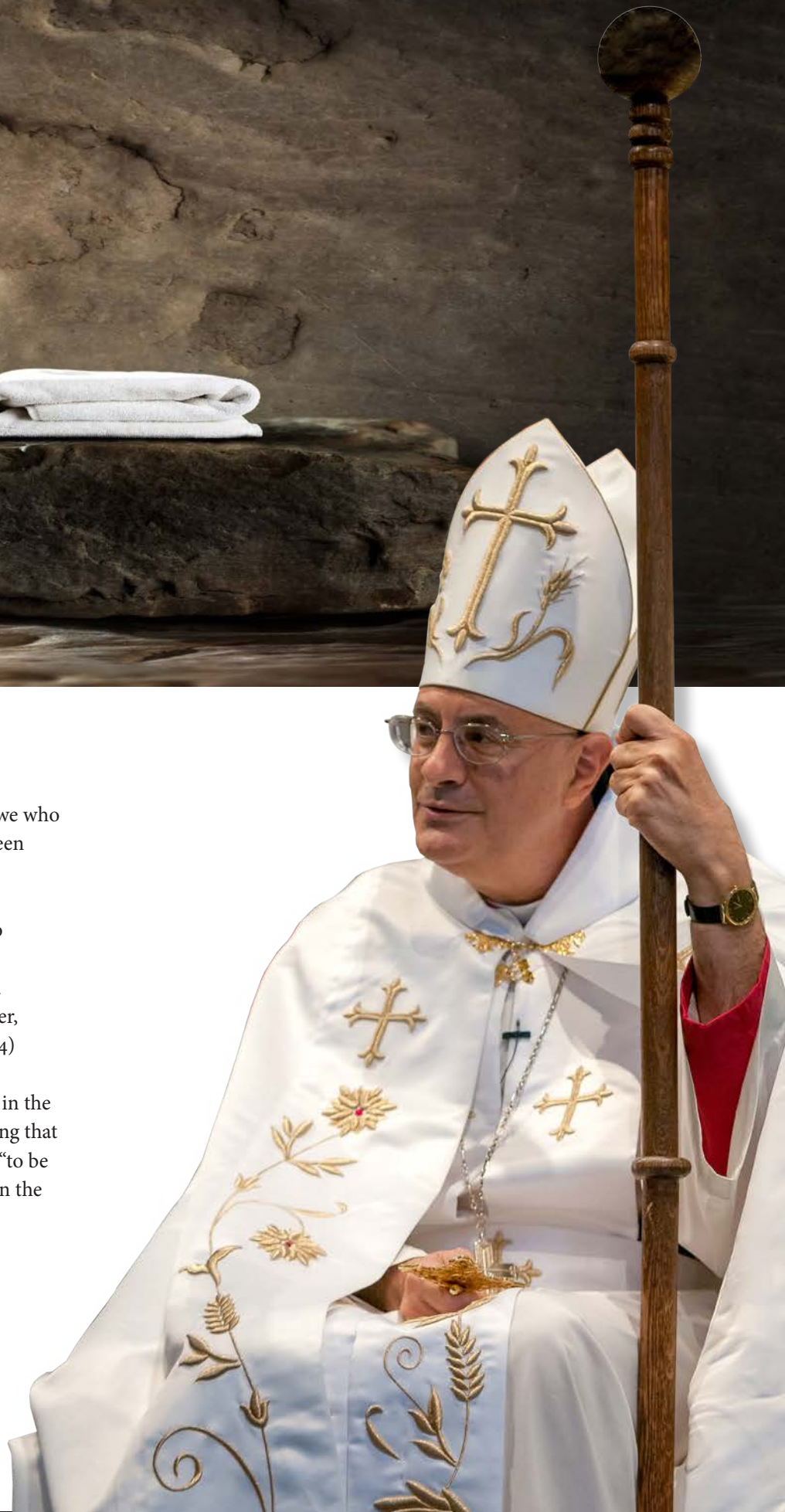
Easter is a time to reaffirm once again that we who have been baptized into Christ, have also been baptized into his death:

“All of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death, so that just as Christ was raised from the dead to the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.” (ROM 6:3-4)

What a blessing it is for us to be born anew in the waters of Baptism! In fact, it is such a blessing that we can indeed say that God has enabled us “to be joyful, even though our hearts lie panting on the floor.”

Happy Easter to all!

+ Gregory



Schedule BISHOP GREGORY J. MANSOUR

- 4 APRIL** Brooklyn, NY | Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral | Easter
- 8 APRIL** *Fully Alive* Zoom Session
- 11 APRIL** Brooklyn, NY | Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral
- 18 APRIL** Easton, PA | Our Lady of Lebanon Church
- 20 APRIL** Virtual | Eparchial Finance Council
- 22 APRIL** Virtual | Presbyteral Council
- 24 APRIL** Virtual | Eparchial Ladies Retreat
- 25 APRIL** Brooklyn, NY | Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral
- 27 MAY** Virtual | In Defense of Christians
- 30 MAY** Brooklyn, NY | Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral
- 1-24 JUNE** Bkerke, Lebanon | Synod of Maronite Bishops



A ZOOM PRESENTATION

STRENGTH & BEAUTY

Reclaiming the proper mission of men and women from the culture of death

WITH GUEST SPEAKER
BROTHER FAUSTINO LEMMON CFR

THUR 29 APRIL | 7:30PM EST

OPENING PRAYER BY
CHORBISHOP SHARBEL MAROUN

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"THE GLORY OF GOD IS MAN FULLY ALIVE"
~ Saint Irenaeus


A SERIES OF TALKS WITH GUEST SPEAKER
FATHER PETER HOPKINS LC

TUESDAY FEB 16 7PM ET OPENING PRAYER BY BISHOP ELIAS ZAIDAN
BELOVED SONS & DAUGHTERS OF GOD

TUESDAY MAR 16 7PM ET OPENING PRAYER BY BISHOP ELIAS ZAIDAN
REMOVING THE OBSTACLES TO TRUE HAPPINESS

THURSDAY APR 8 7PM ET OPENING PRAYER BY BISHOP GREGORY MANSOUR
INTIMACY WITH CHRIST

TUESDAY MAY 18 7PM ET
THE LOVE OF CHRIST COMPELS US

 ZOOM LINK
<https://tinyurl.com/manfullyalive>

MEETING ID: 829 6137 3446 PASSCODE: fullyalive

Schedule BISHOP A. ELIAS ZAIDAN

- 4 APRIL** St. Louis, MO | St. Raymond Cathedral | Easter
- 9 APRIL** Virtual | MYO Gathering
- 10-11 APRIL** Lakewood, CO | St. Rafka Church
- 12 APRIL** Virtual | Rosary for the Intentions of Global Health, Peace, and Stability
- 13 APRIL** Virtual | Clergy Retreat with Bishop Gregory Mansour
- 21 APRIL** Virtual | Lecture of Muriel Dubie on St. Jacob of Serugh
- 22 APRIL** Virtual | IDC Meeting with Congressional Advisory Board and Religious Advisory Board
- 4 MAY** Virtual | Meeting of USCCB International Justice and Peace Committee
- 8 MAY** Phoenix, AZ | St. Joseph Church | Pastoral Visit
- 19 MAY** Virtual | Lecture of Manolis Papoutsakis on St. Jacob of Serugh
- 29-30 MAY** Fairlawn, OH | Anniversary and Appreciation Celebration for Msgr. William Bonczewski at Our Lady of the Cedars Church
- 9-19 JUNE** Bkerke, Lebanon | Synod of Maronite Bishops



Appointments

EPARCHY OF OUR LADY OF LEBANON

The Most Reverend A. Elias Zaidan has made the following appointments:

Father Peter Zogbi was appointed Administrator of St. Elias Maronite Catholic Church, Birmingham Alabama, effective 20 January 2021.

Chorbishop Sharbel Maroun was appointed Vicar General of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles, effective 9 February 2021.

EPARCHY OF SAINT MARON

The Most Reverend Gregory J. Mansour has appointed **Deacon Joseph Chebli** as the Director of the Office of Ecumenism and Inter-Religious Dialogue effective 15 February 2021.



Eavesdropping on Death

by Reverend Michael Shami

A time-tried adage says, “Two things are certain: death and taxes.” With even more certainty than Tax Day every year, death waits for each one of us at the end of our lives. Death looms over us like a taunting bully, with no need to hide because we know it is there and yet cannot prevent it. While the reality of death is certain, what makes it menacing is its uncertainty: when, why and how will it come? And most frightening is the uncertainty of what happens after death, which has captivated the thought of humanity since its beginning. If only someone came back from the dead to tell us what they have seen.

Death is a certain reality that awaits us all, and it has been since Adam’s transgression brought death into the world. When Jesus Christ, our God, became man, He accepted the certain reality of death. In fact, the longest event in His Passion was His death, which lasted three days, compared to the Last Supper or Crucifixion, which lasted a few hours each. But while Jesus’ death is the longest event of His Passion, the Gospel is silent as to His activity from the Crucifixion on Friday to the Resurrection on Sunday. But where the Gospel is silent, the Universal Church has a vivid Tradition about Jesus’ descent to the dead. Not the least insight into these three days comes from St. Ephrem, a great author and hymnist of our Syriac tradition.

St. Ephrem enables us to be the “fly on the wall” in the realm of the dead to which Jesus went, and tear away the veil which makes death menacing. In a series of hymns, St. Ephrem has us eavesdrop on conversations between the tyrant of humanity, Death, and his companion who convinced Adam to choose his entrance into the world, Satan. St. Ephrem invites us, “Come, let us listen to the losers

who have not won nor ever will win argue about victory” (*Nisibene Hymn 53*). St. Ephrem gives us a spoiler right away — though Death and Satan seem to hold sway, while they discuss victory it is always out of their grasp. Between themselves, these two menaces of humanity argue who has more power over us:

Death showed his authority which conquers all.
Satan showed his guile which causes all to sin.

