

Final Communiqué

Maronite Bishops Synod – June 2010

His Beatitude and Eminence, Cardinal Nasrallah-Butros Sfeir, Patriarch of Antioch and the whole East, invited the Bishops of the Maronite Church in the patriarchal territory and those throughout the world to hold their yearly synod at the patriarchal See in Bekerkeh , from 6 to 12 June. The synod was headed by His Beatitude the Patriarch . They performed their spiritual retreat with the help of the Lord's Spirit and treated, in the light of His inspirations, local and general church matters. They concentrated upon prevailing national questions and looked down at the Church's actual situation and its future in the East.

This meeting takes place in the jubilee year commemorating the one thousand and six hundred years following the passage of their Church Patron, Saint Maron, to the Father's heavenly home, as well as in the Year for Priests and in the midst of the preparations for the special assembly of the Catholic Bishops Synod having for subject: "The Catholic Church in the Middle East, Communion and witness" . All these are occasions which make those concerned celebrate them to benefit from their spiritual dimensions. The congregants took, as centre of their meditations, the words of the Lord Jesus in his priestly prayer : "And I consecrate myself for them, so that they also may be consecrated in truth" (John 17/19). Father Malek Bou Tanos, Lebanese Missionary, was the retreat preacher. After having sought the inspiration of this word of life and treated, in its light, the raised questions, the Fathers issued the following communiqué :

1 – His Beatitude the Patriarch welcomed, following the morning prayer, the Synod Fathers, expressing his contentment about entering this retreat with them. He wished them to collect the spiritual and administrative fruits that are expected out of it.

2 – Within this frame, the Fathers applied themselves to study liturgical matters because of their importance in the Church life, being the best way to live faith and transmit it. It is necessary that the faithful understand them and discover their richness to build up their spiritual personality and witness their faith. They looked into the books projects prepared by the Patriarchal liturgical committee, specially the book of the daily hour prayers, the funeral of bishops and priests and the service of forgiveness which takes place on Holy Saturday and crowns the holy passion week with the spirit of penance and contrition leading the faithful to overcome sin with Christ in order to rise with him to the life of grace. The chairman of the committee put, at the disposal of the congregants, copies of the projects prepared to be printed. He opened the question of choosing church singers and readers for each parish. He also distributed a form to carry out a survey about various liturgical subjects.

3 – The Fathers were informed about the results of the last Patriarch's visit to Jordan to consecrate the parish church of Saint Sharbel in Amman and lay the cornerstone for the project of a new church and a world pastoral center near the place reserved for baptism, in the Jordan valley.

4 – Following this, the Fathers took care of the pastoral situation of their parishioners in the Arabic Gulf . They need an organized religious service, special church instance, parishes and churches which provide them with the opportunity to perform their spiritual obligations according to their rite. The Apostolic See took care of a side of this need, and under its supervision, a cooperation protocol is under study between the Patriarchate and the two Apostolic Vicars there, to enable our Church to play its role towards its children .

5 – Reports about the four Maronite seminaries were presented : Saint Maron (Ghazir), Saint Anthony of Padua (Karm Saddeh) , Saint Augustin (Ain Saadeh) , our Lady of Lebanon (Washington D.C.) and about the seminarian's education which today's world requires, so as it responds to different spiritual and pastoral needs in a multi-cultural world. It calls for further encounters around common values, developing ecumenical and inter religious dialogue and true values around which the family and the new generations meet.

6 – After having thanked God for his graces bestowed upon our Church, particularly the emerging of blessed and saints from among its sons and daughters, the latest one being Brother Steve Nehmeh , the Lebanese monk. He will be beatified on the 27 of current June. The subject of the martyrdom of the three Massabky martyrs was brought forward. Their martyrdom has been officially recognized by the Church. They can be considered as lay people, patrons of our Church faithful and completing the chain of our recent saints, which includes monks, nuns and a patriarch. This intended to spread their veneration in preparation to request their canonization.

7 – The Fathers stopped over the situation of Church tribunals and were handed a statistical report about the number of cases, their development, motives and other information. They noticed that the number of cases presented yearly is not diminishing as they had expected. This requires to exert extra pastoral endeavor to preserve family unity and requires from the faithful more sacrifice to bear some times the difficulties of common life. Then they recommended to increase the number of judges to settle the cases within the legal time limits, without delay.

8 – The Fathers were informed about the recent computerized system applied to administer Church properties in the Patriarchate . It allows to control the documents of the properties, their files and accounts according to most recent ways. His Beatitude invited the congregants to benefit from it in their eparchies. This was welcomed and praised by the Fathers. They dealt with various administrative and managerial matters, among which a retirement fund for priests and the ministering of some sacraments in religious shrines. They, also, were informed about the work of the center of documentation and research which has been offering welcomed services and is still following its activities according to its program.

9 – Reports were also presented by the Bishops throughout the world about their pastoral work in the countries which opened their doors before our sons and daughters in North and South America, Europe, Africa and Australia . The Fathers praised the activities of these eparchies and missions and declared it necessary to establish strong links between them and the Patriarchate. They also requested a

balanced distribution of priests to assure a larger and better pastoral work in many of these countries.

10- The Fathers dealt with the church preparatory organization for the participation in the works of the special assembly of the Bishops synod, for which His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI has called, which is to be held in Rome between 10 and 24 October 2010, under the title : “The Catholic Church in the Middle East: Communion and Witness” , “The community of believers was of one heart and mind” (Acts 4/ 32).

His Beatitude and the other Eastern Catholic Patriarchs received during the pastoral visit of the Sovereign Pontiff to Cyprus last week the work paper with which begins the direct preparatory phase of the synod in Rome ,.

The invitation to this synod is, for all those concerned and the public opinion, an occasion to peruse in the future of this East, cradle of civilizations and religions, and endeavor to preserve its variety, uniqueness and the living of its values in liberty.

11 – As for the prevailing stable situation, which tends towards the better, as the Fathers of the synod expect, it is hoped that it leads to a fixed state at the start of this promising Summer which will bring back a number of our citizens to spend some time with their relatives in the homeland. It will also bring over for the Summer holidays in Lebanon a number of its Arab visitors and others. This will help in activating the economy.

It is up to the State, its organizations and institutions to be more efficient and come out of the prevailing stumbling phase which delay the settling up of the budget, the appointments , to fill in some of the urgent vacancies in some posts and improve the understructure, step by step, with other public services.

The Fathers ask God, for the President of the country, its governors and authorities, to succeed in performing their national role, in cooperation and entente among them. They renew , on the occasion of the year for priests, their confidence in their sons the priests , appraise their services for the faithful, and prod them to giving more.

They pray Saint Maron, in his jubilee year, to preserve this East and its rich variety. They call upon their sons and daughters and all the citizens to look at the works of the Bishops Synod for the Christian presence in the East and share in its success with their prayers and expression of their opinion . They ask, for them and all, for God's blessing and graces.