

Speech at Banquet in Brooklyn Saturday, July 15, 2006

Bishop Gregory Mansour

Bishops Roland Aboujaoude and Youssef Bechara

Chorbishop Michael Thomas, Monsignor Ignace Sadek, Fr Jean Younes, Fr Sami Aboudie, representing Bishop Bustrus, beloved priests, deacons and religious here present,

Parishioners and Friends of the Cathedral of Our Lady of Lebanon

Mr Mohommad El Harake, Mr. Antoine Azzam, Ms. Caroline Ziade,

Representatives from the New York City Mayor and Brooklyn Borough President's Offices,

Mrs Jeannine Pierro,

Civic dignitaries and invited guests

Journalists from Lebanon and the United States,

Faithful people of God and friends.

I have come to the United States at the invitation of Bishops Robert Shaheen and Gregory Mansour to give thanks for the 40 years since the establishment of a Maronite Hierarchy here, in the person of Archbishop Francis M. Zayek. Thanks to his untiring efforts and the collaboration of those who worked closely with him, Bishops Chedid, Doueihy and Shaheen, we have now two eparchies with solid foundation and all that is needed for a bright future.

Can I overlook my brother Bishop Gregory, who gave me the opportunity to see all of you and who unceasingly has been working for you? Indeed, much can be accomplished when bishops, clergy, religious and laity work harmoniously together with the grace of the Holy Spirit.

I cannot help but recognize this particular parish in Brooklyn, N.Y.; it is the Cathedral and Mother Church of the Eparchy. I want to acknowledge the great contribution it has made and I know will continue to make as an active and faithful parish of the Eparchy. It is like a loving mother who opens wide her arms to welcome at the seashore all newcomers from Lebanon, to guide them and to help them. I congratulate you on your attachment to the Patriarchal See in Lebanon and to the needs of your brothers and sisters there.

These have been tragic days for Lebanon. We were hoping that the National Dialogue would produce positive resolutions to some of Lebanon's many problems. But added to these unresolved issues we now have a major regional crisis that is once again playing out in our land. We condemn all acts of violence and war, and we suffer for and with all the victims. We say once again that it is time for the Lebanese Government to enforce peace in the entire territory of Lebanon.

I have just issued a statement to your brothers and sisters in Lebanon telling them of your concern and solidarity.

The late Pope John Paul II has called Lebanon "more than a country, a message", that is, a message of conviviality. Lebanon is proud of its cultural and religious heritage and holds in respect the contribution that each of its communities offers. These communities are also called religious families, which despite differences in opinions and political positions among them, try to live in unity and love.

It is in the name of this love that I come to you today. It is the same love for which our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ came into this world, and for which he lived and died on the cross. My brothers and sisters, St. Paul said, "I preach to you Christ, and Him crucified". This is why the Church exists and this is why the Christians of Lebanon and the Middle East continue to give witness to this truth in the East and now in the new countries in which they find themselves. This has been also the destiny of our Maronite Church and her faithful throughout the years. Our martyrs and saints are but living witnesses to this.

My faithful people of Lebanon and the United States stand firm in your faith with courage and determination. Stand firm and rely on God, for He will not abandon us.