[DEATH] O Evil One, only the one who wants listens to you; whether one wants to or not, they come to me.

[SATAN] O Death, your only way is tyranny; mine are cunning snares and traps.

[DEATH] Listen, Evil One who is cunning — one can break your yoke, but no one is able to rebel against my yoke.

[SATAN] Death, your strength searches out the sick but I overtake the healthy all the more. (NH 52)

The two argue for endless lines about who exercises more control over humanity, and they make one salient point after another — Death’s coming is unavoidable, but Satan comes by invitation. Ever since Adam and Eve chose Satan, who brought with him his companion Death, over God, Who is life, the two have inflicted themselves upon us. Worse is the fact that sin is the continual re-invitation of the two over the promise of life and love given by God. Left to our own devices, it seems hopeless in that we continually choose death.

“Eavesdropping on Death”

Continued from page 9

Yet in God’s true love for us, He would never abandon us to our own, even when we fail Him. So Life Himself chose to die, so that He might visit those who are in need of Him most — those enslaved by Death in Sheol, the place of the dead outside of heaven. But Death and Satan misunderstand love for weakness:

[SATAN] Open to us, let us see Him! Let us mock Him, and say, “Where is Your power?” For it has been three days, let us say to Him, “O You of three days, You gave life to Lazarus on the fourth day — give life to Yourself!”

Death opened the gates of Sheol, and the radiance of our Lord’s presence shone forth! Like those of Sodom, they were struck down. They felt around, and searched for the gate of Sheol, which had been lost. (NH 41)

In Satan and Death’s arrogance, they thought they had more power than God Himself, and so after He died on the Cross, they went to mock Him. But what they mistake for weakness is the Almighty’s sacrificial love, His plan to destroy their power by His own death. He comes down to them to liberate the dead; as Jesus foreshadowed Himself, to take the possessions of a strong man, one must first tie him up (cf. MARK 3:27). Jesus does just that — He has forever tied up Death and Satan, and the gate of Sheol is broken so that their trap is destroyed.

Jesus’ Resurrection makes a joke of both Death and Satan — He shows that He is not subject to either of them. Our tradition often quotes King David to make this point: “The Lord awoke like a sleeper, and like a man shook off his wine” (Ps. 78:65). Though Jesus was in the grave for three days, it was not because He needed three days to overcome death — death to Him, the Author of Life, was so negligible it was like waking up from a sleep or getting over a bit of a hangover. The certain menace of humanity,



Death, who thought he had authority, is made a laughing stock by the true King of All, God.

But Jesus’ Resurrection was not simply to show His own power, but to share it with His believers out of His love. We have indeed heard what happens after death from our God Who has returned from the dead. As He tells us in the Gospel, He is the Resurrection and the life, and whoever believes in Him, even if they die, will live — for those who believe in Him never truly die (cf. JOHN 11:25-26). To choose Satan and sin is to choose death, but to choose God and love is to choose life. Those who believe in Him shall experience the same previewed by His death, which He shares with us in His love. This is why the martyrs are often said to have gone to their deaths light-heartedly or joyfully — Death, the once-menace of an uncertain afterlife, is the joke of the Christian for Christ has snatched us out of his hands and has smashed his gates. To choose the life in Christ is to make certain that Death is always the fool:

Blest is He Who set them on each other those cursed servants [Death and Satan] so that we could see them as they have seen us and mocked us.

This is a promise, my brethren: that these things that we have seen we shall see them again when we are raised. (NH 52) ■

Fr. Michael A. Shami is the Director of Liturgy for the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon and currently pursuing doctoral studies in Syriac Liturgy at the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome.

Ordination

Priestly Ordination of Father Mikhael Jalkh

On 25 January 2021, Deacon Mikhael (Chady) Jalkh was ordained to the priesthood at Our Lady of Help Church in Sakiet El Misk, Lebanon, through the imposition of the hands of Most Reverend Peter Karam, Patriarchal Vicar as delegated by Bishop A. Elias Zaidan. This was Bishop Peter's first ordination since becoming a bishop.

Father Mikhael is the fourth child of Semaan and Antoinette Jalkh. Born on 8 November, the Feast Day of Saint Michael, Father Jalkh was given the baptismal name of Mikhael. At the age of 33, Father Mikhael felt the Lord's call and entered the seminary to study philosophy and theology.

After many years studying, reflecting, and serving in Lebanon and the U.S., Father Mikhael prepared for his ordination. Due to travel restrictions, the attendance was limited to immediate family members and close friends. Nevertheless, the ceremony was most inspirational.



Bishop Zaidan wrote in his message, "Even though, I am not able to join you physically on the day of your priestly ordination, but I am close to you as well as many of us here in the USA in thought, prayer, and spirit as you receive the sacred order of priesthood...I assure you of our prayers asking our Lord, the High Priest, to be your companion, to safeguard you from all kinds of temptation and to bless your priestly ministry."

At the end of the ordination ceremony, Father Mikhael remarked, "I would like to thank, especially, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the Eternal High Priest, for granting me the countless gift of sharing in His ministerial priesthood and for all the graces lavished on me throughout my time of formation and ministry. To the

Immaculate Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church and Queen of the Clergy, I render heartfelt thanks for her constant protection and motherly intercession." He also thanked everyone who prayed and supported him in his journey of vocation.

We offer our sincere congratulations and heartfelt prayers to Father Mikhael and look forward to his years of ministry serving God's people in the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles. ■





The Resurrection and the Children of Adam

by Rev. Armando Elkhoury

What does the resurrection of Jesus Christ mean for all the children of Adam? In this article, I explore the theological notions of the resurrection as expressed in *The Book of Offering* of the Maronite Church and its effect on all of humanity.

Adam's Fall

The Creator crowned his creation with Adam and “fashioned all creation to honor Adam, the image of [his] majesty.” Adam neither deserved nor earned this honor, but God bestowed it upon him, for he created Adam in the image of the only begotten Son (GENESIS 1:26).

God intended for Adam to enjoy this creation and placed him in Paradise (GENESIS 2:4-25). The Evil One, however, tricked Adam into disobeying the commandment of God. Stumbling and falling, Adam became a slave to Satan and Death, cursed, banished from Paradise and wounded. The image of the Son of God in Adam became distorted and corrupted.

God the Father, abundant in mercy, sent his Son into the world to make Adam whole and happy.

Old Testament Images of Resurrection

The Book of Offering contains two Old Testament images that represent the resurrection of Jesus. The first one is the Divine Warrior in the Book of Isaiah who trampled his enemies in his wrath. Their blood spurted on his garments and stained his apparel as one who treads the winepress (ISAIAH 63:1-6).

The Maronite Liturgy interprets the Divine Warrior to be Jesus Christ. Asking the Old Testament Prophet for an explanation, the Church says, “Alleluia! Come, Isaiah, and explain your words to us; tell us whom you saw all dressed in blood-stained clothes, like someone who treads the press while making wine.” The response on

Isaiah's lips is loud and clear, “He is Christ, the Risen One, the Son of God!” It would seem the stains on his garments are from Jesus' blood: He had suffered flogging, his head was pierced with a crown of thorns, his hands and feet were nailed to the cross, and his side was pierced with a lance. The Maronite Liturgy asserts otherwise: It is not the blood of Jesus that stained his clothes but of his enemies. Like Isaiah's Divine Warrior so does Jesus Christ squash his adversaries by himself—and *their* blood stains his garment.

Who are the enemies of Jesus? Is it the king who ordered death? The Roman soldiers who nailed him on the cross? The Jews who demanded his crucifixion? Peter who betrayed him or Judas who denied him? The disciples who abandoned him? The enemy is death! Jesus' resurrection manifests that the Son of God has trampled death, and the blood that spattered his garments is the blood of death that died. Christ battled death to save all his beloved ones. The Liturgy proclaims,

Alleluia! Risen is the Lord of hosts, the King Almighty! When Isaiah saw his Lord, he cried out, asking: “O Son of God, who has dyed your garments red as blood?” Jesus then replied: “I have trampled death itself to save my loved ones, and the blood of conquered death has stained my garments.” Alleluia! Our Lord has been raised.

Jonah is another Old Testament image of the resurrection. Sent by God to preach repentance to the Ninevites in the East, Jonah fled West on a ship. The sailors, who were afraid of the ferocious winds that the Lord hurled upon the sea, threw Jonah overboard. The Lord sent a great fish to swallow Jonah, who remained in its belly three days and three nights (JONAH 1-2). Jesus uses the image of Jonah to prefigure his sojourn in the abode of the dead and, implicitly, his resurrection

(MT 12:40; LK 11:30). The fish vomited Jonah upon dry land (JONAH 2:11) symbolizes death vomiting Jesus Christ from its realm: it is a symbol of Christ's resurrection. Accordingly, the Maronite Church, echoing the Scriptures, teaches that Jonah brought repentance to the Ninevites and Jesus redemption to the whole world:

Jonah spent three days in the whale's belly and told a city: "Come to repentance." Jesus spent three days inside a dark tomb and told the whole world: "I bring redemption."

The images of the Divine Warrior and Jonah, as explained above, depict the resurrection of Jesus Christ as his absolute victory over death. In order to understand the meaning of the resurrection for all of humanity, let us look at the terms in the Maronite Liturgy that describe how the fall affected Adam after his creation.

Jesus Conquers Death

Jesus Christ, the Divine Warrior, goes to war and ultimately conquers death. By dying, the Son of God brings the final battle to the tomb, death's domain. Jesus deliberately takes the war to death's territory where the Evil One reigns in order to trample both death and the Evil One once and for all:

On a Sunday most holy, Christ our Savior truly rose. Death and Satan he conquered...

