

Bishop Gregory Mansour's Welcome Speech to Patriarch Bechara Peter Cardinal Rai during his visit to the Eparchy of Saint Maron

Welcome Patriarch Bechara Peter Cardinal Rai

I have the joy of welcoming a Shepherd, a Good Shepherd.

Even my most difficult days as shepherd of the flock entrusted to me, are nothing compared to that of the shepherds of the Middle East. For over three years, Archbishops Boulos Yazigi (Antiochian Orthodox) and Yohanna Ibrahim (Syriac Orthodox) have been missing. They were kidnapped near Aleppo, and still we do not know if they are dead or alive. Their only "offense" was that they were tending the flock entrusted to them.

A week ago a man dressed as a priest arrived in Qamishli, Syria, at the 101st commemoration of the "Sayfo", the Syriac name given to the Ottoman genocide of Syriac, Armenian and Assyrian Christians. He was stopped at the door; there he detonated his suicide vest killing himself and several others. His goal was to reach the Syriac Orthodox Patriarch, Ignatius Aphrem Karim.

Scores of bishops, priests and religious have been killed, kidnaped and tortured by those who hate. But there is something that those who hate do not understand. The shepherds of the Middle East cannot be frightened. They cannot be defeated by terror or threats. They are the Good Shepherds, of whom Jesus predicted would come after him; they are the ones who like him, lay down their lives for their flock. Our Maronite Patriarch is one of those Good Shepherds. He cannot be frightened nor will he run at the approach of wolf. With gratitude and deepest respect we welcome the Father and Head of the Maronite Church, Patriarch Bechara Peter Cardinal Rai.

+ Gregory John Mansour  
Bishop of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn