

Homily of Patriarch Bechara Peter Cardinal Rai at
Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral
Brooklyn, NY
October 29, 2017

“When the Son of Man comes, he will sit on his throne in judgment” (Matt 25).

We are in the last Sunday of the Season of the Holy Cross, a Season of the “last things” (eschatology). We celebrate today the Sunday of Christ the King, who will come again to judge the living and the dead. By judging everyone on the acts of charity he will ask how we cared for those who are hungry, thirsty, naked, a stranger, the sick and imprisoned, in the spiritual and in the moral sense. Jesus tells us that the road to God and to our eternal salvation, is social love.

We are happy to celebrate this liturgy with you at Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral at the kind invitation of Bishop Gregory. In the Eparchy of Saint Maron, we have visited Washington, Boston, and now Brooklyn. Before coming to Washington we visited parishes in the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon: Detroit, Salt Lake City, Las Vegas, and San Diego.

I wish to greet all present here:

- Archbishop Benedito Auza, The Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations
- Bishop Paul Sayah, my Vicar General
- Bishop Cyril Bustros, Archbishop of Beirut, Lebanon
- Bishop Yousif Habash, The Syriac Catholic Eparchy of Our Lady of Deliverance
- Reverend Clergy here present and Religious Sisters
- Ambassador Carla Jazzar
- Ambassador Nawwaf Salam
- Ambassador Caroline Ziade
- Ambassador Antonio Andari
- Consul General Majdi Ramadan
- Representatives from the University of the Holy Spirit in Kaslik
- Representatives from the Maronite Foundation in the World
- Representatives from In Defense of Christians

We lived two important occasions during this visit. First, the 4th *Annual In Defense of Christians* (IDC) Summit in Washington, DC, October 24-26. We focused there on the importance of the presence of Christians in the Middle East. Christians are the guardians

of the roots of Christianity, and the guarantee of co-existence between Christians and Muslims in moderation, cooperation, and the exchange of culture and civilization.

We also raised our voices, calling upon the international community and the United States to do all that is possible to end the wars and strife in Middle East by means of diplomatic and political efforts, the strengthening of permanent and global peace, and the return of all displaced and refugees to their countries, especially those now living in Lebanon.

In 1948, Lebanon received Palestinian refugees who are now 500,000. Likewise, we received since 2011 many Syrian refugees, who are now 1.7 million, as well as thousands of Iraq refugees. We ask for their safe return to their country and to their dignity, to secure their civil rights, their culture and their history. Their number has become difficult for Lebanon with regard to Lebanon's economy, politics, security and societal good order.

The second event, after IDC, was yesterday: the consecration of the Shrine of Saint Sharbel at Saint Patrick Cathedral in New York City, which was offered by Mr. Antoun Sehnaoui. Many bishops and priests took part in that celebration, as well as many officials and faithful from Lebanon and the USA. We filled the Cathedral. Saint Sharbel attracted them through his special language, which he speaks to every heart, across every country, religion and ethnic group. He is now here in New York, and thus all through the United States, and Sharbel will be the permanent voice of the East, to the rulers and people of this nation, and to the international community, represented in the United Nations, which meets in this City.

The Gospel of today: On the last day we will be judged on love. Jesus tells us clearly in the Gospel today that he commissions us, each of us, and entrusts us to serve the hungry, thirsty and naked...

- We are in charge of the bread, education, service, and the Word of God. The *thirsty* long for water but also for love, justice and the grace of salvation. The *naked* need clothes, but also his dignity and self respect. The *stranger* is one living far outside his country, but also the stranger in his own home and society, and he needs respect, acceptance and understanding, which will take him out of his loneliness.
- The *sick* is the one who is suffering physically and emotionally, but also the one who is sick through his own pride, arrogance, selfishness and addiction to various evils. The *prisoner* is one who is behind bars, but also the one who is prisoner to his own devices and evil desires.

These are all persons we meet every day in our families, societies, Churches and in our countries. God put us in charge of caring for them. This witnessing to social love and mercy is at

the heart of the Gospel. May this love and mercy, which we share, be a permanent hymn of glory to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit now and forever, Amen.