The Son of God not only vanquishes death and conquers its domain, but establishes his unshakable throne in what used to be the realm of death as well. The tomb becomes the kingdom of life:

The Ruler of all was enclosed within a tomb.
He arose destroying death and its dark realm.
Christ the King forever reigns.

The Divine Warrior, now the Ruler of the tomb, seeks Adam in the darkest depth of the abyss of death. When he finally finds him, death had mortally wounded Adam, horribly corrupted him, and snuffed life out of him. Poor Adam, he is no longer!

But for the Divine Ruler is also the Heavenly Physician who, in his abundant love, came for the sake of Adam's race. As a Physician and Lover of all people, Jesus Christ

bandages the wounds of Adam. The Source of Life heals Adam and gives him life.

Alleluia! Christ, the Son of Mary, died; he tasted death on the cross. He brought *Adam back to life* when he went down to the dead. Seeing him, Death was afraid and lost its crown in the fight. *In glory Christ rose from death, and he lifted us on high* [emphasis added].

Indeed, the Physician of soul and body has bandaged our wounds, healed us, given us life, and freed us.

On a Sunday most holy, Christ our Savior truly rose. Death and Satan he conquered, giving *Adam's children life*. Let your servants, Lord, praise you, for from death you truly rose. Let your saints glorify you, for you *gave your children life*.

What is the significance of the resurrection for us? For one, the Author of Life, through his resurrection, grants us a new life, thus saving Adam's race! Moreover, the Son of God renews his image that Adam had distorted. Indeed, "God the Father sent his Son to make Adam's image new" for Adam's image grew old.

Jesus Christ, our Lord God and Savior, you formed us out of nothing, and, after the fall of Adam, you formed us anew and raised us up to be your brothers and sisters.

Moreover, Jesus Christ erases Adam's curse and brings Adam back to Paradise: "Christ has granted Adam life and restored him to the place that he lost when he had sinned."

Death is still a human reality. It does not, however, have the final word. With the eyes of faith, we recognize that Jesus Christ, sitting on his throne in the tomb, awaits to bestow on us eternal life so that we will be with him, his Father, and his Holy Spirit forever. "Even in their tombs the dead rejoice as creation sings." Let us rejoice with them: *Christ is risen! He is truly risen!* ■

Father Armando Elkhoury is vice-rector of Our Lady of Lebanon Seminary, Washington, DC



Saint Thomas and His Christians

by Rev. David A. Fisher

Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe.”
Thomas answered and said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

— JOHN 20:27-28

The Apostle, Saint Thomas (in Aramaic, “Teōma” Greek “Didymus”), was a twin. Some traditions call him Judas, not to be identified with the one who betrayed the Lord Jesus. Most scholars assume he was a Galilean, and although the gospels do not mention his profession, it can be reasonably presumed that he was a fisherman.

In the cases of Peter and Paul, there is enough information in the New Testament to get a sense of their personalities. Thomas is another who is mentioned enough to draw some picture of his personality. The New Testament refers to Thomas in Matthew 10:3, Mark 3:18, Luke 6, John 11:16, 14:1-6 and 20:25-29 and in the Acts of the Apostles 1:13.

The Church has also drawn some sense of the character of Saint Thomas from the hagiographical (writings about the saints, mixing fiction and fact) writings known as the *Acts of Thomas* and the *Gospel of Thomas*. For example, it is from these writings that we believe he carried the Good News to India in 52 and died a martyr’s death by the thrust of a spear while at prayer in 72. The oldest Christian Churches in India take pride in calling themselves “Saint Thomas Christians.”

From Doubt to Belief

The Acts of the Apostles describe how the followers of Jesus gathered in the upper room:

When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers. (ACTS 1:13-14)

This profession of faith in Jesus as the Word of God is made only after Thomas’ demand for proof. He will not accept what the others tell him—in his mind, their wishful thinking may have caused a group hallucination. Possibly he judged them to be more mystical in their makeup than himself, and so professed a mystical encounter with the Lord. Thomas wanted proof, something he could see and touch.

And then the Lord stands in their midst, even though the doors were locked. The Risen Lord is no longer

limited by his temporal humanity as he was before his victory and glorification upon the Holy Cross. The glorified Lord still carries the marks of his crucifixion, but now they are signs of his victory, signs that confirm the faith of those who were closest to him in his earthly ministry.

So the other disciples said to him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nail marks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe." Now a week later his disciples were again inside and Thomas was with them. Jesus came, although the doors were locked, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe." Thomas answered and said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed." (JOHN 20:25-29)

Thomas goes from doubter to one firm in his faith, to the point that he will wear the crown of a martyr.

Saint Thomas Christians

The first generation of Christians took the faith into Mesopotamia, Egypt, Ethiopia, Armenia, Persia, Arabia, China and India.

According to the Acts of Thomas, the apostles divided up the world for their missionary labors, and India fell to Thomas. However, Thomas claimed that he was not healthy enough and that a Hebrew could not teach Indians; even a vision of Christ could not change his mind. Christ then appeared to a merchant and sold Thomas to him as a slave for his master, a king who ruled over part of India. One story suggests that Thomas offered to build a palace for the Indian king that

would last forever. The king gave him money, which Thomas gave to the poor. Asked to show his progress, St. Thomas explained that the palace he was building was in heaven, not on earth. Ultimately, after giving into God's will, Thomas was freed from slavery. He planted seeds for the new Church, forming many parishes and building many churches along the way. (*Catholic Encyclopedia*, by Herbert Thurston; *For All the Saints*, by Katherine Rabenstein)

Southwestern India by the Malabar Coast in the state of Kerala is home to the Saint Thomas (or Mar Thoma) Christians, numbering more than four million. Today, they are divided among Syro-Malabar Catholics, Syro-Malankara Catholics, Syrian Orthodox, Assyrian Church of the East, Anglicans, and Protestants.

These ancient churches believe that Saint Thomas himself was the first to evangelize this part of India.

Conclusion

Saint Thomas reveals the apostolic foundations of the Christian faith, for he is the witness after the resurrection of Christ to make a profession of faith, "My Lord, and my God" (JOHN 20:28). Later, true to the apostolic confession of faith, he will give his life in martyrdom.

Saint Thomas also symbolizes the vitality of the missionary Syriac tradition within Christianity. Spreading the truth of the Gospel of Christ over thousands of miles, along ancient roads, deserts, mountains, and along risky waterways, Syriac men and women, monastics, clergy, and laity, braved the dangers of an often hostile world. Their legacy lives on today, among those who still call themselves the Christians of Saint Thomas. ■

Rev. David A. Fisher is a priest of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon and Adjunct Professor of Eastern Christian Thought at St. Charles Seminary.

Building a Church from Scratch – Msgr. Donald Sawyer *by Brandon Shulleeta*

Growing up in Austin, Texas, Msgr. Don Sawyer said he was a teenager when he felt God calling him to priesthood. He initially resisted.

“I kind of fought it, but an inner voice said, ‘go have your fun and enjoy your dancing and socializing, but you will not be marrying like everyone and have a family.’” He said he believes that married men should be allowed to be ordained.

About 47 years after being ordained, he’s now the priest of Our Lady’s Maronite Catholic Church in his hometown of Austin.

Sawyer was ordained by Archbishop Francis M. Zayek on April 27, 1974. He was assigned to Austin, where he founded Our Lady’s Maronite Parish in 1983. He earned his Doctorate of Ministry in 1991 with his specialty of study in mission and evangelization.

He sees his parishioners as family and understands each has unique abilities and life stories. He said everybody wants to feel like “somebody. ... In God’s eyes, everybody

is somebody.” He appreciates that Maronite Catholic parishes tend to have a sense of family.

One of his parishioners, for example, said she felt more welcomed in one day at Our Lady’s than in two years at her former church. Msgr. Don said he’s proud that people have chosen to come to Our Lady’s when they sometimes have to pass other churches to get there.

It’s also important for priests to show an openness to parishioners’ ideas and to realize priests don’t have all the answers, he said. Getting parishioners involved makes



