



SAINT ANTHONY MARONITE CHURCH

A Parish Family of the Eparchy of St. Maron of Brooklyn, NY

كنيسة مار أنطونيوس المارونية

Sunday, November 12, 2017

الأحد، 12 تشرين الثاني 2017

145 Amesbury St * Lawrence, MA 01841

Phone: 978.685.7233 * Fax: 978.688.4475

email: rectory@stanthonylawrence.org * Website: www.stanthonylawrence.org

OFFICE HOURS

M-TH: 9 AM - 4PM

Friday: Office is Closed

Saturdays: By Appointment

LITURGIES

Daily Liturgies:

M & W: 9 AM

T & TH: 7 PM

Weekend Liturgies:

Saturday

Vigil Liturgy @ 4 PM

Sunday Liturgies:

8:30 AM - Arabic

9:30 AM - English

11:30 AM - English & Arabic

HOLY DAYS OF OBLIGATION

Vigil Liturgy @ 7 PM

Feast Day @ 9 AM

Sacraments of

Baptism & Confirmation

1 month in advance with the Pastor

Sacrament of Matrimony

Couples should make arrangements
six months prior to the wedding date

Sacrament of

Reconciliation

One hour Before Thursday &

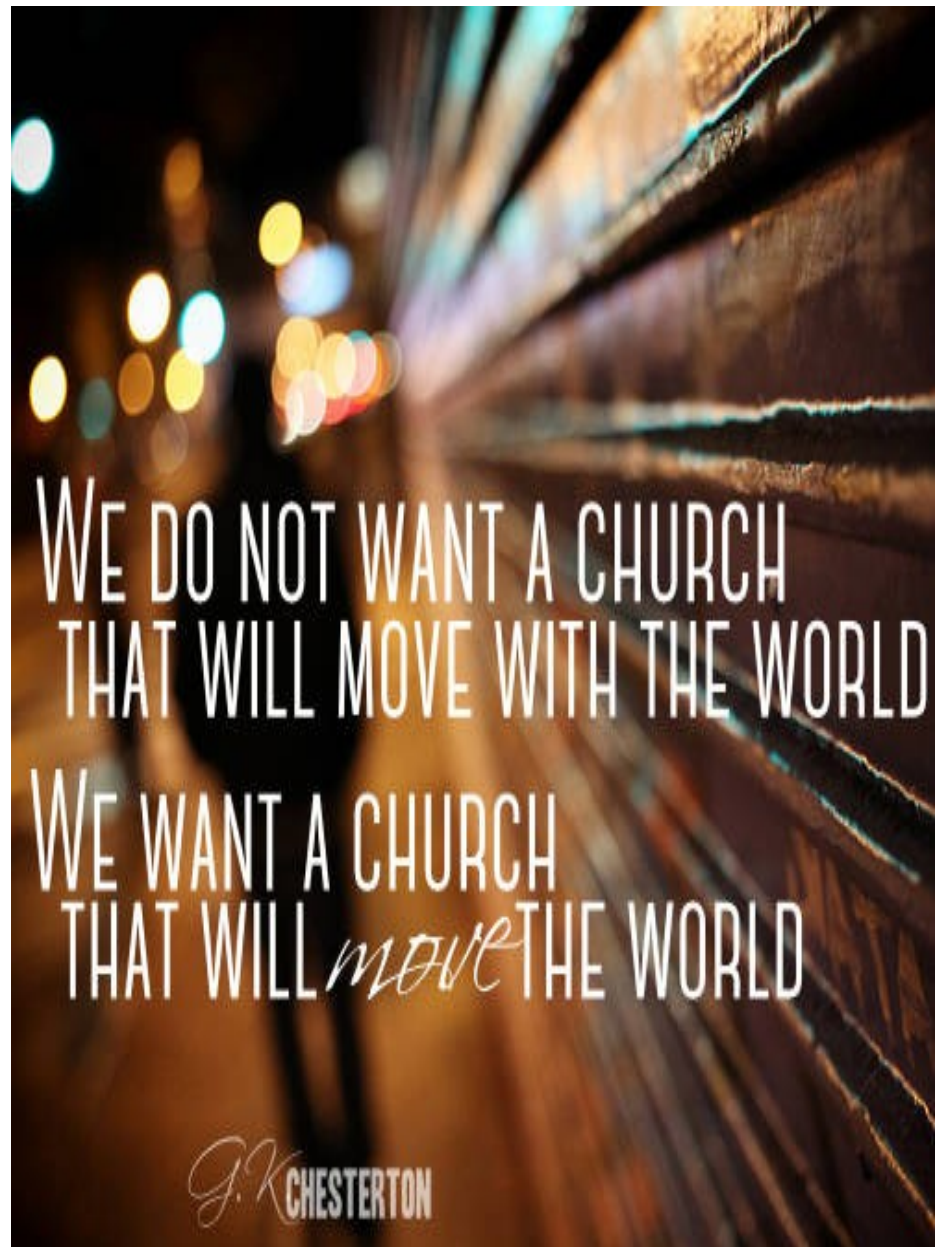
Saturday Liturgies,

or by appointment

Anointing of the Sick

Please notify the Rectory if a
member of your family is ill,
hospitalized, or unable to come to
Church and would like to receive
communion at home

