



THE MARONITE CATHOLIC CHURCH



THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Before He suffered His passion and death, Jesus prayed that his followers would be known by their love (John 13:35). “See how they love one another,” the early Church Father, Tertullian, heard it said of the first Christians. Today, the Gospel of Christ has reached the four corners of the world. Christians went forth from Jerusalem and encountered different traditions, cultures, customs and languages and the Church became a communion of Churches united in love with each other, looking to the See of Peter in Rome as the first among them.

Jesus also prayed for unity, “that they all may be one” (John 17:21). Today there are Catholic, Orthodox and Protestants who pray and work for this desired unity. However, for Catholics united with the Pope in Rome, there is already an amazing unity even within the reality of cultural diversity. The Catholic Church, comprised of 21 Eastern Churches and 1 Western Church, is a communion of Churches, with the Pope as the visible head, “gathered in the one spirit, breathing as though with two lungs - of the east and of the west - and burning with the love of Christ in one heart - having two ventricles.” (*Sacri Canones*; Pope John Paul II)

One of the Eastern Catholic Churches is the Maronite Church. She has her own hierarchy composed of a Patriarch who is her father and head, and over fifty Bishops who shepherd the many Eparchies (Dioceses) in Lebanon, the Middle East and throughout the world. The Patriarch governs the Church in a synodal manner with his body of bishops as is customary in Eastern Churches.



THE EASTERN CATHOLIC CHURCHES

There are six major traditions of the Catholic Church:

- Alexandrian
- Antiochene
- Armenian
- Chaldean
- Constantinopolitan (Byzantine)
- Latin (Roman)



Each Catholic Church practices a common faith according to one of the six major traditions. The Maronite Church follows the Antiochene Tradition.

All Churches within the communion of Catholic Churches share the same:

- Dogmatic Faith
- Seven Mysteries (Sacraments)
- Moral Teachings
- Unity with the Pope of Rome

All Catholics believe the same truths of the faith yet worship differently. One could say they share the same essence of faith, but a different expression. Each Church embraces its own culture and tradition to express Her faith in Jesus the Risen Lord.

Each of the Catholic Churches:

- Encompasses a unique liturgy, theology, spirituality and discipline;
- Is characterized by its own cultural and linguistic tradition;
- Is guided by a Patriarch, Major Archbishop, Metropolitan or other Hierarchy, who along with their Synod of Bishops are in full communion with the Pope, the Successor of Saint Peter in Rome.

THE MARONITE CHURCH

The Maronite Church dates back to the early Christians of Antioch where “they were called Christians for the first time” (Acts 11:26). Along with the vernacular, she still uses as her liturgical language, Syriac, a dialect of the Aramaic that Jesus Himself spoke, and takes her name from the hermit-priest, Saint Maron, who died in 410 AD.

Within a few years after Saint Maron’s death, over 800 monks and the faithful they served became known as the “House of Maron” or Maronites. Later, the Muslim invasions (7th-10th Centuries), coupled with conflicts from within the Byzantine Empire, caused the Maronites to flee from the plains of Syria, to the natural protection of the mountains of Lebanon where they first lived in caves and grottos, and then later built small churches and monasteries.

By 687, Maronites, who were both missionaries and monks, led by Saint John Maron, whom they elected Patriarch of the vacant See of Antioch, and thus developed as a distinct Church within the Catholic Church.

The Maronite Church has been enriched by three centers of learning and culture:

- Antioch

A city in West Syria (now Turkey) that served as a center of commerce and education and was known for its Greek and Syriac culture. Antioch gave the Maronite Church much of her unique liturgical life.

- Edessa

A prominent city in ancient Mesopotamia, which had a Semitic culture and influenced the prayers and hymns of the Maronite Church. It was also the home of Saint Ephrem, Doctor of the Church, who gave the Maronite Church much of her poetry and hymns.

- Lebanon

The land that provided a safe haven to establish a stable monastic and parish life, as well as schools to educate the children of the close knit and devout Maronite families. Maronites have been and continue to be a positive force for good in the development of Lebanon as a country of peaceful coexistence for all people.

Maronites now live in many nations and among many cultures. The Mother Church is in Lebanon, and daughter communities exist throughout the world.