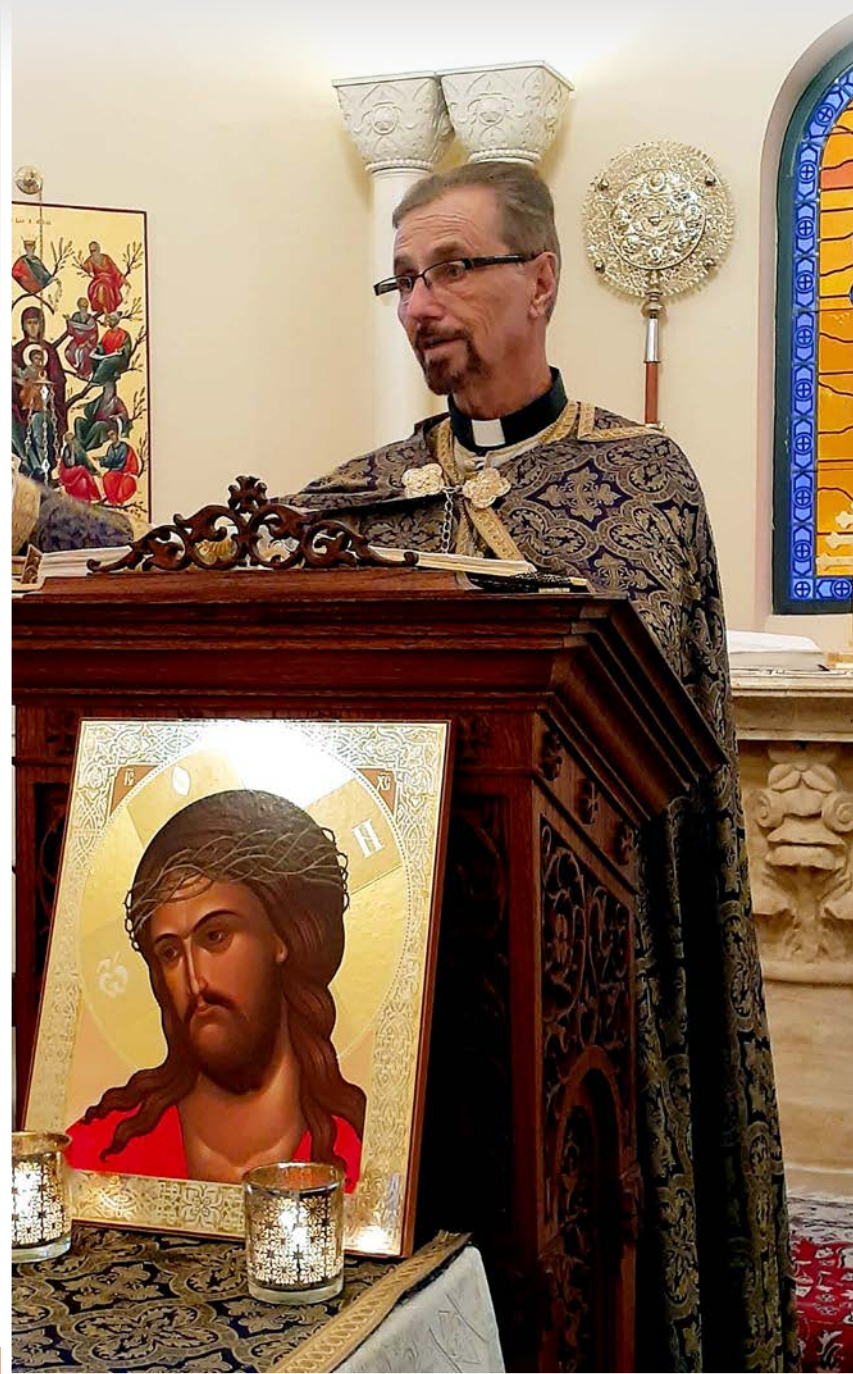
them feel respected, and it leads to good ideas, he said. “Sometimes you get some stupid ones,” he laughed, adding that a priest should show appreciation for those too.

He fondly tells the story of one of his closest parishioners, a woman in her 70s, who is a Catholic convert. As a Protestant at the time, she asked to sit in during Mass, even though she said she had no intentions of converting, Sawyer recalled. Three years later, after regularly attending church, he invited her to Bible study, where she cried and then laughed in reaction to a passage she called “beautiful” — a passage she could never understand before that moment. She soon converted to Maronite Catholicism and continues to be very active in the parish.

Msgr. Don said God must be placed above all else and that being a good Catholic requires more than just a proclamation. There’s also a need to live like a Christian, he said, without idols, such as greed, money and power. He pointed to abortions as another example of why society needs to restore faith in God.

“It’s easy to say, ‘I’m Catholic,’” Sawyer said, adding that living as a Catholic is the more challenging part. “You have to humble yourself before God.” ■

Brandon Shulleeta is a journalist and parishioner of St. Anthony’s Maronite Catholic Church in Glen Allen, VA.



“ Growing up in Austin, Texas, Msgr. Don Sawyer said he was a teenager when he felt God calling him to priesthood. He initially resisted. ”

St. Maron Philadelphia: Maronite History in the City of Brotherly Love *by Anna Salloum*

The early beginnings of the Maronites in the United States took them to regions where various industries welcomed them. Somewhere between textiles in New England and steel in Pittsburgh, is Philadelphia, the City of Brotherly Love, which traces its roots back to the late 1600s. By the late 1800s, the Maronite community found its way there, and it is here to stay, thanks to its thriving parish, St. Maron Maronite Catholic Church. Most parishes start with a small group. However, the growth of the Maronite community in

Philadelphia started with one person, a brave young man.

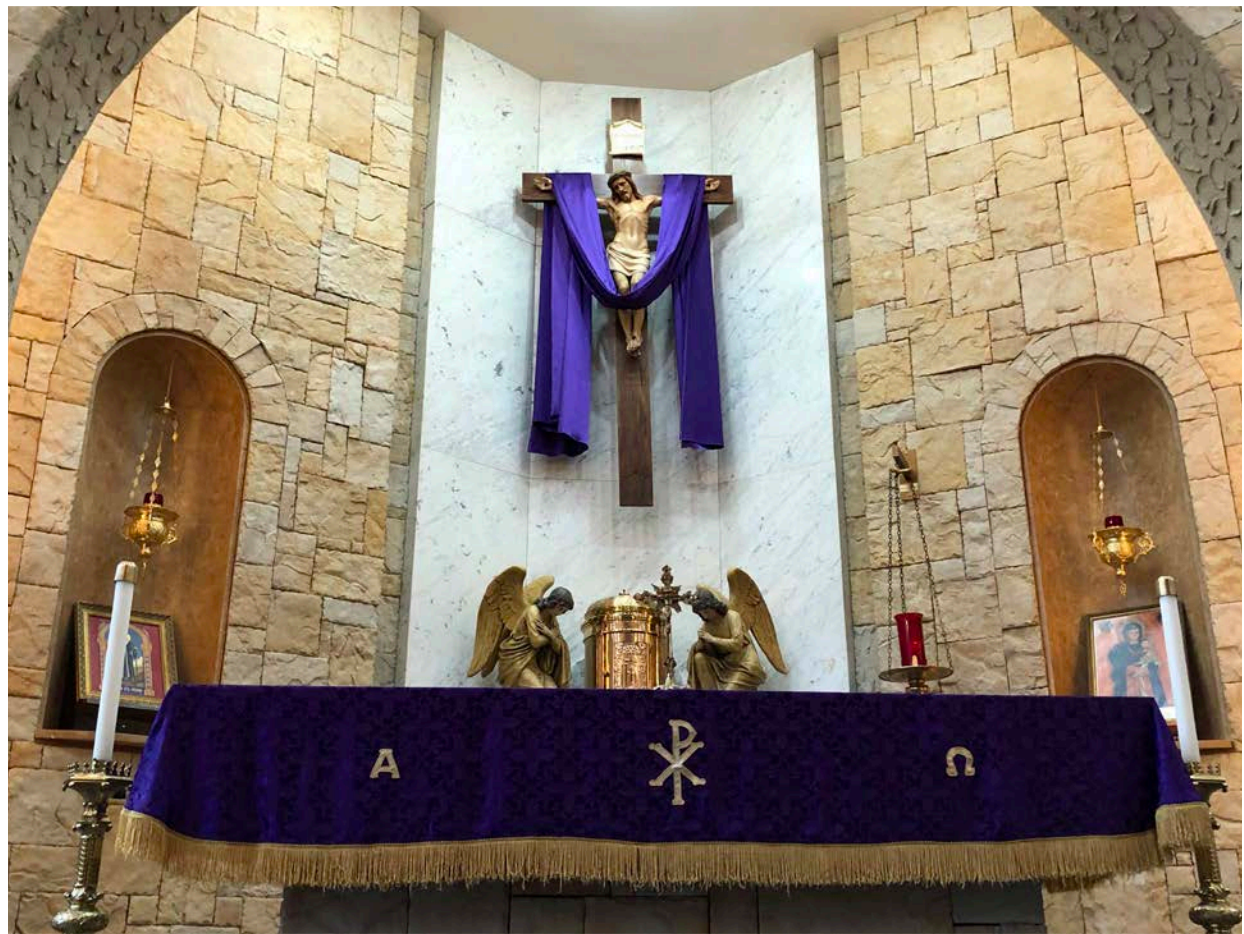
Today, if we ever got off a bus or train in a foreign city, we would have the luxury of a cell phone and the Internet to ask questions and perhaps even use Google Translate. Imagine being 22 years old in 1865, and disembarking a ship in New Orleans, far away from Lebanon. Sarkees Abraham showed strength and valor, thus traveling by foot over the next two years. His travels in this new land took him from the wetlands of Louisiana all the way to

Pennsylvania. He became the first known Lebanese immigrant to settle in Philadelphia.

Around the same time, other immigrants from Lebanon also made their way to Philadelphia and settled not too far from him. And while Jesus is present among those two or three who gather in his name, most small and developing communities over time do need a place to worship, and more importantly, a shepherd for the flock. St. Maron's parish ultimately was established in 1899, according to records at Bkerke.



Over 100 years have passed, but there isn't anything "old" about this parish. The guidance of the very "young" Abouna Andrawos "Fadi" ElTabchi will certainly take the parish into the next 100 years. He is the 18th leader of St. Maron's parish. His back of the house life experiences in the kitchen and human resources have prepared him for front of the house leadership and management. This is Abouna Fadi's second assignment, since his ordination in 2017. He is very much looking forward to getting to know not only his parishioners, but the city of Philadelphia as well. Between the



current local COVID restrictions, and work to catch up around the parish, Abouna Fadi has not been able to see much of the city.

One of the biggest projects that he walked into is the Maronite Convention, scheduled for Philadelphia this year, but unfortunately the parish is working at the mercy of the city's restrictions which are constantly in flux, so there is no clear answer at the moment on the status of this year's Maronite Convention (*the City of Philadelphia does not go by the state of Pennsylvania's restrictions—they have their own*). Abouna Fadi is constantly monitoring mandates of the city day-by-day and any changes. As it is, a max of 50 people

are allowed in certain establishments including houses of worship, so this poses a challenge for the Liturgy. Saturday vigil attendance has dropped due to the pandemic but, fortunately, live-streaming has helped parishioners enjoy the Liturgy from the safety of their homes. These restrictions have not stopped Abouna Fadi from showing an attitude of brotherhood. Abouna Fadi has shown the meaning of brotherly love by donating the parish hall space as a vaccination site.

