

Maronite bishop urges 'profound defiance' in face of persecution of Christians

by Catholic News Service
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Maronite bishop prays during Mass at New York cathedral for safety of Orthodox leaders kidnapped in Syria (CNS)

Bishop Mansour said that Jesus was not a 'passive victim'

Maronite Bishop Gregory Mansour of Brooklyn has told students at Belmont University students about the need for all Christians to respond to persecution with "profound defiance".

Pointing out that this was markedly different from vengeful retaliation or submissive inaction, Bishop Mansour said: "Jesus was not a passive victim. Christians are not just asked to be nice people and doormats."

He told the Belmont students that they are called to stand in solidarity with the persecuted Christians in the Middle East, and to join forces with other Christians, Jews and Muslims of goodwill to raise a voice against "the worst injustice you can imagine," that is currently happening at the hands of Islamic State militants.

Bishop Mansour spoke at Belmont as part of the Nashville university's "Chapel Speakers" series co-sponsored by the College of Theology and Christian Ministry.

"We try to bring in speakers from across the denomination spectrum," said Todd Lake, vice president for spiritual development at Belmont. "We are a multid denominational Christian university," said Lake, noting that about 15

percent of the student body is Catholic.

When Lake approached Nashville Bishop David Choby about his recommendation for someone who could speak on the plight of persecuted Christians in the Middle East, he suggested Bishop Mansour.

In addition to leading the Eparchy of St Maron of Brooklyn, Bishop Mansour is also a leader of Christian Arab and Middle Eastern Churches Together, based in Lebanon, where he was ordained a bishop in 2004. He did his graduate work at The Catholic University of America in Washington, Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome and at the University of California-Los Angeles in the Near Eastern languages and cultures program with an emphasis on Islamic studies.

The Maronite Catholic Church is one of the largest Eastern Catholic churches in the world, with more than 3.3 million members. Bishop Mansour's eparchy includes Maronite churches in 13 states in the eastern United States and the District of Columbia. There are currently no Maronite churches in Tennessee.

Bishop Mansour visited Syrian refugee camps in Lebanon, his ancestral homeland, over the summer, and saw firsthand the suffering of Christians and other minorities who have been violently forced from their homes.

Witnessing the refugees' plight was difficult, but visiting the region "made me proud to be a Christian," Bishop Mansour said, noting the hospitals, schools, and centers for the poor and disabled that Catholic groups continue to operate in the midst of the chaos.

Even though "Christians in the Middle East are under persecution from every side," he said, they "are the salt and light."

During his talk, Bishop Mansour noted the historical divisions among Christians, even within the Catholic Church, but said that "amazing unity is happening today."

Eastern Catholic patriarchs from around the world recently visited Iraq to show their solidarity with the persecuted Iraqis. Additionally, Bishop Mansour was part of a major In Defense of Christians summit in Washington in September that brought together nearly a thousand Christian leaders, politicians and laypeople to launch a massive effort on behalf of the minority communities of the Middle East.

In remarks at the summit and at Belmont, Bishop Mansour championed the art of nonviolent resistance, which he said worked for the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., Mahatma Gandhi and St John Paul II. This requires "much prayer, much fasting, much building of solidarity," he said.

"Peace is possible, but it takes a lot of hard work."

Courtesy of:

<http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/news/2014/10/31/maronite-bishop-urges-profound-defiance-in-face-of-persecution-of-christians/>

Maronite bishops: 'Christian presence in Middle East must be preserved'

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Maronite Catholic bishops pose for a photo during their June 13-17 annual synod at Bkerke, the patriarchal seat north of Beirut, Lebanon (CNS)

The bishops released a statement at the conclusion of their synod in which they rejected a partitioning of the Middle East

Maronite Catholic bishops from around the world warned against plans to partition the Middle East and urged Christians to stand firm and to preserve co-existence with Muslims.

In a statement at the conclusion of their June 13-17 synod, the bishops stressed the importance of continuing the presence of Maronite Catholics in Lebanon and the region.

Particularly after reviewing the situation of Maronite bishops in Syrian eparchies in Damascus, Aleppo and Latakia, the prelates resisted "all international plans" for partitioning the region and called instead to

preserve “living together, Christians and Muslims, in a climate of freedom, democracy and respect for diversity.”

They decried the suffering of the Syrian people, especially in recent months due to the worsening war and the deterioration of the economy and the national currency stressing that “poverty has become universal.”

The bishops pointed out that in Aleppo, people are suffering from “a scarcity of (the) necessities of life, such as water, electricity and food, and the demolition of homes and the loss of life-taking, in addition to thousands of dead and wounded, widows and the displaced.”

Lebanon borders Syria, and the bishops called on the international community to support Lebanon with financial support “to provide adequate assistance” to Lebanon’s two million displaced – most of whom are Syrians – and “to work seriously for their early return to their country.”

The bishops repeated their demand for the election of a president for Lebanon. The country’s institutional system, based on the National Pact of 1943, provides that the office of the president be occupied by a Maronite Catholic.

“The bishops discussed the presidential vacancy that continues for more than two years and called upon deputies and political factions to explain frankly about the real reasons that prevent a head of state election,” said the statement.

The bishops also emphasised “the negative impact of the presidential vacuum on political, security, economic and social levels,” as well as the disruption of constitutional and administrative institutions.

Deploping the deteriorating economic and social conditions of the Lebanese and the growing number of those living below the poverty line, they called on officials “to develop a rescue plan that promotes the country’s economy.” They also praised “the tremendous efforts” of the Lebanese army and security forces in maintaining security and civil peace and the protection of citizens.

The bishops commended the efforts of parishes in marital reconciliation and marriage preparation. They also announced Maronite World Youth Day in Lebanon on July 15-23, under the theme “Be Strong and Courageous.”

The synod, presided by Cardinal Bechara Rai, Maronite patriarch, took place at the patriarchal seat of Bkerke, north of Beirut. It was preceded by a spiritual retreat

Courtesy of:

<http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/news/2016/06/21/maronite-bishops-christian-presence-in-middle-east-must-be-preserved/>

Saint Charbel