FIVE DISTINGUISHING MARKS OF THE MARONITE CHURCH

The Maronite Patriarchal Assembly (2003-2004), made up of over 500 Maronite participants – clergy, religious and laity from throughout the world, described the identity of the Maronite Church by five distinguishing marks:

First and foremost Maronites are Antiochene – where Christ’s followers “were called Christians for the first time” (Acts 11:26). Maronites share an historical, liturgical and spiritual heritage with all the other Catholic and Orthodox Antiochene Churches.

Maronites are also heirs of Syriac cultural and religious heritage, whose language, poetry, and hymnody were the means used to express the mystery that God is beyond all descriptions yet has come close to us in Christ.

Second, Maronites are Chalcedonian, meaning they were staunch supporters of the Council of Chalcedon, convened in 451 A.D., which taught that Jesus was true God and true man. In this formula Maronites found a balance, and way of life that placed them forever in the communion of the universal Church.

Third, the Maronite Church is a Patriarchal and Monastic Church. Saint Maron was a hermit-priest. The first Maronites were monks, priests and laity associated with the monasteries of Saint Maron in the 5th - 8th centuries. Maronites have a cherished history known for an ascetical life of sacrifice and devotion.

Fourth, the Maronite Church is known for Her love and devotion to the See of Peter in Rome. This relationship has allowed Maronites to fully express the Catholic faith held from the beginning, and at the same time be part of the balance between East and West.

Fifth, the Maronite Church is tied to Lebanon, Her spiritual homeland and the land of Her Patriarch and people. Maronites take great pride in the joint accomplishment of the Muslim-Christian co-existence, which today we call Lebanon.

THE MARONITE CHURCH AT A GLANCE

The command of Jesus continues to find partial fulfillment in the missionary work of the Maronite Church: “Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature.” (Mk 16:15) Today there are millions of Maronite Catholics throughout the world. The Patriarch, in communion with the Pope of Rome, resides in Bkerke, Lebanon, with a summer residence in Dimane.

Patriarchal See: Bkerke, Lebanon

Eparchies: Argentina
 Australia
 Brazil
 Canada
 Cyprus
 Egypt and Sudan
 Europe
 Holy Land and Jordan
 Lebanon (13)
 Mexico
 Syria (3)
 United States (2)

Exarchates: West Africa
 Colombia

Seminaries: Ain Saade, Ghazir and Karm Sadde in Lebanon; Washington, DC in the United States and a new Seminary in Mexico. We also have the Maronite College in Rome for student priests. Maronite religious orders and communities have houses of formation in Rome and in Lebanon.

The United States is home to two Maronite Eparchies with over 90 parishes and missions, along with a Seminary, two Monasteries, two Convents, and a Shrine to Our Lady of Lebanon.



MONKS, RELIGIOUS AND CONSECRATED LIFE

Religious life, in all its forms, was and still is an important part of the Maronite Church. Hermetic and communal monastic life accompanied the birth of the Maronite Church from the beginning, thus linking the history of the Church to the monks of the Monastery of Saint Maron.

Toward the end of the seventeenth century, religious life became more organized, new orders were founded and their mission expanded.

Monks, nuns and religious priests and brothers serve in schools, universities, hospitals, parishes, missions, orphanages, and nursing homes in Lebanon, the Middle East, and many places throughout the world.

Today there are five religious orders and congregations for men and nine for women numbering hundreds of religious. Some are of Pontifical right, some Patriarchal and some are Eparchial, which means they are dependent upon the Pope, Patriarch or Eparchial Bishop respectively. Each order and congregation has its own rule of life and focuses on living the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience according to the charism of their founders.



THEOLOGY, SPIRITUALITY AND LITURGY

A monastic spirit permeates Maronite prayer and liturgical life making asceticism and sacrifice an important part of the relationship with God. The effects of this spirituality are seen in the Maronite family, the first school of love where each finds his or her own vocation to love God and serve others.

Prayer is a relationship with God, so to pray is to live and to live is to pray. Prayer enables us to become pure vessels for God's purpose and temples for His divinity.

Since all language about God is limited by finite human nature, poetry, especially in liturgy, is the preferred means of expressing the proper awe and humble reverence due to God in worship.