Abouna Fadi is looking forward to working with CCD, MYO and MYA. His youth and experience will certainly lay the foundation and groundwork for the young parishioners to understand our faith

and tradition. He is also looking forward to food sales, and he hopes to have as many as possible, including a bake sale that will include home-made sweets. The food sales will take place for now in place of a festival, which will not happen because of the city's restrictions.

The clarity of the parishes' future, both immediate and long term, is hard to tell at this stage because the changes in the city of Philadelphia are happening on a day-to-day basis. But Romans 12:12 reminds us to "*be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, and faithful in prayer.*" ■

Anna Salloum is a parishioner of Our Lady of Lebanon in Miami, Florida.

Palestinian Christian Elected as of Focolare Movement

by Saher Kawas

HOLY LAND—On 31 January 2021, Margaret Karam, a Haifa-born Palestinian, became the third president of the Focolare Movement, succeeding Maria Voce and the Movement's founder Chiara Lubich. The news of her election elicited great pride and joy worldwide and from her home country.

Margaret was 15 years old when she first learned about the Focolare Movement and the spirituality of Chiara Lubich; a spirituality of unity that she embraced in a place where racial and religious intolerance still exists.

Throughout her life, Margaret was involved in the promotion of interreligious dialogue and has worked with the Assembly of the Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land (AOCTS), the Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel (ICCI) and the Episcopal Commission for Interreligious Dialogue. She also held many positions in the Focolare Movement in the Holy Land and Los Angeles.

"Here I am! I am at your service. I am at the service of the Church, of the Movement and humanity together with all of you," said Margaret, now 58, upon her election by two-third of the 359 representatives in the General Assembly of the Focolare Movement, which started on January 24 and will conclude on February 7. "When my name came out, I was deeply moved. At the same time I really felt within me the strength of the Spirit, who I had been invoking the whole day."

Since the election, congratulatory messages and well wishes have been pouring in for Margaret.

On the Focolare website, one can read the heart-warming support that readers expressed when they heard the news. One reader wrote, "We thank God for the gift of Margaret, and may she always be guided by the Holy Spirit." At the same time, another said, "the great joy for the election of the new president was multiplied when I listened to her first simple words full of so much love for us, for the Church and for humanity. I was impressed by her meek and Marian aspect."

Members of the Focolare Movement in Jerusalem recognized the new responsibility and commitment they have now in living the Focolare Spirituality and charism of unity that God gave to Chiara Lubich. They also gave thanks to the Holy Spirit "for this grace that He bestowed on Margaret and that He may enlighten her way and inspire her in her service to the Work of Mary."

In a letter to Margaret, H.B. Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, expressed his joy "to see that a daughter of our Church has been chosen for such a delicate and demanding service." He also wished her to continue doing God's will, knowing that she has "the human and spiritual resources to lead the Movement towards new horizons... and in her new service will bring the "flavor" of the Holy Land."

Fr. Francesco Patton, OFM, Custos of the Holy Land, also conveyed his warm wishes and those of the Franciscan Friars "for this new call to service of Our Lord and His Church, according to the charisma of unity." He invoked the Lord to support her in this appointment and enlighten her mind and heart that she "may listen to the voice of the Spirit."



"[She] is the daughter of a respected family from Haifa that was known for its love, faith, and generosity towards the Church," read a statement by the Assembly of the Catholic Ordinaries.

"Margaret joined the Focolare Movement since its inception in our country in the 1970s and was known for her prominent role in promoting the status of the Movement in the Holy Land."

The Order of the Holy Sepulchre, on its Facebook page, congratulated the new president of the Focolare Movement and underscored her work in interfaith dialogue in the Holy Land. It is worth mentioning that Margaret's father, Boulos Karam, was invested in the Order in 1964 by then Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem Alberto Gori, who recognized Mr. Karam's excellent cooperation and activity in the reconstitution of the Haifa Parish following the terrible events of 1947-1948 in the Holy Land.

"Be a family, in the truest sense of the word"

Now, Margaret will lead the Movement for the next six years. "What I feel more than anything for the next six years is to be able to live more and more the legacy that Chiara gave us: be a family, in the truest sense of the word, because only in this way we can achieve that specific goal which is unity," said Margaret.

Reprinted with permission of Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

New Bishop of Antélias, Lebanon

The Synod of Bishops of the Patriarchal Church of Antioch of the Maronites elected the Reverend Antoine Farès Bounajem as archbishop of Antélias of the Maronites, Lebanon, with the assent of the Holy Father.

Msgr. Antoine Farès Bounajem was born on 10 August 1967 in Harharaya-Kattine, archeparchy of Antélias. After his primary and secondary school education at the Saint George College of Zalka and in the minor seminary of Ghazir, he carried out his studies in philosophy and theology at the Université Saint-Esprit de Kaslik in 1992.

He was ordained a priest on 10 July 1994 for the archeparchy of Antélias.

He was awarded a licentiate in theology, with a catechetical-pastoral focus, at the Institut Catholique de Paris in 1999.

Since ordination he has held various pastoral roles. Until now he has served as parish priest, episcopal vicar for pastoral care and youth catechesis, and chaplain of the Scouts and various prayer and formation groups. ■



Eternal rest grant to them, O Lord.

HABIB YOUSSEF YAZBECK

It is our sad duty to announce the passing into Eternal Life of Mr. Habib Youssef Yazbeck (from Lebanon), father of Reverend Elias Yazbeck.

Habib is survived by his wife Jamileh, his sons, Father Elias and Sharbel. He is also survived by his brother George and sister Hiam.

Funeral Services took place in Lebanon on 2 February 2021. A Memorial Mass for the repose of his soul was scheduled for 11 April 2021 in Cleveland, OH.

Condolences may be sent to Father Elias at: Saint Maron Maronite Catholic Church
1245 Carnegie Avenue, Cleveland, OH 44115

May God give eternal rest and joy to His servant, Habib.

MOUNTAHA HANNA BADAWI

Mrs. Mountaha Hanna Badawi, mother of Chorbishop Alfred Badawi, has passed to eternal life.

Mountaha is survived by her husband, Albert Badawi, her sons, Wajih, Ernest, Chorbishop Alfred, Joseph, Wahib, Bahjat, and their families. Mountaha was also the aunt of the Very Reverend Dominique Hanna, Rector of Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral, Brooklyn, NY.

Funeral Services took place in Lebanon on 8 February 2021.

Condolences may be sent to Chorbishop Alfred at: St. Sharbel Maronite Catholic Church
43888 Hayes Rd., Clinton Township, MI 48038

May God give eternal rest and joy to His handmaid, Mountaha.

NATIONAL MYA



Lenten Happenings

The Worship Team prepared a presentation on St. Joseph and how we can imitate him throughout the Lenten season and beyond. Within this presentation, they provided an overview of the Year of St. Joseph, including the apostolic letter *Patris Corde*, by Pope Francis. The pandemic influenced his decision to declare this “The Year of St. Joseph.” At the end, the attendees were put into breakout sessions to get to know each other better and become prayer partners. To continue to have St. Joseph present within our lives, the worship team will be leading a consecration to St. Joseph, starting on 11 April. To join this consecration group, please check out the National MYA website!

The Activities Team hosted Game Night on Thursday, 25 February, with a Maronite twist! Our hosts Joe Bsaibes and Anthony Harb, along with in-house IT specialist and mustached Texan Jonathan Jaoude, entertained our guests with *Za Brice is Right!* where contestants guess the price of many random Catholic themed items. The fun night culminated with a grand prize awarded to the winner Caline Farah from Riverside, California. Join us next time on MYA game night!

On the bi-monthly rotation of our Zoom Night with the Bishop, his month’s topic was Lent. On 18 February, Bishop Elias Zaidan led a fruitful discussion on our walk with Jesus through the season of Lent. He described the analogy of the three pillars of Lent: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Fasting without prayer, especially during the season of Lent, is simply just a diet. Bishop Zaidan reminded us to encourage local MYA events to be inclusive and have themes based on the current liturgical season. In the spirit of Lent, surely there are many service opportunities for the young adults in your church!

The January Zoom Night with Bishop Gregory Mansour included a discussion about his Pastoral Letter. Attendees brought their questions and we had an insightful evening with His Excellency. His letter spoke of sexuality, current societal pressures, and the role of men in relationships. His letter can be accessed from the Eparchy’s website, stmaron.org.

You can find the recordings of our Zoom events on our Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/NationalMYA>.

Also, check out our updated website calendar feature to find event details, zoom links, and more at maroniteyoungadults.org!

