

His Beatitude Patriarch Nasrallah Peter Cardinal Sfeir
Homily at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Lebanon
Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel
Sunday, July 16, 2006

*Bishop Gregory,
Bishops Roland and Youssef,
Monsignor Sadek,
Monsignor Thomas,
Father Younes,
clergy, religious and laity,
priests and beloved faithful of the Cathedral of Our Lady of Lebanon,*

On this Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, we gather in the Cathedral of Our Lady of Lebanon. Both Mt. Carmel and Lebanon are places of devotion to Mary, Mother of Our Lord, and are found in the East – the place where our Lord Himself and Mary lived and walked. Many Maronites have a special devotion to both and wear the scapular of Our Lady of Mt Carmel.

It is also from this East that I come to share, as St. Paul says, “so that we may be mutually strengthened in Christ.”

The message of Our Lady at Carmel and her message to us today are the same: Consecrate yourselves to God. Give yourselves completely to God. As our beloved Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI says, by giving ourselves to Christ we lose nothing and gain everything. This is Mary’s hope for us.

These days have been tragic for us in Lebanon. It seems that the world has lost its peacemakers. It is more desirable to fight and wage war, than to make peace.

Mary, however, is a true peacemaker. She, like St. Charbel, whose feast we shall soon celebrate, brings together Christian and Muslim in devotion. Though seen differently in both religions, Mary, like the One and in whose image she was created, is one. There is one God, one Lord Jesus, and one Mary - seen differently, but nonetheless one.

It is to her intercession that we turn to in difficult times for Lebanon, the Middle East and the World. We turn, Christian and Muslim alike, to her loving care when we have need in our family, our marriages, our homes, our society, our country of Lebanon and our world.

The Maronite Patriarchs throughout the centuries have always taken Mary as their special protectress to save them from hardships, Yannouh, Qonnobin, Dimane, and Bkerke are all named after her.

In Lebanon Mary stands at the Bay of Jouneih in Harissa to welcome all visitors. She likewise looks to bless those who emigrate in search for a new home. On every mountain of Lebanon she is enshrined as a sentinel to protect her neighbors. In the new lands where her name is honored she is still the help of Christians, our protectress, and our hope.

Mary too has a special role as a guide for those who govern. We pray that she will help them do what is right for their countries, to be in the service of others, to work for peace and justice, not just to satisfy their own special interests, but rather to serve the common good.

We pray for Lebanon, the Land of Our Lady, so that he may regain peace, dignity, independence and his role as a message of conviviality.

By Mary’s love at the Cross of her Son, she bears witness to a suffering yet hopeful love, a love stronger than death, stronger than difficulties, a love that endures every hardship and breaks down barriers between peoples. This is a love for Christians and Muslims, for believers and non-believers. It is her witness to this consuming love of God that makes her a worthy model for us to live and die for Christ and to bear witness to Him in Lebanon, the Middle East, and the entire world.

In these difficult times in which we live, O faithful people, seek the help and prayer of Mary and the Saints. Bear witness to Christ where you live. May the prayer of Our Lady of Mount Carmel and Our Lady of Lebanon be with us all.