

Homily at Saint John Maron Church, Williamsville, N.Y., on June 23, 2016

Bishop Gregory,
Archbishop Paul,
Chorbishop Michael,
Father Elie,
Dear Priests, Deacons, and Religious,
Parishioners and Friends of Saint Maron Church,
Brothers and sisters in Christ,

"Discern the signs of the times" (Mt. 16,3)

I am very happy to visit you, upon the kind invitation of my Brother Bishop Gregory. I thank him for the organization of this visit with his Vicar General Mgr. Michael Thomas. I visit you with Bishop Paul Sayah, my Vicar General, and Attorney Walid Ghayad, head of the media office in the Patriarchate, and with Deacon Simon Nader who came with us from Lebanon. We bring you warm greetings from Lebanon, the spiritual home of the Maronites, along with the hopes and concerns of our peoples in the Middle East, who are passing through historical and very delicate circumstances. For them all we ask for your prayers and support.

This parish of Saint John Maron has a rich history and the parishioners have been known to be good Maronites. The zeal of your current Pastor, and his commitment to serve you is guiding you in the footsteps of those who have gone before you. It is also good to see so many priests and people from surrounding parishes on this occasion of my pastoral visit to you.

In today's Gospel, the Lord Jesus reminds us that we must read the "signs of the time". That time, is the time for mercy, a Jubilee Year for mercy! Showing mercy to everyone we come in contact with is sincerely good for all of us. How amazing is God who calls us to be his children, even though we are unworthy, and despite all things, forgives us. Pope Francis himself often refers to himself as a sinner who has received mercy. He says he has been called to do something special for God. This is also true for each of us. Our meeting with Christ in prayer, in the celebration of the Sacraments, in love of neighbor or help of the poor, makes us true Christians.

The Gospel of today is taken from Saint Matthew, a tax collector who was once devoted to a self-centered way of life, stealing and over taxing people. Then he met Christ and he was never the same. He changed his way of life and went from tax-collector to Apostle. Of the "Signs of the Times" now a days, the conflicts in the countries of the Middle East, where the language of war, destruction and hatred as well as that of violence, terror and displacement of people predominates, and where human rights and the value of the human person no longer exist. Those Signs show forth the importance of the presence of the Church and Christians in that part of the world, which needs badly to hear the language of the Gospel, the language of love, peace and brotherhood, the language of human rights and the sanctity of life. Those signs reminds us, we the Christians of that region, where Christ showed forth the glory of God, where the Church was born and where Christ gave his Gospel to the world, that we are entrusted with the Gospel, the Good News of joy for all peoples. The signs of our times clearly show that our world needs Apostles of mercy. We are those Apostles called to spread love and forgiveness in a world filled with the hate and vengeance. May God show us his Divine mercy as we show mercy toward each other.