Our Social Media Team primarily sends reminders via Instagram, while regional representatives also send event info in text chats with local representatives in their region. Thank you to our national board members for their voluntary hard work and dedication, to the board directors for their guidance. ■



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2021 MYO Lenten Retreats

EPARCHY OF ST. MARON
Youth Leaders Lenten Retreat
by Sr. Therese Maria, MSCL



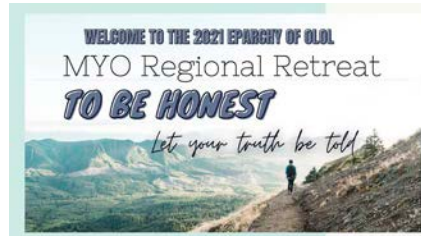
On Saturday, 27 February the Office for Maronite Youth and Young Adults facilitated its first Virtual Lenten Retreat for the youth leaders of the Eparchy of Saint Maron. The retreat theme focused on the healing and heroic faith of the Hemorrhaging Woman. "Daughter, your faith has healed you, go in peace." (Mark 5:34)

We were blessed to have over 30 youth leaders register along with Bishop Gregory Mansour. The evening retreat included praise and worship led by Tamara Alchoufete, an inspiring talk by Lauren Gentry, a dynamic youth minister from New York City, interactive breakout sessions and a powerful prayer experience praying through the five keys to Freedom and Healing from Unbound Ministry. The five keys were: Repentance and Faith; Forgiveness; Renunciation; Authority; and Blessing. To learn more about Unbound ministry visit heartofthefather.com

To stay up to date with our upcoming MYYA events follow us on Facebook at @myyaoffice and Instagram @myya_stmaronbrooklyn

Our MYYA Handbook and other resources can be found at stmaron.org/office-for-maronite-youth-and-young-adults ■

EPARCHY OF OUR LADY OF LEBANON
MYO Regional Retreat
by Nicole Sabbagh



During the weekend of 27-28 February 2021, the Office of Youth Ministry of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon brought together over 230 of our youth, advisors, and clergy to join for a time of reflection for our retreat themed **To Be Honest: Let Your Truth Be Told**.

Father Edward Hanna, the director of the Office of Youth Ministry kicked us off with a warm welcome before Bishop Elias Zaidan opened our retreat with prayers dedicated to Saint Joseph and Blessed Carlos Acutis.

Father Simon Eshshaki, of the Chaldean Eparchy of St. Peter, gave an incredible witness about Jesus' healing power in our lives when we come to Him as we are. He reminded us that as we go to the doctor when we're sick; we must also turn to Jesus and the Church to heal our weary souls. Chaldean Sister Bernadette Setto showed her vulnerability as she spoke about her teen years filled with partying and drug abuse, before she realized that she was called for something greater.

Sima Dib from Houston reflected on the retreat, saying, "Going into this retreat, I was not sure what to expect, with it being online. However, I believe I learned a lot. One speaker that resonated with me was Sister Bernadette, because the talk was very relatable as a teenager. Her story was very inspiring, because now, I am assured that no matter what, I can always come back to God, and he will fix all my brokenness. I hope that from now on, I can be honest about my struggles and look to God when I need help."

Along with icebreakers, breakout sessions, and inspiring testimonies from Joe Calabria from St. Maron's in Youngstown, and Elissa Deban from St. Sharbel in Clinton Township, and our seminarians led us in Eucharistic Adoration. Youth were able to place their burdens on the cross virtually and give them up to the Lord.

This fun-filled two-day journey showed us that despite whatever brokenness we might feel, God's love will always prevail, and when we open our hearts, His peace and love will overflow.

To stay up to date with our upcoming events follow us on Facebook at @oleparchy.myo and Instagram @olo_myo ■

The Psalms: A Book of Liturgical Songs

by Father Anthony J. Salim

Saint Joseph, a Man of the Psalms

In this year dedicated to Saint Joseph, let us begin with a reflection on the guardian of God's Son and the Psalms. On the Sunday of the Commemoration of the Revelation to Joseph, we see Joseph as an exemplar of a righteous man chosen by the Heavenly Father to be the earthly legal and adoptive parent of Jesus, Word-Made-Flesh, and husband of Mary of Nazareth. As an obedient Israelite, Joseph and Mary would have sung the songs of Israel in Israel's worship services and likely have even taught these to the young Jesus as he grew up. The Psalms would form and sustain the spiritual and liturgical lives of the Jews, and some, like the first verse of Psalm 1, describe Joseph well:

¹Blessed is the man who does not walk
in the counsel of the wicked,
Nor stand in the way of sinners,
nor sit in company with scoffers.
²Rather, the law of the LORD is his joy;
and on his law he meditates day and night.
³He is like a tree
planted near streams of water,
that yields its fruit in season;
Its leaves never wither;
whatever he does prospers.

Liturgical songs.

The Psalms are for the most part liturgical poems that were meant to be sung. The Psalms were and still are sung primarily in the Jewish worship services, but were also sung in other settings, such as processions and when the people would go on pilgrimage.

The Psalms were composed with a Hebrew rhyming

structure and metered form and are meant to be sung according to what we call "psalmody." The Psalms are traditionally attributed to King David; yet a glance at the titles of many of the Psalms, shows that some of them are attributed to others, for example, to Solomon, King David's son. Many of these liturgical songs are still central to today's devout Jews as well as to Christians.

Complexities of Life Set before the Lord.

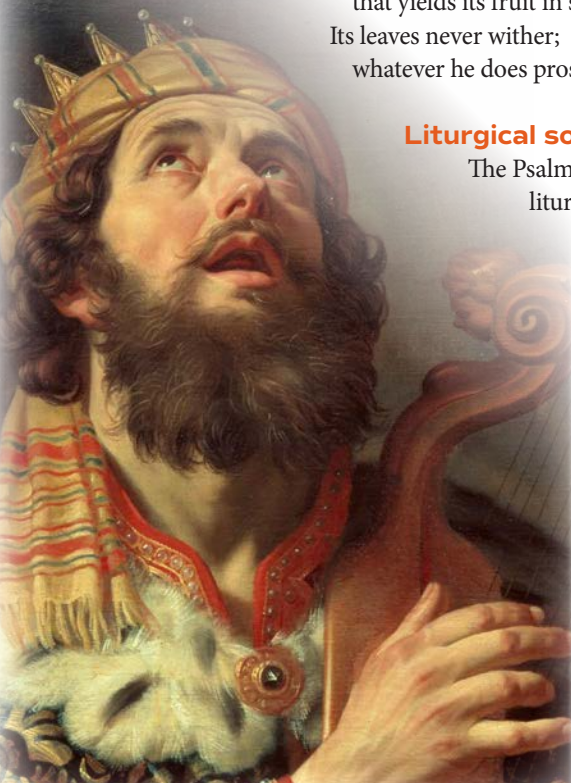
The beauty and attraction of the Psalms lie in the fact that they express the whole range of human emotion and prayer. When you read the Psalms, you see gratitude to God for his blessings (example: Psalm 138); sentiments of glory given to the majesty of the Good God (example: Psalm 8); anger at being attacked and persecuted by the enemies of Israel or the individual offering the Psalm (example: Psalm 3) and even frustration and depression caused by the hardships of life from which the sufferer begs for relief, expressed by lament (example: Psalm 53), and trust in God (example: Psalm 27). More information may certainly be seen in the Introduction to the Book of Psalms in various editions of the Bible.

This relation to life is why the Psalms are a basic and rich source of the Church's prayer life, such as these well known and loved examples:

- Psalm 1: "Happy the man who follows not . . ." (quoted above)
- Psalm 23: "The Lord is my Shepherd . . ."
- Psalm 51: "Have mercy on me, O God, . . ." (used especially in Great Lent and in the Mystery of Penance)

Divine Praises

In Christian tradition, the Psalms are the foundation of the Divine Praises, the prayer system that is prayed each day by monks, nuns, ordained clergy and (ideally) all Christians. The form of the Divine Praises varies from Tradition to Tradition within the Universal Church (e.g., Syriac, Latin, Greek). In our Maronite Liturgical Tradition, we see this in Ramsho (Evening Prayer) and



Safro (Morning Prayer), which we have been getting more used to as we pray them in our larger eparchial gatherings and clergy meetings.

Structure of the Book of Psalms.

The Book of Psalms comprises an entire book in the Old Testament. In Catholic Tradition it is composed of 150 Psalms. Another name for this book is the “Psalter.” The Book of Psalms is subdivided into five books, which may imitate the five Books of the Torah, and are listed this way in many editions of the Bible. Alternatively, another fruitful way of classifying the Psalms is by theme or genre.

The Psalms vary greatly in length, with the longest being Psalm 119, which praises God for giving such splendid laws and instruction for people to live by, and the shortest being Psalm 117, which calls on the nations to acknowledge God’s supremacy.

Maronite Divine Liturgy

We see the use or refer to the Psalms in several ways. Two ways stand out:

- The *Mazmooro* verses. The Psalm-like verses chanted in the Maronite Divine Liturgy before the First Scripture Reading tradition are called in Syriac the *Mazmooro* verses (plural: *Mazmoorae*), translated as the “Psalm of Glory.” These verses imitate the metrical form of Syriac liturgical poetry known as *memre* and *midrashe* and are related to the Hebrew poetic structure of the Psalms.
- In verse 1 of the Hymn (*Qolo*) of the *Hoosoyo* for Thursday of the Season of the Glorious Resurrection:

In the sacred book of Psalms,
David, son of Jesse, wrote:
God, the Savior, reigns as king,
clothed in majesty and might!
And now all the nations sing and shout for joy:
Jesus has been raised!
He has strengthened all the world;
lest it shake he made it firm.
He woke up from sleep, from the darkness of the tomb.
So his foes were saddened but his friends were glad.
Mourning has been turned to joy.

Prayer of the Believer

The Psalter is the book in which the Word of God

becomes the believing person’s prayer. In other books of the Old Testament, “the words proclaim [God’s] works and bring to light the mystery they contain.” The words of the Psalmist sung for God, both express and acclaim the Lord’s saving works; the same Spirit inspires both God’s work and man’s response. Christ will unite the two. In him, the psalms continue to teach us how to pray.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, ¶2587)

Students of God’s Word in the Psalms are encouraged to read those suggested above, but seriously to read all of the Psalms will produce a lively and fruitful spiritual life. Praying the Psalms in the Ramsho will deepen one’s life daily. ■

Father Anthony Salim is a retired priest of the Eparchy of Saint Maron and a frequent contributor.

The Order of Saint Sharbel New Members

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ANDREW HOWARD | *St. George* | Dover, NH

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CHARLES FEGHALI | *Our Lady of Lebanon* | Washington, D.C.

