

Day 29

PILGRIMAGE OF GRACE

LITURGICAL RITE



East & West: The Church's Two Lungs

Pope St. John Paul II often said that the Church has two lungs—East and West—and it must learn to breathe using both of them. Remembering saints like Sharbel helps the Church to appreciate both the diversity and unity present in the Catholic Church. Like all the saints, Sharbel points us to God and invites us to cooperate generously with God's grace, no matter what our situation in life may be.



Saint Sharbel Makhlouf's Story (from Fransiscan Media)

Although this saint never traveled far from the Lebanese village of Beka-Kafra where he was born, his influence has spread widely.

Joseph Zaroun Maklouf was raised by an uncle because his father, a mule driver, died when Joseph was only three. At the age of 23, Joseph joined the Monastery of St. Maron at Annaya, Lebanon, and took the name Sharbel in honor of a second-century martyr. He professed his final vows in 1853, and was ordained six years later.

Following the example of the fifth-century Saint Maron, Sharbel lived as a hermit from 1875, until his death. His reputation for holiness prompted people to seek him to receive a blessing and to be remembered in his prayers. He followed a strict fast and was very devoted to the Blessed Sacrament. When his superiors occasionally asked him to administer the sacraments to nearby villages, Sharbel did so gladly.

He died in the late afternoon on Christmas Eve. Christians and non-Christians soon a place of pilgrimage and of cures. Pope Paul VI beatified Sharbel in 1965, and canonized him 12 years later.



The Maronites (from the Eparchy of St. Maron of Canada)

The Maronite Liturgy

The Maronite Liturgy is the original liturgy which developed in Antioch in Aramaic right after the time of the Apostles. This early liturgy was ascribed to St James the Less, the first Bishop of Jerusalem, and was enriched by the hymns and prayers of St Ephrem, James of Sarug and other Fathers of the Antiochian see. The Maronites share this same heritage with the Chaldeans, Syrian Catholics, the Malabarese and Malankarese of India.

Fully Catholic

Maronites are full, recognized members of the Catholic Church. They stand in union with the pope and are recognized by the Vatican. They celebrate the same sacraments and profess the same apostolic faith as all Roman Catholics across the world. Maronites can fulfill their Sunday obligations in any Roman Catholic church, and any Catholic can do likewise in a Maronite church. Maronites do, however, have their own unique theology, spirituality, liturgy and code of canon law.

Language

The native language of the Maronites, like that of Jesus Christ, was Aramaic. The Maronites were isolated from the larger church for hundreds of years, and were only "discovered" when Crusaders entered Lebanon. Therefore, the Latinization of the church largely bypassed the Maronites, leaving them intertwined with Aramaic culture and dialect. They maintained it as their spoken language until Mount Lebanon was conquered by the Arabs at the beginning of the 14th century. Just as traditional Catholics revere the Latin tongue, Aramaic is a sacred part of Maronite religious history and is still used in some church ceremonies and songs.

Liturgy

The early Maronites were the direct descendants of the people who received Christianity from the Apostle Peter, who became the church's first bishop after founding it at Antioch. The Divine Liturgy of the Mass celebrated by the Maronites can be traced to Antioch, where "the disciples were called Christians first." (Acts 11:26). The Antioch Liturgy still exists in the Maronite rite, blended with part of the ancient liturgy of the Old Testament. For instance, at the Consecration, the priest tips the chalice in all four directions, symbolizing that Christ shed his blood for the entire Universe, which mirrors the tradition of sprinkling the four corners of the altar with the blood of the sacrificial lamb.

Saints

The Maronites feel a special kinship with three saints in particular. Saint Rafka was a nun who entered the Lebanese Maronite Order and lived and worked at the Convent of St. Simon. St. Sharbel lived for 16 years at the St. Maron Monastery in Lebanon, but then became a hermit for the rest of his life after being called to solitude by God. St. Nimatullah Al-Hardini was a Lebanese priest who spent most of his life in monastic solitude. His feast day is celebrated by Maronites on Dec. 14.

Spiritual Themes

The Maronite liturgy celebrates the Eucharist in the expectation of the coming of the Lord. The Maronites, in their Liturgy, are intensely aware that we are not actually in the glory of the Lord and in the plenitude of His Redemption- that we are awaiting it. On the other hand, they realize in faith that this Sacrament is really rahbouno, a pledge of the glory to come, and zouodo, a viaticum which transforms a person into a pilgrim on the way to his home, "the house of the heavenly Father." Maronite liturgy, therefore, emphasizes the necessity of purification before the return of Jesus Christ. It follows closely the sentiments of the early Christians who were awaiting the Second Coming of the Lord.

The Structure of the Maronite Mass

The Maronite Mass, like any other Mass, includes the Service of the Word, and the Service of the Holy Mysteries (the Eucharist). It can be celebrated by any number of priests at the Altar together. The bread and wine are prepared by the celebrant right before Mass on a side-table. At every mass, incense is used to purify and sanctify the people and gifts as they are offered to the Lord. The Service of the Word always has two readings: from St. Paul and the Gospel. There are two lecterns: one for the Epistle, and one for the Gospel, used only by the priest or deacon. This part is led by the priest standing by the side of the Altar... The Major part of the Liturgy of the Eucharist is called the Anaphora (equivalent to the 'Eucharistic Prayer' in the Latin Rite)... at present there is a choice of six Anaphoras...

Baptism and Confirmation

Baptism in the Maronite Rite is always accompanied by Chrismation (Confirmation). Both Sacraments are given by a priest, and always in the same ceremony. Baptism is done by immersion or by pouring water over the head.