In the Maronite Church, the celebration of the Eucharist is known by several names: Qurbono (Syriac), Quddas (Arabic), Sacrifice of the Mass, Divine Liturgy, and the Service of the Holy Mysteries.

In this celebration, Christ is offered to the Father as our salvation and we also offer ourselves, with Him, as a spiritual sacrifice. By the invocation of the Holy Spirit, and the actions and words of the priest, bread and wine are transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ, the sacrifice at the altar is made holy, and so are we.

Before the Holy Mysteries are celebrated, the priest and people prepare themselves. The priest, deacon or subdeacon prepares the bread and wine on a side altar. The Hymn of light is chanted as the candles are lit.

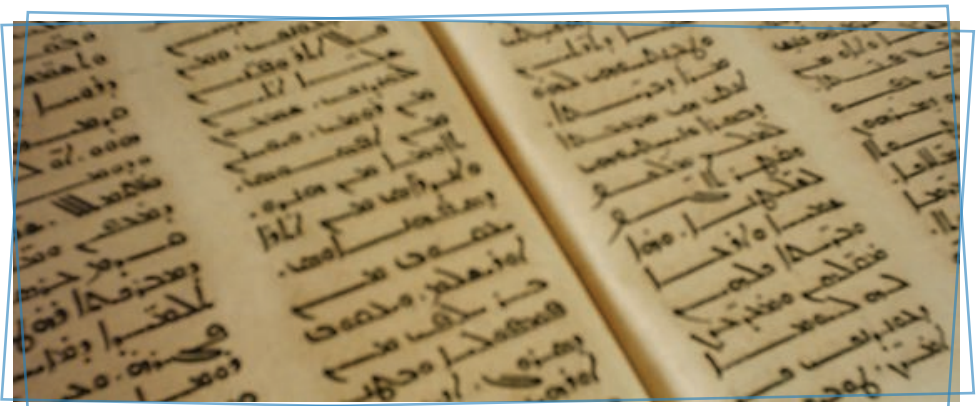
The Service of the Holy Mysteries begins, first with the Service of the Word, then the Service of the Eucharist (Anaphora).

Service of the Word

The Service of the Word stems from the ancient Jewish Synagogue service. Hymns, psalms, the burning of incense, Scripture readings and a homily comprise this service.

A unique feature in the Service of the Word in the Maronite Church is the Hoosoyo or Prayer of Forgiveness. During this time the priest or deacon incenses the altar and the faithful as a prayer is recited or chanted, recalling God's mercy to sinful man in times past, and asking His mercy again for today. The Trisagion (Qadishat) is then chanted in Syriac, followed by three verses of psalms and poetry referring to the feast. Then a passage reading from the New Testament is read and the Gospel is proclaimed.

The structure of the Service of the Word remains the same for every Divine Liturgy but the prayers themselves change to reflect the feast. These prayers serve as great catechetical texts. The entire purpose of the Service of the Word is to lead up to and reflect on the Gospel of the day.



Service of the Eucharist

After the Profession of Faith, the Eucharistic prayer or Anaphora begins. The bread and wine are processed to the main altar where the priest prepares to offer the sacrifice. He prays for God's pardon for himself and those with him. He offers the gifts, prays for the needs of the people and then extends to them a sign of peace from the altar. Peace is exchanged from the altar without words by a simple gesture of hands open to receive and then to give to the person next to them. It takes place before the sacrifice is offered in keeping with Jesus' words recorded in the Gospel of Matthew:

"Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift." (Mt 5:23-24)

Then, a prayer of praise to the Holy Trinity is offered and the Eucharistic narrative of the Last Supper is chanted in Syriac. During this time, by the word of the priest and the invocation of the Holy Spirit which follows, the bread and wine are transformed into the Sacred Mysteries: the Body and Blood of Christ. The people sing Kyrie Eleison (Lord have mercy), and the consecratory part of the Anaphora is complete.

The intercessions for the intentions of the Church and world are then offered. This is followed by the Breaking of the Bread and the Elevation as the people stand.

The “Our Father” is prayed with hands extended. A prayer of forgiveness follows as people bow before the Sacred Mysteries. They are then invited to communion with the words: “Holy gifts for the holy”. The Sacred Mysteries are then offered to the faithful who receive the Body and Blood of Christ on the tongue by intinction.