MARIA CHEMALY | *St. Anthony* | Cincinnati, OH

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

For more information about the Order ask your Pastor, visit www.orderstsharbel.org 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

With Lebanon on verge of collapse, thousands rally to support cardinal

BEIRUT—Thousands of Lebanese rallied Feb. 27 to show their support for the positions of Cardinal Bechara Rai as the country teeters on the verge of collapse from multiple crises.

The rally was at Bkerke, the seat of the Maronite Catholic Church, north of Beirut. Speaking from a window of the patriarchate, Cardinal Rai, Maronite patriarch, told the crowd: "You have come from all over Lebanon, of all ages, despite the dangers of the coronavirus, to support two proposals, that of neutrality and that of an international conference for Lebanon under the auspices of the U.N. You have come to ask for the salvation of Lebanon.

"Long live Lebanon, united and unified, actively and positively neutral, sovereign and independent, free and strong, advocating coexistence and tolerance," Cardinal Rai said.

Muslims and Druze were among those who attended, including Sunni, Shiite and Druze sheikhs.

"Failure to respect neutrality is the sole cause of all the crises and wars that the country has gone through," Cardinal Rai stressed.

"Do not remain silent in the face of corruption. Do not tolerate the theft of your money, the fluid borders, the failure of the political class, the chaos in the investigation into the Beirut port explosion, or the imprisonment of the innocent. Do not tolerate the failure in forming a government and implementing reforms," he said.

Archbishop Paul Nabil El-Sayah, patriarchal vicar general for foreign affairs at Bkerke, who stood beside Cardinal Rai during his speech,

told Catholic News Service: "Lebanon has never been in such a situation throughout its modern history. This is why the patriarch is taking such drastic measures."

The outpouring of Lebanese people, specifically to express their solidarity with Cardinal Rai, reflects the urgency regarding Lebanon's future. More than half of the Lebanese people now live below the poverty line, the unemployment rate exceeds 50% and the Lebanese currency has lost 80% of its value in less than a year.

Lebanon has been without a government since the previous one resigned in August, following explosions at the Beirut port that killed more than 200 people, injured thousands and left 300,000 people homeless. Political rifts have held up the formation process of a new government.

Cardinal Rai has repeatedly admonished Lebanon's politicians for their negligence. In his speech, he said they "have not even had the audacity to sit down at the same table to resolve the current problem."

He said Lebanon is "facing a coup situation in every sense of the word on the various fields of public life, a coup against the Lebanese society." He underlined that the international conference he advocates aims to "affirm the stability and identity of Lebanon, the sovereignty of its borders, and its attachment to freedom, equality and neutrality."

Iranian-backed Hezbollah and some other political parties in Lebanon have been critical of Cardinal Rai's proposal for an international

conference, with Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah saying it would open the door to foreign interference in Lebanon.

Without mentioning Hezbollah directly, Cardinal Rai alluded to the Shiite political and military group and its weapons in his speech: "There is no state with two powers within it, nor with two armies or two peoples. Any tampering with these constants threatens the unity of the state."

The cardinal also voiced rejection of any attempt to naturalize Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and pressed for Syrian refugees to be returned to their country.

On top its population of around 4.5 million, Lebanon has absorbed approximately 1.5 million Syrian refugees and more than 400,000 Palestinian refugees, whose presence stems from the creation of Israel in 1948.

"I fully understand your screams and anger and understand your uprising and revolution," Cardinal Rai said in his speech, referring to the mass protest movement that began in October 2019, which was later interrupted by the coronavirus pandemic.

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Caritas Lebanon USA is working in the United States of America to help and support Caritas Lebanon.

Currently we are sponsoring Lebanese families in need at this difficult time of the pandemic, with the degrading economic situation, and the after-effect of the explosion of Beirut seaport on August 4th, 2020.

Many generous people already sponsored more than 250 Lebanese families, and more to be sponsored in the near future. For more information about the sponsoring of Lebanese families, please, visit www.CaritasLebanon.org

More projects were supported by Caritas Lebanon USA, especially the monetary help that we offer to the Lebanese people has impacted positively many lives.

The need is overwhelming, Caritas Lebanon has 45 geographic sectors in Lebanon. They provide medicine, money, and food according to the number of people in need. Due to the Aug. 4th explosion, and its impact, is still critical to raise funds with which are also helping pay rent for many families. Caritas Lebanon has programs for children with special needs in home and at outside care centers. Caritas has helped rebuild homes that burned to the ground. Caritas Lebanon helps farmers in the remote area to keep them in business.

Caritas pays hospital bills that the Lebanese Social Security does not cover. Caritas is providing COVID-19 testing support and oxygen when needed. The situation is getting worse each day. Caritas has provided hygiene kits to 7,000 people. The salaries in Lebanon have been cut dramatically and when there are no funds, there are no jobs. Caritas was once helping 10,000 families; now they are up to 40,000 families and more.

Future Planning:

Caritas Lebanon USA is planning for an online telethon, with the help of some Catholic Radios in the different US cities. Caritas is looking for Honorary Board Members to help and support the staggering needs of the Lebanese people at this difficult time. A Tesla car raffle is on the planning too.

For more information or questions, please, contact Fr. John Nahal, president of Caritas Lebanon, USA (rector@StRaymond-MC.org), call 314 621 0056, or mail 931 Lebanon Dr., St. Louis, MO 63104)



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Parish News

LAWRENCE, MASSACHUSETTS **Welcome Father Manuel Rahmeh**

St. Anthony Church in Lawrence, Massachusetts, has served as a welcoming hub for new priests in the Eparchy of Saint Maron. As an active, dedicated, and faithful community of priests and spiritual leaders, newly ordained priests have been fortunate enough to enjoy the devotion and guidance spanning over 20 ministries at St. Anthony's. St. Anthony's Church is blessed to welcome Fr. Manuel Rahmeh (priest and son of a priest) to devoted Maronite parents, Fr. Nabil Rahmeh and Rosalie Rahmeh from Deir-El-Ahmar. Fr. Manuel brings much joy and vibrance to the church and community. God Bless him on this new part of his religious journey, and may the Lord lead more young men to priesthood for the Maronite Church. ■



BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA **Retirement of Chorbishop Richard D. Saad**

In January 2021, St. Elias Church in Birmingham, AL, celebrated the retirement of Chorbishop Richard D. Saad as pastor. A year of special honors and celebrations for Chorbishop Richard had been planned for 2020, but we had to scale down our celebrations due to the pandemic. We hope to still have a banquet in his honor this July during our annual Feast Day picnic.



Chorbishop Richard came to St. Elias as a deacon in the summer of 1971. After his ordination on 29 January 1972, he was assigned to St. Elias where he has remained, except for a single year when he served as the pastor of St. Anthony and St. George Parishes in Wilkes-Barre, PA.

On Sunday, 10 January 2021, the children of the Maronite Christian Formation classes presented him with a memory book and surprised him with cupcakes to celebrate his birthday.

For the celebration weekend of 16-17 January, we were honored to have the following distinguished guests join us: Bishop Elias Zaidan, Fr. Albert Constantine, Fr. John Paul Kimes, Fr. Mitch Pacwa, and Fr. Peter Zogbi, Chorbishop Richard's successor at St. Elias.

After the 5:00pm Liturgy on Saturday, 16 January, several gifts were presented to Chorbishop Richard, including a memory book created by the parishioners, a cedar tree planted in Lebanon in his name on behalf of the National Apostolate of Maronites, a car purchased by the parish, and the St. Maron medal from Patriarch Bechara Peter Rai.

On Sunday, 17 January, following 10:30 a.m. Liturgy, a reception was held in the parish hall. Parishioners and non-parishioners came and expressed their appreciation, and wished Chorbishop well in his retirement.

Chorbishop Richard will remain in Birmingham and continue to be close to this community which loves and respects him so much. ■



FALL RIVER, MASSACHUSETTS

Lenten Prayer Bags

by Andro Alkhawande & Melia Bouramia

The Maronite Youth Organization of St. Anthony of the Desert Church in Fall River, Massachusetts, has been working diligently on activities to help others during this pandemic. They provided Thanksgiving meals for families at a local elementary school and raised money for charity. The MYO also designed a project that would encourage parishioners to celebrate the importance of Lent and to strengthen their faith throughout the Lenten Season.

Inspired by the gospel on the Friday before Hosanna Sunday (Mark 4:1-11 & Luke 4:1-13), "Lenten Prayer Bags" were created. Each bag consisted of items that depicted the Lenten Season including: a shell to symbolize baptism and how Jesus began His ministry after His baptism; sand to illustrate the forty-days Jesus spent in the desert fasting and praying; a small stone to represent how the devil tempted Jesus to turn stone into bread; and finally, a candle to describe the concept that while Lent begins in the cold darkness of winter, the light of the Resurrection of Jesus illuminates the whole world bringing hope to the darkest corners.

Additionally, the following reading list was suggested: "The Essential Teachings of St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta" containing daily meditations from her journal; "The Way of the Cross" containing the rules of Lent for Maronite Catholics; and a St. Joseph consecration prayer card. ■



L to R: MYO members: DJ & Bella Simoes, Andro & Ashlee Alkhawande, Advisor Melia Bouramia



UNIONTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA

Lenten Activities

by Dr. Mabel George Howard

The Lenten Season is a time for prayer, fasting, almsgiving, religious traditions, spiritual introspection, giving to charity, and the kindness of helping others. As an expression of camaraderie among family, friends, and community, the Ladies Guild and Altar & Rosary Society of St. George Church in Uniontown, Pennsylvania, held their first annual Lenten "Fish Fry" every Friday during Lent. Take-out and limited seating for eat-in lunch and dinner meals consisted of fish or shrimp platters with a variety of homemade side dishes available to parishioners and community members. Since many local organizations were continuing to curtail events during the pandemic, the Ladies Guild and Altar & Rosary Society members were happy to provide this culinary opportunity to the people of Southwestern Pennsylvania.

