

Introduction of Patriarch Nasrallah Peter Sfeir in Lawrence, Massachusetts
by Bishop Gregory J. Mansour

The past 20 years our Maronite Catholic Church has been lead by an extra ordinary man. Before becoming Patriarch, he spent another twenty years behind the scenes assisting Patriarchs Meouchi and Khorieche. Patriarch Sfeir is basically a monk and Bkerke has been his monastery. He lives, prays, serves and leads as a monk. He is steady, practical, intelligent, faithful, relying totally on God. He represents the best of what the Maronite Church, her prayer and way of life is all about.

He is not a political man; nonetheless he is unafraid of speaking the truth, to ruffle feathers, to speak out for the cause of justice. He has stood before the most powerful, and been a friend to the lowly. He is strong with the strong, humble with the meek, astute with the crooked

Where he lives in today's Lebanon, is deeply troubled. It is also deeply divided. It is not easy to explain these divisions as Christian-Muslim, Shiite-Sunni, Political party against political party, Israel and Arabs. The problem facing Lebanon today, and the region as a whole, is the same everywhere: "every man for himself." This is the sin of selfishness. No one can think of the other.

Patriarch Sfeir has repeatedly warned against this kind of a world and has suffered because of it. Lebanon suffers, the world suffers. Patriarch Sfeir suffers. We hope, pray and pledge to redouble our efforts to work for a just solution to Lebanon and our world's many problems.

Patriarch Sfeir is a bridge builder. Thus he is feared by some, resented by some, loved by many (those of us who know him well) and yet respected by all. On the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Diocese of Saint Maron, U.S.A., and on the 20th anniversary of his election to be Patriarch, Bishop Robert Shaheen and I have invited Patriarch Sfeir to visit our Annual Maronite (N.A.M.) Convention held in Chicago and a few of our parishes. Lawrence, and her Pastor, Monsignor Peter Fahed Azar, is one of these visits...and a beautiful one I may add.

His visit here has not disappointed us. Like Peter and Paul, the Apostles before him, our Patriarch has strengthened, challenged and encouraged us. For this we thank him and thank God. I hope and pray that the Maronite Church throughout the world, as well as every citizen and friend of Lebanon, will come to respect and love the priest, monk, bishop, Cardinal, and Patriarch who is Nasrallah Peter Sfeir and follow his wise guidance. Many say we respect the Patriarch, but when he says something they do not like, they reject his wisdom.

Let us pray for him and for his mission for Lebanon and the Church throughout the world, and let us pledge anew our obedience and willingness to serve the Church and our world under his leadership.

Please join me in welcoming His Eminence and Beatitude, Nasrallah Peter Cardinal Sfeir, Patriarch of Antioch and All the East.

Bishop Gregory J. Mansour
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