Prayers of thanksgiving are followed by the last blessing. The final prayer of the Anaphora is one of farewell to the altar. The priest prays silently, “Remain in Peace Holy Altar of God, I hope to return to you in peace...I know not whether I will return to you again to offer sacrifice.” By this special prayer the priest is reminded of his own mortality and just how sacred divine communion actually is.



The Liturgical Year

During the year, the different seasons celebrate the moments of the saving plan of Christ, following every aspect of His life and ministry. The Liturgical Year begins on the first Sunday of November with a consecration and rededication of the Church.

The Seasons are:

Glorious Birth

Epiphany

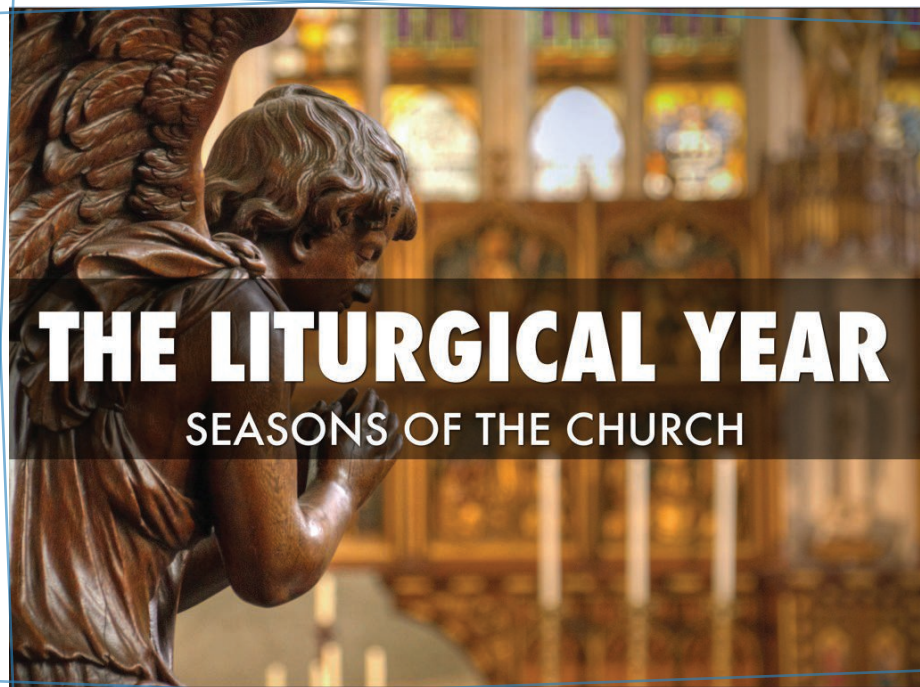
Lent

Holy Week

Resurrection

Pentecost

Holy Cross



The faithful are invited during each liturgical celebration to conform their lives to that of Christ and His Church.

MUSIC AND ART

The core of the present day Divine Liturgy dates back to before the 5th century. The monastic spirit of asceticism and simplicity penetrates the entire Divine Liturgy - its prayers, gestures, music, art and architecture.

The purpose of Maronite art, music and ritual is worship of God and repentance from a life of self-centeredness to a life centered on God. In the words of the 10th century Syriac monk Rabban Isho, when told of the beautiful ceremonies and music of other churches, he said: “unless it brings one to repentance, what good is it?”

Music animates the words of the prayers and serves as a teaching tool and memory aid. Saint Ephrem, James of Serugh and others greatly influenced the ancient simple chant traditions still used today.



Syriac art, the oldest source being the Rabbula Gospel Book (560 AD), portrays human figures, and manifests them with divine mystery. The great churches of ancient Syria were beautifully adorned. Today, however, they are in ruins. The small chapels and monasteries of the mountains of Lebanon, with their arches, ceilings, walls of hand-cut stone, and their modest wall paintings, became the heirs of this artistic tradition.

RITUALS

Earthly things take on a spiritual significance during special feasts and rituals during the liturgical year. Water, for instance, is blessed in various ways to give it a spiritual meaning.

At Epiphany water is blessed with a lighted coal to signify the fire of the Spirit Who entered the Jordan River at Christ's baptism.

