



**Homily of His Eminence, Leonardo Cardinal Sandri, Prefect of the
Congregation for the Eastern Churches, during the celebration of the Divine
Liturgy in the Syro-Antiochian Maronite Rite, at the parish of St. Charbel.
Thursday 20 June 2019 A.D.**

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

1. We find ourselves celebrating the Eucharist on the day when the Catholic Church thanks the Lord precisely for the gift of the memorial of the Lord's Death and Resurrection, to which we are given access in the sacred signs that the Lord chose during the last supper with his disciples: the bread and wine that are transformed by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit into the Body and Blood of Christ. Around the table of the Lord, we feel in communion with the Holy Father, Francis, who has asked me to bring you his greeting and his blessing, with the Patriarch, His Beatitude Cardinal Bechara Boutros Rai, and with Bishop Abdallah Elias Zaidan, whom I met in Rome before his trip to Lebanon to attend the Synod. We raise a special prayer for Bishop Peter Karam, until a few days ago pastor in Cleveland and vicar for the clergy, elected Bishop of the Patriarchal Curia. We pray that he may carry out a fruitful ministry, bringing the richness of missionary experience lived in the United States and his training in Germany, into the context of the Lebanese motherland, so rich in history and sanctity, yet always needing to listen to what the Lord suggests to the Church His Bride. I cannot forget what I witnessed in May, when I participated in the funeral of the beloved Cardinal Nasrallah Boutros Sfeir, Patriarch emeritus, true son of the Land of the Cedars and courageous pastor of the flock entrusted to him during difficult years, which were full of challenges for the Church and for the nation.

2. Today's feast makes us aware that the Lord is present, walking with his Church and humanity throughout history, nourishing us with Himself to transform our existence so that it becomes "Eucharistic", living in perpetual thanksgiving. From a solely human point of view, each of us can decide each day how to look at our own life and that of the world. We decide whether to start by making a list of defects – usually those of others around us before our own; or to think of all the difficulties that we will have to face; or to be crushed by worry for the problems that fill our existence. Let us try to imagine all this at the level of an entire Church, for example the Maronite one. There is the need to maintain unity between the communities of Lebanon and those of the diaspora, which are now perhaps more numerous, with the risk on the one hand of insignificance amidst the other religious components of the Lebanese society and on the other hand of secularization in the new contexts abroad. Then there are the challenges of charity and hospitality that are part of the Christian's identity but that in their numerical proportions seem to us enormous – as in the case of the more than one million Syrian refugees remaining in the Land of the Cedars. We face too the difficulty of an authentic and purified testimony on the part of some priests or in some areas of ecclesial life where the exercise of power, the administration of goods, or that of justice in the courts can tempt some to seek their own affirmation and not the common good of all. Our existence and that of the entire Church every day would put us in a pessimistic position, resigned to walk along the roads of our existence, speaking certainly of things that concern the Lord, but with a spirit of resignation, because we would keep Him confined on the Cross and in the tomb. Christ, however, is the Living One, who joins us even in the moments of desolation when we are unable to feel His presence, and patiently goes back to explaining the Word and breaking His bread. Then the eyes of our hearts are healed and we ourselves return to being proclaimers and missionaries of the Gospel. We announce to ourselves and to our brothers and sisters that we are not alone amidst all the problems we have. In each of them the Lord continues to lead His Church. He is and remains forever the Living One, who defeated sin and death once and for all. We live in a new way, look at life with new eyes, let the mystery celebrated transform our life.

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3. If all this may seem too big or too idealistic, let me ask you a question: why do we continue to pray to the Virgin Mary? Why do we do novenas to St. Charbel or St. Rafka, why do we honor St. Rita of Cascia and many others so much? Perhaps because we think we get from them what we ourselves are not capable of? Perhaps yes, but the saints are not satisfied with having huge numbers of devotees, but wish that by looking at their example every day we can say our little YES to the Lord. The Virgin Mary and all of them in fact did not have a life made comfortable because God had chosen them for themselves. They did not have everything easy. Indeed, perhaps they had to face, even within the Church and among their brothers, many misunderstandings or oppositions. But they were exalted because they lived knowing that nothing and no one could tear them from friendship with the Lord, dead and risen for us. Like St. Charbel, patron of this beautiful Church and parish community, let us also light our lamp before the Eucharist, so that our life burns with the love of the Lord poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. Let us live as risen with Christ, as we are by virtue of the Baptism we have received. Let us transform our world together with the saints and thanks to their intercession in a Eucharistic way, starting to give thanks for all the wonders that God has worked and continues to work in the life of the Church and in each of us. Amen.