

# Radiate His Light

## MARONITE SERVANTS OF CHRIST THE LIGHT NEWS



### Sharing in the Spirit of Bethlehem

In reflecting on Christmas, we think of Bethlehem. Can you imagine the suffering Mary and Joseph must have experienced to meet the demands of the census? The familiar Christmas story is so romanticized, that it is easy to forget the hardships endured. Mary, nine months pregnant and the birth imminent, had to suffer the long difficult journey, the cold, ... the separation from family and home. How Joseph must have suffered, wanting to provide for his family, but limited by circumstances which he had no control over.

One of the powerful messages of this mystery that nourishes our faith is, that beyond the homelessness, the darkness, the sufferings, Mary and Joseph rose above it because of their trust in God. Trust was their strength in such uncertainty and apparent bleak hardship.

Then with the glorious birth of Jesus, their trying experiences were turned into joy and hope. There in that lowly stable a brilliant glory pierced the darkness with such a radiant light, that it illumined the entire world for all generations!

*"Holy Lord, Fair Dawn,  
You enlightened the whole world."*  
(from the Christmas Hoosoyo)

One of the messages of this mystery that seems fitting for the world's current upheavals is: Christ is our hope and in him alone we have joy. Let us join in with the spirit of this Maronite Qolo (Syriac hymn), and rejoice:

*"Throughout this day the creatures of heaven and earth celebrate the memory of your birth, and the Church sings you songs of praise and glory."*

Dear Friends and Family,

May this season of Holy Announcements be one of special blessings for you as we prepare to honor the Light of the World in our celebration of the Glorious Birth of Our Lord. Thank God, we have much to be grateful for.

Sister Therese Maria and I are looking forward to moving into the convent, God willing, in the coming weeks. We are thrilled! And we can't wait to share our home with all of you. The Mother of the Light Convent will allow us to host retreats and spiritual gatherings for our beloved friends of Maronite parishes across the country. But we need help in getting there.

We recognize these are challenging times for many families including our own Maronite Servants community. We appreciate whatever support you're able to contribute. Please know we are good stewards and we wouldn't ask for help if it wasn't badly needed. Unfortunately, our operating budget is already in the red due to unforeseen circumstances beyond our control.

During this time of giving, I humbly ask that you consider adding us to your Christmas list. Your tax deductible donation can be offered using the envelope attached or via our online PayPal option on our website. Thank you. Opening our convent is costly but the gifts it will offer are priceless.

From our home to yours, Merry Christmas. God Bless you.

In Mary, Mother of the Light, *Sister Marla Marie*



In September, we gave a spiritual teaching to the teens of Our Lady of Lebanon, Washington DC





## Maronite Patriarch's Visit to the US

The Maronite Patriarch, His Beatitude Bechara Peter Rai— the head of the largest Catholic patriarchal church – made his inaugural visit to the United States from Lebanon October 4 to 23, 2011.

We were blessed to meet with the Patriarch on October 18 and 19 when we gathered with fifty parishioners to welcome his plane at the New Bedford (MA) airport. Afterwards, at the request of His Excellency, Bishop Gregory Mansour, we joined a small group of clergy for lunch with the Patriarch. That same evening a beautiful Divine Liturgy was celebrated by His Beatitude and many clergy at St. Anthony of the Desert parish in Fall River (MA), followed by a banquet. At all these events we had the opportunity to listen to the Patriarch and to speak with him and with Archbishop Paul Sayah, Patriarchal Vicar General. His Beatitude encouraged us in our mission as Maronite Servants and extended an invitation for us to come to Lebanon.

The Maronite Church is the largest of the six Eastern Catholic patriarchal churches, with an estimated 3.3 million faithful around the world and in full communion with the Holy See in Rome. There are 45 bishops throughout the world, two eparchies (Dioceses) here in the United States. His Beatitude's full title as Patriarch of Antioch and All the East reflects the responsibility he has for the Maronite Church in Lebanon and the Middle East, and from this perspective he serves as a principal of unity for Catholics of the Middle East.

## Radiating His Light at the Institute of Religious Life Meeting - Boston

By Sr. Therese Maria Touma

On Saturday November 11th we attended the Institute of Religious Life (IRL) Regional Meeting at the Basilica of Perpetual Help, Boston, M.A. This year's meeting was titled, Sacred Liturgy and the Consecrated Life. The day of recollection included three spiritual talks, Divine Liturgy, adoration and benediction.

One of the talks titled *The Holy Mysteries: the Eucharist as the Radiant Light for the Consecrated Life* was presented by Sister Marla Marie. In her reflective presentation, Sister highlighted the beauty of our Maronite Church within the Eastern Catholic Churches, sharing some of our Maronite spirituality, theology, icons and music utilizing power point slides for illustrations.

The second part of Sister Marla Marie's presentation explained the *Holy Mysteries* by taking three rituals in the Divine Liturgy and relating them to the life of the consecrated persons. Sister discussed the ritual of the Lighting, the symbolism of Incensing, and the prayer of the Transfer of Offerings.

Sister Marla Marie referenced Church Documents such as *Vita Consecrata* (Consecrated Life) to help emphasize her point of how we can enter more deeply into the Mystery of the Eucharist, so that it can become who we are to others.

Some highlights that stood out for me were the beautiful prayers that were shared visually and vocally from the Divine Liturgy, while Syriac music played in the background. Another highlight was the symbolism of the incense used in the Liturgy. We as Religious are to be that pleasing aroma ascending to God as we offer up our daily prayer, worship and sacrifices. As consecrated men and women, we are called to lay down our life as a living incense.