At Pentecost water is blessed with the priest's breath to signify the Divine Breath over the waters at creation and at the first Pentecost.

At the Holy Cross water is blessed with a hand cross to signify the divine power that flows from the saving cross.



FUNERAL RITUAL

Prayers of the funeral liturgy (Ginnaz) take place in the home or the funeral parlor, the Church and finally the cemetery. These prayers are chanted in Syriac, Arabic and English to enable the faithful, the deceased and all in the 'communion of saints', to enter into a dialogue with God. The departed are remembered as they make their way home.



Death, the end of our earthly pilgrimage, is the beginning of a passage from life in this world to life in the next. The Mother of God, our Patroness in both worlds, is beseeched to offer safe passage for the departed as they begin their journey home.

MARY

The Maronite Church has always been a Marian Church. From the beginning, Maronites have claimed a special devotion to the Mother of God. In the small villages, homes, mountains, hills and streets of Lebanon are found shrines of all types to Our Lady. Hymns, feast days and the liturgical life of the Maronite Church clearly express this great devotion to the Mother of Our Lord.

The common weekday Divine Liturgy for Wednesday honors Mary:

“O beautiful Lily and fragrant Rose,
The fragrance of your holiness has filled the whole universe.

Pray for us, that we may become the sweet fragrance of Christ that spreads throughout the world.”

Our Lady of Lebanon, pray for us, and enable your Maronite Church to be an everlasting gift for the universal Church and for the world.



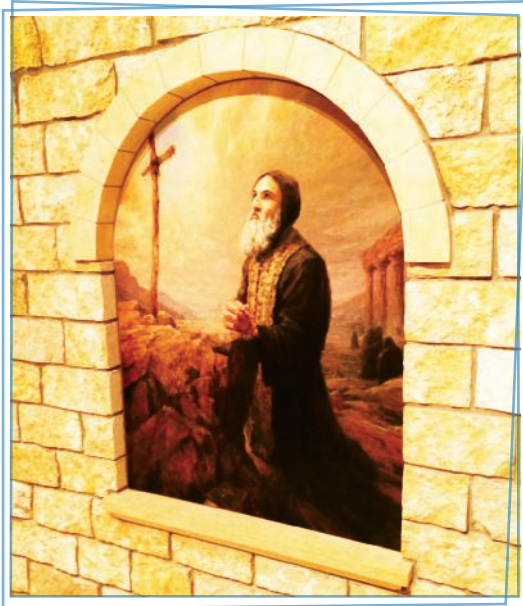
PRAYERS

Prayer to Protect the Family

○ Lord you extended your right hand and blessed the children who came to you. You imposed your right hand on your disciples: first in the Upper Room, then on the Mount of Olives.

Now, ○ Lord,
extend your all-merciful right hand and bless our family. Shield us day and night against the power of evil. Forgive our sins and transgressions. Keep away from us all temptation and all that afflicts body and soul, that we may praise you, now and forever. Amen.

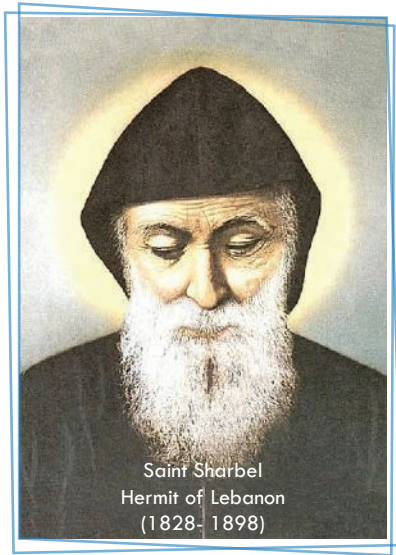




Prayer to Saint Maron

Lord God,
you called your chosen one, Saint Maron, to the priesthood and the monastic life. You perfected him in divine virtues, and guided him along the difficult road to the heavenly kingdom. We ask you, through his intercession, to immerse us in your love that we may walk on your path, observe your commandments, and follow your footsteps. May his holy example resonate throughout our lives. With your love, may we achieve that final destination reached by our father, Saint Maron, your heavenly kingdom. Through his intercession, may we attain the glory of the resurrection and everlasting life in you. We raise glory and thanks to you, to your blessed Father, and to your living Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

