

Tuesday: 8th Week of Pentecost  
NAM Convention-San Francisco, California  
July 5, 2016

"Because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs" (Luke 11:8 )

Your Excellencies,  
Beloved Priests, Deacons, Subdeacons, Religious, Monks and Nuns,  
Father John Nahal, Pastor  
The Honorable Johnny Ibrahim, Consul General of Lebanon  
Distinguished Guests,  
Mr. & Mrs. Joe and Carmen Maroun, Convention Chairpersons  
NAM Board Members,  
Dear Parishioners and Friends,

It is a great joy for me to join you at this Convention for the first time as Patriarch. This year marks the 50th Anniversary of the establishment of the exarchate of St. Maron, then 5 years later the Eparchy of St. Maron by the late Archbishop Francis Zayek. We give thanks to God for His blessings and for the growth our Maronite Church has experienced. I would like to thank my brother bishops Gregory and Elias for their kind invitation to join you and participate in the various activities of the Convention. I am grateful for the hospitality and hard work of Father John Nahal and the committee of Our Lady of Lebanon, host Parish, along with the efforts of the NAM officers and Board Members. Joining me on this trip is Archbishop Paul Sayah, my Vicar General and Attorney Walid Ghayad, head of media/communications at the Patriarchate.

In today's gospel, Luke 11: 5-8, Jesus Christ gives us a description of common hospitality in the Middle East at the time. In those days, there were no phones, no e-mails, no text messages. A guest would just drop by at any time and the host, out of courtesy, usually displayed the various details of hospitality: food, shelter and courtesy. It was very embarrassing to not be able to provide these services. It seems in the story that a friend had dropped by one night and the host did not have bread to feed his guest; the host went to his neighbor begging for bread in the middle of the night in order to take care of his guest. At first, the neighbor resists, but afterwards he gave in because of the persistence of the man.

We see in this parable a few lessons for our life:

1. **Hospitality:** It is a virtue. You accept the person, you welcome him/her, you care for him/her, you spend time with them and you give a small part of yourself to that person.

Hospitality is becoming less and less common in our own world. Everybody is busy with self, worries about self and only care about his/her own immediate family and close friends. However, Christ challenges us to look at each person in need (hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, stranger, incarcerated) the way we look at him. He identifies with them; he wants us to show our love and mercy to them. In that perspective, Pope Francis has called for a Jubilee Year of Mercy, to encourage us to seek God and to practice the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Let us make a special effort to take initiative to be hospitable

and to be merciful to others, especially those in need.

2. **Perseverance:** This parable comes in the context of praying without losing hope. In life, we want to get the best results with the least amount of effort, the most money in the fastest period of time. We live in a digital world and we get used to answers and solutions in record time. We apply the same concept to God. We feel God needs to answer us so quickly and to supply us all of our wants and needs. If not, we start questioning God, even accusing him of being deaf, being unconcerned about our situation. In reality, God knows us very well, better than we know ourselves, and He will provide us accordingly. Never lose hope in your relationship with God.

On the other hand, perseverance is necessary also in our ministry as priests, religious and lay people. We can never give up anytime we encounter a difficulty, anytime someone opposes us or rejects us, anytime we see people criticizing us, objecting to our teachings and ways. remember they have done that to Christ before us as well. He was misunderstood, rejected, criticized, judged, condemned, and even crucified. Yet he came out victorious.

Therefore, dear friends, in order to persevere in our ministry, we need to be persistent in our relationship with God. Let us never give up, never lose hope. God will always sustain us and He will be there for us always.

O Merciful Lord, help us to be hospitable, to care for the least of our brothers and sisters. May we always be strengthened with your grace working within us. Our Lady of Lebanon, pray for us. Amen.