Following each Lenten dinner, Fr. Aaron Sandbothe heard confessions as parishioners recited the Stations of the Cross and prayed the Devotion to the "Five Wounds" that Jesus Christ suffered during His Crucifixion. This represented a spiritual pilgrimage in the footsteps of Jesus to the final place of His Crucifixion. Fr. Aaron



concluded the evening with Vespers (*Ramsho*) and the Benediction of the Cross, invoking Divine blessings and recalling the salvific Passion of Our Lord.

Also during Lent, monetary donations were collected to support the fifth annual Catholic Relief Services (CRS) Rice Bowl at St. George. CRS offers resources to help families and communities locally and globally experiencing difficulties such as: hunger, poverty, homelessness, illness, etc. ■



Parish News

SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS St. George MYO “Christmas Bags”

by Lisa Delgado, Youth Ministry

Each year, the Maronite Youth Organization (MYO) selects an organization to sponsor for its Christmas Angel Tree. With tremendous support from the parish community, toys and gifts are typically collected for children and the less fortunate. However, in 2020, the world was changed immensely. This Christmas, instead of collecting toys, the MYO collected much needed suitcases and duffel bags for the San Antonio Children’s Shelter. Approximately 6,000 children in San Antonio are victims of child abuse, neglect, or abandonment each year. Upon removal from the home, or transition to a new home, children pack their personal belongings into trash bags which places a feeling of worthlessness for



the child. While an extremely traumatic experience, a simple bag is a gift of dignity for the child. Through the generous support of our parish community, MYO was able to collect approximately 400 suitcases and bags. Small acts of kindness by many can change the world. ■

UNIONTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA Pennsylvania-Ohio Priest Gatherings

It is not uncommon for our Maronite parishes to be hours from other parishes—or for our priests to go months without seeing a fellow Maronite priest. This reality is even more apparent during the pandemic, as most eparchial and inter-eparchial in-person events have been curtailed or cancelled. Over the past year the priests of western Pennsylvania and Ohio have been gathering together each month for lunch, prayer, and discussion. The priests of the region also gathered together for a mini-retreat at St. Anthony’s Church in Cincinnati, OH after both eparchial retreats had been cancelled. It has been an opportunity for our priests to collaborate and share the challenges of parish life during a pandemic and the varied and, often, creative solutions to these challenges.

On Thursday, 11 February 2021 the priests of PA and OH gathered at St. George Church in Uniontown, PA for lunch, 6th Hour Prayer, and discussion. This was the last Thursday before Great Lent and is traditionally known



as “Fat Thursday” or “Drunkard’s Thursday” as this is the last opportunity to enjoy forbidden foods before Easter. After midday prayer, the priests enjoyed a buffet of barbecued ribs, roasted chicken, smoked macaroni and cheese, an array of desserts, and a selection of mimosas and Lebanese beer. It was a fruitful and boisterous gathering before the sobriety and austere Lenten fast began. ■

WILKES-BARRE, PENNSYLVANIA

A Visit From Bishop Gregory Mansour

On Sunday, 14 February 2021, His Excellency Bishop Gregory Mansour, visited St. Anthony-St. George Church in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. Fr. Adib Salameh and Subdeacon Crosby Sparks, accompanied Bishop Gregory in celebrating the Divine Liturgy and blessing the new parish rectory on the corner of Park Avenue and Dana Street. Bishop Gregory expressed his sincere appreciation to those involved in selling the St. George Chapel and property on Loomis Street. A special “thanks” was given for organizing and executing plans for building the new rectory. He also thanked Fr. Paul Damien for initiating the building plans, and Fr. Adib for his commitment and leadership in continuing this endeavor. Also during liturgy, Michael Khalife, a lifelong parishioner, was inducted into the Order of Saint Sharbel. Following liturgy, everyone attending was invited to join Bishop Gregory and Father Adib for a blessing and tour of the new parish rectory.



February Food Drive

The Altar & Rosary Society of St. Anthony-St. George Church in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, recently held a February Food Drive in honor of the feast of St. Maron. Nonperishable food items and monetary donations collected from parishioners and friends of the church were presented to the Catherine McAuley House Shelter for Homeless Women & Children. ■



Pictured L to R: Cynthia Collins, Kristen Daywood-Martinelli, Jackie Sparks, Donna Bedwick, Joyce Birk, Shelley Senghaas, Father Adib Salameh, Maureen Kishbaugh, Linda Joseph (Co-Chairperson), Georgette Austin (Co-Chairperson), Rosa Khalife-McCracken, Jennifer Ricci, MaryAnn Spagnuolo

The Faith Witness of a Mother

by Frances Jane Mourani

Quite honestly, I knew nothing of the Maronite faith before my marriage. During our pre-Cana session, the instructor admonished my future husband and me for setting a wedding date that did not allow for the full course of marriage preparation classes. He told us quite sternly that he was only making an exception because of the longstanding priestly friendship between himself and my fiancé's older brother, who was then the Maronite Bishop of Damascus. After about an hour of intense instruction, he directed his full attention to me, "So, Frances," he asked with his twinkle in his eye, "are you ready for the Maronites?"

Thirty years later, his question still makes me smile, knowing as I do now, the reality is that the Maronites saved me. My faith journey began at that moment with the celebration of the Holy Mystery of Crowning (Marriage) and the joyful gathering of family and friends who witnessed that blessed occasion with us.

The expectation was that we would start a family quickly afterwards, but it did not happen. I was devastated when my doctors explained the medical challenges ahead of me to become a mother.

Spiritually, I felt wobbly. Here I was newly-arrived to the Maronite faith, making an adjustment to its traditions and language, not to



mention the culture of the Middle East—and now I faced this very private struggle. Many times, in despair I questioned the Lord, why are you doing this to me? In hindsight, I realize that the Holy Spirit saw what I did not. I needed time to adjust to my new faith and my marriage. With this gift, I learned to come to Sunday Divine Liturgy without focusing on the barriers of language or understanding, but instead to close my eyes and open my ears to the beautiful melodies of the liturgical chants and hymns and to open my mind to an acceptance that I was now part of a faith steeped in the rich monastic life of the East but still connected to the Universal Catholic Church. I learned not to see myself as a "stranger" but rather to embrace the warm hospitality of the Maronite community of faith around me.

I gave birth to my first son, Antoine-Hameed seven years later, and to his younger brother, Gibran-Marc, two years afterwards. The healthy arrival of my two precious sons

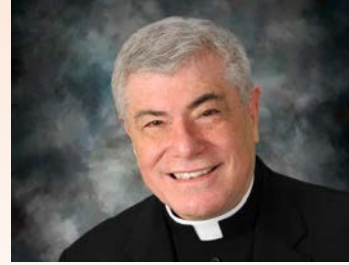
overwhelmed me with gratitude. I prayed with all my heart to the Lord to bless and protect them from harm.

Throughout both pregnancies, with the encouragement of my husband, I maintained a special devotion to St. Anthony the Great, an early Christian monk who inspired generations of monastics throughout the East. His feast day, 17 January, is always honored in our house by attending Divine Liturgy and, when the boys were young, a special dinner celebration.

I wanted our faith to radiate throughout the house through saintly prayer devotions, lighted candles, and icons. I wanted my sons to experience a living faith where the passing on of Maronite faith traditions would provide them with core values and beliefs to give structure to their lives while growing up and, with God's grace, into adulthood.

My own faith journey has been so richly influenced by the Maronites that I cannot imagine where I would be otherwise. If I had remained with my Latin Catholic faith, I believe I most probably would have "drifted" from a spiritual anchor many years ago. The Maronites put me on a path to genuine faith formation, giving me the opportunity to experience a deeper, more authentic relationship with God, and to hopefully create a pathway for my sons to follow, and for this I feel so blessed. ■

From the Editor



For me, **the greatest hero in society today is the caregiver.** The job of a caregiver is exhausting and thankless. But a caregiver is also a most powerful teacher for the young about what is important to us. I have a story:

An old man in India lost his wife. She had not been healthy, but she managed to provide some basic care for him. Except for one son, their children had moved away and were struggling to provide for their own families.

The son who lived nearby had no option but to take his father in with his own family. His wife was not enthusiastic about taking on another burden. On the other hand, the children were overjoyed and welcomed this gentle man with interesting stories, who had all the time in the world for them. What is more fun than a grandfather?!

At first, things seemed to go tolerably well. There were irritations about demands and limitations on the freedom of the family, but they accepted them—for a while. But then the wife told her husband she could not take it anymore—his father had to go.

There was a group of Catholic nuns who lived not too far away and took in the aged and the sick. The convent was poor, so care was basic, but at least the elderly man would be safe and fed. He would be lonely because his grandchildren would be able to visit only a few times a year. And so, arrangements were made for the nuns to receive the grandfather.

Since the family was too poor for even a mule, the husband fashioned a wicker basket in which he could carry his father to the convent. The children were hysterical—they did not want their grandfather to leave them.

The day arrived and the husband asked his oldest son to accompany him as he carried grandfather to the convent. It was not an easy journey, but they finally arrived. The “burden” was deposited with the sisters and the husband turned to return home with his son.

Leaving the convent, the father picked up the wicker basket and moved to discard it. But his son held back his hand, and said, “No, Dad, keep it. We may need it in the future.”

We can care for our elderly loved ones with compassion or we can neglect them—in both cases, we are teaching. ■

Chorbishop John D. Faris

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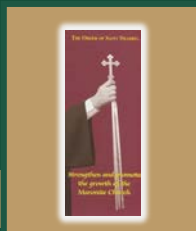
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