(adapted from the prayer for the 1600th Jubilee of the death of Saint Maron)



Prayer to Saint Sharbel

○ Merciful Father, through the Holy Spirit, you chose Saint Sharbel as a voice crying out in the wilderness. His monastic life is an example to your Church. In the Scriptures he discovered your Holiness as Word Made Flesh, and darkness gave way to light. In the Eucharist he encountered your Divinity as Bread of Life, and the poverty of this world gave way to the treasures of your Kingdom. In prayer he experienced your silence as Mystery Present, and loneliness gave way to communion. Through the Virgin Mother he embraced your Son as Lover of Mankind, and hostility gave way to hospitality. We now beseech you, through his intercession, to change our hearts of stone to hearts of flesh and to grant our special request. We give praise to you, to your Only Begotten Son, and to your Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

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+Bishop Gregory John Mansour,

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Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn

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Prayer to Saint Rafka

○ Jesus Christ, our Lord and God, you impressed Saint Rafka's life so much that she became the teacher, the worker, the praying nun and your partner in the Mystery of Redemption.

We ask you, through Saint Rafka's intercession and prayers, to bless the children; enlighten the youth; transform people's hard work and sufferings into blessings; grant graces of recovery, joy and happiness to the sick and respond to the prayers of those gathered in Your name in churches and monasteries.

○ Lord as you graced Saint Rafka with the blessing of eternal life, allow us to live like her in faith, hope and love that we may glorify you and thank you with her, the Virgin Mary, and all the saints, forever. Amen.



Prayer to Saint Nemtallah Al Hardini

O Jesus, you called your holy priest Saint Nemtallah to forsake the world and live a life of prayer and penance in a monastery. You filled him with your grace, which allowed him to follow you on the path of holiness; carrying his cross with joy day by day, through which he was sanctified. We beseech you, O Lord, through his prayer, grant our requests that we may faithfully imitate his goodness on earth. We thank you and glorify you together with the most blessed Virgin Mary our mother, to whom Saint Nemtallah was most devoted, and all the angels and saints in heaven, now and forever. Amen.

Prayer for Fostering Vocations to the Priesthood

Blessed be God, the Father, who chose shepherds after his own heart; Blessed be the beloved Son, who entrusted the Service of the Holy Mysteries to them; Blessed be the Holy Life-Giving Spirit, who sanctifies their offerings.

O Heavenly Father, we pray for an increase in vocations to the priesthood and religious life for the service of your holy people. We ask you to send laborers into the vineyard. Your faithfulness is unconditional and you accompany your Church and invite us to cooperate in your plan of salvation. May we contribute to creating and preserving conditions in which the good seed, sown by your Holy Spirit, can take root and bring forth abundant fruit in us. We petition you, O Christ our Lord, to enlighten the paths of those considering a call to priesthood, and religious life, and bring them close to you, so that their calling may become a pure sacrifice for the glory of God. To you be glory, and upon us your mercy, now and forever. Amen.



Morning Prayer

Our Lord and Creator, we adore you at all times, especially now when you have awakened us from sleep, that we might praise you.

May we stand at your right hand on your great dawn, to receive the life of happiness.

And with joyful hearts we shall raise glory to you, now and for ever. Amen.

(adapted from the Morning Prayer for Monday)



Prayer at Bed Time *(from the Sotooro prayer just before sleep)*

O Lord, as you rested on your cross you cried out:

“Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.”

We, therefore, commend our spirits into your hands, O Lord, tonight and all the days of our lives, but especially at the hour of our death, represented now by our sleep.

To you we abandon our bodies, thoughts, feelings and all that we are.

Keep us without stain that our sleep may glorify you. At the end of our days, may a peaceful sleep carry us to you, who neither slumbers nor sleeps. To you be glory, for ever. Amen.



For more information on the Maronite Church in the United States please write the Eparchy of Saint Maron at 109 Remsen Street, Brooklyn, NY 11201; www.stmaron.org ; or the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon, Pastoral Center, 1021 South 10th Street, St. Louis, MO 63104; www.usamaronite.org For information on the Maronite Church worldwide please log on to the official website of the Maronite Patriarch: www.bkerke.org.lb

Nihil obstat:

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EPARCHY OF SAINT MARON OF BROOKLYN

