

Feast of Saint Maron
2-4-2012 Banquet
Detroit: St. Maron/St. Sharbel/St Rafka Parishes

How wonderful it is to see you all here tonight. This gathering of our community brings great joy to my heart for the Bible says: “Happy are those who delight in the Spirit of the Lord and “Every time two or three gather in my name, I am with them.” This marvelous community of Maronites in the greater Metropolitan of Detroit is a sure symbol of God’s loving and life transforming presence in our midst. This year we can safely say that the Spirit of Saint Maron, in whose memory we are assembled, is truly alive in our hearts and minds. We are proud to call ourselves sons and daughters of Beit Maroun, a house built on solid biblical and Christian foundations. Saint Maron has left us a legacy that we can afford to take for granted; it is a treasure entrusted to our care. As a treasure, it needs to be protected and, most importantly, increased. How can it be increased, we might ask? Well, let us be clear about one thing here: If the treasure of Beit Maroun is not constantly increased, the house would be doomed for destruction and only ruins will be left standing as a small footnote on the margins of history. Thus, every generation of Maronites must contribute to the treasures of the Maronite Church worldwide.

This is the greatest challenge that we are faced with today: It appears that some of our people here in Detroit have doubts as to what is being done to make the House of Maron grow and prosper. In time of trials and tribulations we can only remind ourselves of the fundamentals that have kept the House of Maron together for all these years. Let me mention just few which, I believe, are pertinent to our present condition today.

1) The Maronite Church has always proclaimed a message deeply rooted in the God’s revelation as given to us in the Bible. Moreover, the spiritual and liturgical life of our Church have always reflected the Mission and Works of the Lord Jesus Christ. Particularly, the ascetic and monastic traditions of our Church have developed out of the Gospel Principle of Single-mindedness, or the unconditional and unwavering commitment that the faithful disciple makes to God.

In this sense, no doubt, God becomes the ultimate and focus of the believer’s love, hopes and desires. Today more ever, we need to redirect the focus of the Church’s preaching to reflect these elements which have been so essential to our traditions. It is in God that we place our trust.

2) The priest, according to the soundest and purest of the Maronite way of life, has always been seen by the people as a servant of God’s word and minister of the Sacred Mysteries. He is set by the Holy Spirit to serve the people, not to be

served by them. No matter what his conditions are, the priest must constantly work to gain the trust of the people; he can't take that for granted. In order for him to achieve this goal, he must show understanding, compassion and above all disinterested love and care for his people. Once he does that, he will be looked upon in the community as a person of unity, not of division; a person of concord, not of controversy; and a person who is driven by a sense of duty, not by love of office. One of the most beautiful images of the priest that one finds in the spiritual and theological literatures of the Maronite Church is the one that compares him with John the Baptist. As you recall, John the Baptist directed and led people to Christ, not to himself. This is exactly what a Maronite priest should embody in the ways he conducts himself in the world: He is simply the messenger of the Word, not the message. The priest has been entrusted the authority by the church and conferred by his bishop to teach, to preach and to lead the flock. As spiritual leader and administrator responsible for the life and mission of the faith community, the pastor is entrusted with the sacramental and pastoral care of his flock. He is also entrusted with the administrative and supervisory duties and is held to pastoral obedience with regards to his bishop.

3) Following the Gospel's precepts of fellowship and quality, the Maronite Church has always emphasized the importance of justice, truth and mercy. Because God plays no favoritism with us, the Church must treat all people as equal sons and daughters of God. If there is boasting, St. Paul contends, let all people boast in the Lord. Success in ministry requires full participation of every disciple; no one should be left out, no matter how much disagreements there are. We should always strive for unity and harmony in the community.

These values that we have learned from our noble traditions must guide our endeavor as one community of faith. Here in Detroit, the possibilities of increasing the treasures of Beit Maroun are endless. It is truly disheartening to see opportunities for growth and prosperity constantly slipping by us. We should take an oath before our living God to work as one community to build up the Community of Christ. Future generations of Maronites will be carefully looking at the legacy that we have left them: What would it be? Would it be one that will make them proud to call themselves Maronites? Or, because of our inability to add to the treasure, there won't be anyone left to carry on the torch of faith?

It is my sincere hope that we seize the day, put aside our differences, and join hands to build the House of Maron to be beacon of light for all to see.

Happy Feast Day,
Fr. Alfred Badawi