

Homily for the 50th Anniversary of the presence of a Maronite Bishop in the United States
Romans 12:1-8, Gospel of John 17:11-21

Today for us is the Feast of Sarkis and Bakhos, also in the Latin Church, the Feast of the Holy Rosary. I want to also say Happy Anniversary Chorbishop Joseph Kaddo for 44 years of Priesthood today!

Your Eminence
Brother Bishops
Beloved Priests, Deacons and Subdeacons
Consecrated Men and Women,
Order of Saint Sharbel, Members of NAM,
Brothers and Sisters in Christ

I would like to reflect with you this evening on the meaning of consecration.

This past week my cousin Mike died. For sixty-five years his life was lived in a fragile body. It began with his difficult breach birth; a set of forceps used in 1961 left him without the use of his legs and a deep curvature in his back. His life was spent between crutches and wheelchairs. He learned to swim, and for a brief time felt free, but he spent the last twenty years in nursing care, with very good and gracious care givers. From our many visits over the years I knew that cousin Mike offered his body, in all its imperfections, as "a living sacrifice pleasing to God", sometimes questioning why, but mostly offering. Saint Paul asks in the first reading from the Letter to the Romans:

"I urge you therefore, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship. Do not conform yourselves to this age, but be transformed; by the renewal of your minds so that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good, pleasing and perfect".
(Romans 12:1-2)

The expression "offer it up" is really a beautiful expression, mostly for our small sufferings. But in reality it is an invitation for us to give to God what is truly his. Our life is his gift, our imperfect bodies, his gift. We offer back to him the same, but with love.

Today in the Gospel of Saint John we read the beautiful passage of our Lord Jesus asking his Father to consecrate his disciples as he has consecrated himself to his Father, and to make them one, as he and the Father are one.

The noble desire of our Lord is to make us more and more like himself: one with the Father, sent into the world, and set apart for a divine mission. This reminds us of the same desire Archbishop Francis M. Zayek had when at the age of forty-six he was sent as the first Maronite Bishop to the United States.

Born in Cuba, raised in Lebanon, educated in Rome, sent as Auxiliary Bishop to Brazil in 1961, this Missionary Bishop was then appointed by Pope Paul VI to the United States. He was quite worried that he may not succeed in his divine mission. He was small and the mission was so great! He thus consecrated himself, and the entire People of God entrusted to his care, to our Lord through his Blessed Mother. He gave back to God what was already his, and asked God to care for his flock as her own True Shepherd.

Altars, Churches, Chalices, Religious Men and Women, and Bishops are consecrated. They are permanently set aside, for God's purpose. They are from the time of consecration, God's own. A blessing is one thing, but a consecration is another; it is permanent.

With this permanent character in mind Pope John Paul II consecrated himself to our Lord through our Lady. On his Papal coat of arms only the letter "M" for Mary was written, along with the words Totus Tuus, which in Latin are the words used by Saint Louis de Montfort to say to Mary "all is yours" .

This consecration to Our Lord, through Our Lady, which we too will make in a few minutes, says clearly that all that we do, are, and hope for, is yours O God. With Mary we say 'let it be done to me according to your word". Our lives are consecrated to him: like my cousin Mike, who did his best to offer himself, like Archbishop Zayek, who consecrated himself and us to God, and like our Blessed Mother, who offered her very self, body and soul to God.

During the last fifty years God has blessed his Church of Saint Maron here in the United States with new parishes and missions, vocations to the priesthood, diaconate and religious life, and with a good increase in spiritual maturity and generosity. We have stood with amazing solidarity and support for our suffering brothers and sisters of the Middle East, yet we have so much more to do.

What will the next fifty years be like? We will only know if we do as cousin Mike, Archbishop Zayek, and Our Lady did, and generously consecrate ourselves to our Lord. So, let us now make our consecration and pray:

O Mary, renew today in your hands, O Immaculate Mother, the vows of my Baptism. I repent of all my sins. I renounce Satan, all his ways, and all his worldly pomp. I resolve to follow Christ more closely than ever before.

O Mary, I give you my heart. Set it aflame with love.

May I share our Lord's great thirst for love and his passion for the good of others. Make my heart as your most pure heart, that I may love our Lord and the members of his Body, the Church, with your own perfect love.

O Mary, I entrust myself totally to you: body and soul, possessions, both interior and exterior, the value of any good that I do, and the use of my time right up to my last days. Make of me and of all that I am and possess, whatever pleases you. Let me be a fit instrument in your hands for the greatest possible glory to God.

If I fall, lead me back to your Son. Wash me in the blood and water that flow from his pierced side. Help me when I feel discouraged to not lose trust in his fountain of love and mercy.

With you, O Immaculate Mother, who always do the will of the Father, I unite myself to the perfect consecration of Jesus as He offers Himself in the Spirit to His Father for the life of the world.

To Him be Glory forever!

Amen!