

**His Beatitude Patriarch Nasrallah Peter Cardinal Sfeir**  
**Talk at a Private Dinner**  
**At**  
**Bishop Gregory Mansour's Residence**  
**Friday , July 14, 2006**

*Your Eminence: Cardinal Egan, Cardinal Rigali, Cardinal Dulles*  
*Your Excellencies: Bishop Di Marzio, Bishop Elect Caggiano, Bishop Batakian*  
*Monsignors Stern and Faris,*  
*Priests from the Maronite, Melkite, Syriac and Latin Churches*

I want to thank each of you for coming this evening to this informal gathering designed especially to strengthen us in soul and body for our common Catholic work with our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI. I am, indeed, grateful to my brother Bishop Gregory Mansour for hosting this informal encounter and giving us the opportunity to see all of you.

May I also express my gratitude and that of my brother Maronite Bishops in U.S.A. for your fruitful collaboration with the Maronite hierarchy in the United States over these past 40 years. This is the reason for my pastoral visit, to give God thanks for the Maronite Church's presence in the United States.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank Cardinal Egan. He has always been so gracious to me personally. Also I thank him and Monsignors Stern and Faris at CNEWA for their gracious assistance to the Churches of the Middle East. I also take this opportunity to mention my own personal hope to one day see Cardinal Cooke among the rank of the blessed and the Saints.

I want to thank Cardinal Rigali for his visits to Lebanon and for his constant solicitude for the Christians of the Middle East.

I thank Cardinal Dulles for his presence last year at the honorary doctorate granted to me by Fordham University and for his keen interest in Lebanon.

In the difficult times in which we live in Lebanon and the Middle East we have the special challenge and grace to witness to Christ wherever we are, and in particular to witness to His crucified love, which our Holy Father describes in his first encyclical as that "agape", unconditional love that knows no limits. This love overcomes every selfish and proud pretension that separates us from God and from one another. This love gives meaning to our lives as priests and bishops. This love is the source and the goal of our Christian lives.

We ask this day the intercession and prayer of the Mother of God, Mary known to us as Our Lady of Lebanon, to strengthen us especially in Lebanon these days, so that we may witness to her Son, Jesus Christ, and to live His love in the world in which He has placed us.

Thank you for gathering this evening, and may our Blessed Mother strengthen us along with our Holy Father in our Catholic Faith.