In reference to the prayer of the Transfer of Offerings, Sister Marla Marie shared that we are to model Mary's receptivity in receiving The Word, Jesus in her heart and body. We are to receive Jesus into ourselves so that we can be fruitful in radiating his light to others.

The Institute on Religious Life (IRL) promotes and supports the growth, development, and renewal of the consecrated life—particularly vowed religious life—as a gift to the Church and an evangelical witness to the world. We include and engage bishops, clergy, religious, consecrated and lay faithful in a collaborative apostolate of prayer and service, guided by the magisterial teachings and rich heritage of the Church. More information at: [www.religiouslife.com](http://www.religiouslife.com)



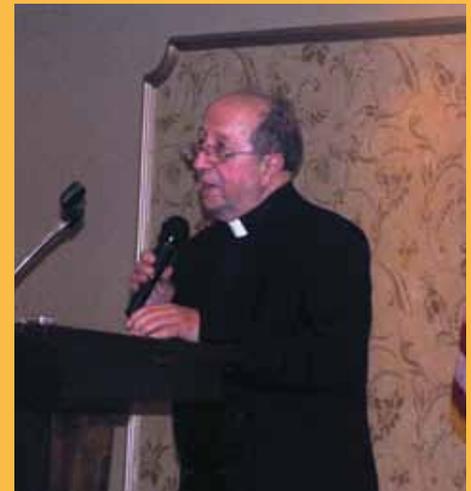
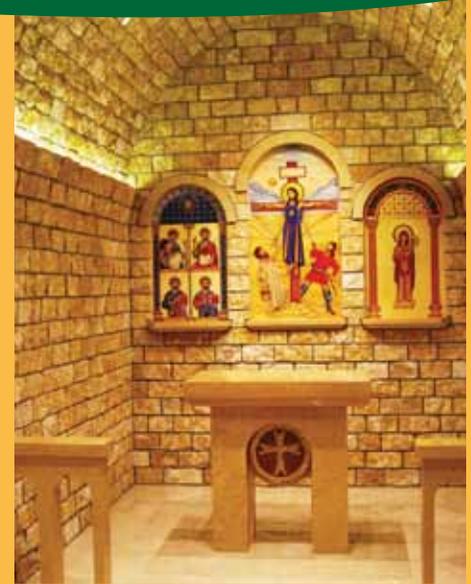
## 'Desiring His Light' – Reflecting on My Retreat

By Sister Therese Maria Touma, Maronite Servant Novice

I have just concluded my six day silent retreat. The theme of this year's retreat was "Desiring His Light" and under the direction of Mother Marla Marie, I was given online conferences by the late Fr. John A. Hardon, S.J. on selected Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola. This was a blessed time for me to receive new graces: to thank the Lord for the great things He has done in my life and will continue to do, to progress in self-knowledge, and just be still and know that the Lord is here with me, loving me, in His Word, in the Eucharist, in the Mystery of Penance and in the beautiful nature surrounding me (here in Dighton).

I enjoyed this precious time of retreat, and through spending more time with the Holy Scriptures, my desire to live Jesus' light and beatitudes, and to love Him whole heartedly have intensified. In listening to the invaluable conferences I was enlightened in many ways. In particular, I came to appreciate more deeply how my religious vocation is not a gift just for myself and for my own holiness but for the salvation and sanctification of others. I am called by God to be a channel of grace, to reach out to others by using my gifts and talents to build up His Kingdom of love here and now. I am to be a witness of Christ's love, mercy, healing and joy, and to put others in direct contact with His warmth and light. What an awesome privilege and responsibility!

As Maronite Servants of Christ the Light we take six to eight days for silent retreat each year, and monthly we have recollection days (we call them Hermit Days) where the sisters spend the day in solitude and prayerful reflection following an annual theme. Overall my days of retreat were well-balanced and structured with scheduled conferences, meditations on Scripture, reflective walks, Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, spiritual direction and sharing, daily Divine Liturgy and Divine Praises, fasting, video clips on the life of Christ, and creative art. I am grateful for all the time, love, and attention Mother Marla Marie put into preparing and facilitating this retreat for me. May I with the grace of God generously live out the fruits of this retreat.



## Maronite Celebrations Washington, DC

We were able to attend the dedication of the new Maronite Chapel of Our Lady of Lebanon at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception on Friday, September 23, 2011. Also, Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Seminary, Washington, D.C., celebrated its 50th Anniversary that evening, along with the 50th anniversary of the ordination to the priesthood of Seminary's Rector, Chorbishop Seely Beggiani. The combined celebrations were beautiful.



# Pray for Vocations

We daily offer a special prayer daily for vocations asking for an increase to our *Maronite Servants of Christ the Light* community.

We also pray for our bishops, priests, deacons, sub-deacons and seminarians. Every day we select one of our clergy and dedicate a day of prayer and sacrifices for their vocation. Please consider being a Vocations Prayer Angel and join us in this daily intention.

Also, a group of families at Our Lady of Lebanon parish in Washington, D.C. have responded to the Holy Fathers' request to be "spiritual mothers" to priests by committing to pray for a specific priest on a daily basis. More on this program will be detailed in our next newsletter, as we hope to promote spiritual motherhood for priests.

## ON THE WEB

Check our blog updated every Friday. Visit our website for a copy of this newsletter. Also, find Maronite Servants on Facebook, Twitter, & LinkedIn.

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