OPENING OF LITURGICAL YEAR



WE DO NOT WANT A CHURCH
THAT WILL MOVE WITH THE WORLD

WE WANT A CHURCH
THAT WILL *MOVE* THE WORLD

G.K. CHESTERTON

Please refer to our website for more
Sacrament Celebrations Guidelines

Facebook: Saint Anthony Maronite Church Lawrence, MA



Meet our staff:

Clergy

Father Elie Mikhael, Pastor
pastor@stanthonylawrence.org

Father Joseph Abisaad,
Parochial Vicar

Phone: 978-685-7233

Emergency Contact:

Fr. Elie Mikhael
 305.807.9087

Fr. Joseph Abi Saad
 978.457.5889

Sub-Deacon James T. Demers
Sub-Deacon Nadim B. Daou

Secretary:

Mrs. Susan Fuccillo
 978.685-7233

rectory@stanthonylawrence.org

Parish Ministries

- ♦ Religious Education
ccd@stanthonylawrence.org
- ♦ Publishing: Bulletin
bulletin@stanthonylawrence.org
- ♦ Choirs (English, Arabic & Syriac)
 - ♦ Kids Choir
 - ♦ Knights of the Altar
 - ♦ Knights of Mary
 - ♦ Maronite Youth : MYO
 - ♦ Maronite Young Adults
 (Coming Soon)
 - ♦ Bereavement Ministry
 - ♦ Cenacle of the Rosary
 (Thursdays @ 6PM)
 - ♦ Cenacle of Divine Mercy
 (Sundays Before the Liturgies)
 - ♦ Sacristan (s)

OPENING OF THE NEW LITURGICAL YEAR

Liturgies Intentions

SUNDAY OF THE RENEWAL OF THE CHURCH

أحد تجديد ألبية

Saturday, November 11	4:00 PM	For Good Health of Maryann Hatem by the Pastor
Sunday, November 12	8:30AM	For the Fallen Victims of the shooting in Sutherland Springs, TX.
	9:30AM	For: + Ibrahim and Saide Kassas, By their son, George, Kassas, and Family.
	11:30 AM	For: + Maroun Mouawad, By his wife, Habouba, his children and their family.

Week of Renewal of Church

أسبوع تجديد ألبية

Monday, November 13 @ 9 AM	For+ the souls of Catherine and Geoffrey O'Connell, By their loving daughter.
Tuesday, November 14 @ 7 PM <i>St. Philip, Ap</i>	<i>Private Intentions.</i> 7 PM Bible Study-English
Wednesday, November 15 9AM	<i>In Honor of the newly born baby,</i> <i>Mia Grace Ata, By the Pastor</i> 7 PM Bible Study-Arabic
Thursday, November 16 @ 7PM <i>St. Matthew, Ap</i>	<i>For the good health of Saadallah</i> <i>Azzi, By the Pastor.</i> 6:30 PM-Rosary/Family of St Sharbel
Friday, November 17	Office Closed

Announcement to Zechariah

أحد بشارة زكريا

Saturday, November 18	4:00 PM	For: +Edmond Solomon, By the Pastor.
Sunday, November 19	8:30AM	For: + Joseph Bousanayah and Fadia Chickhani, By Mr. and Mrs. Tony Namour and Family.
	9:30AM	For the souls of Jennie and Toufi Ferris, By their children and families.
	11:30 AM	For: + George, Zeidan, and Helen Ata, and Salwa Geha, By their children and their loving families. For: 40 Day Anniversary- Elias Feghali, By the Family.

We've launched our new website and we're excited to introduce you to our new look

www.stanthonylawrence.org



ONLINE GIVING

Is now available in association with

myEoffering

[**www.stanthonylawrence.org**](http://www.stanthonylawrence.org)

WHAT IS myEoffering?

myEoffering is a service we've teamed up with to give you the ability to send your offerings online in the same way that many of you already pay bills and purchase products. We chose to use myEoffering because they are part of a trusted, Christian family-owned company, who have been serving the needs of churches for nearly 100 years. Their product is solid, secure, easy, and convenient.

WHY SHOULD I USE myEoffering?

Many of you already pay for most of your purchases electronically, whether online or with a credit or debit card. So we have decided to offer this service as a convenience to you - you can stop writing checks or having to remember to bring cash every Sunday. Simply log in to our service and set up your offering. You can set the donations to match your pay periods, and even send your one-time donations to the special offerings we may have from time-to-time. This new service allows you to give any amount, at any time, from home or on the road, with your computer or even your mobile device. Now you can control how and when you give your tithes.

HOW DOES IT HELP?

Online giving is the future. In the lifetime of our young people, we will see electronic payments overshadow traditional methods of paper payments. In order to position ourselves to continue doing the work of God in the future and to make it as convenient as possible to be a cheerful giver to God's work, we have decided to offer online giving to you. In addition to easier access to giving and more engagement with young stewards, online offering has many benefits for the church. It allows us to more easily track contributions for budgeting. It saves us from manually tracking those contributions every week. It saves us from large fees on check processing and allows us to more accurately forecast expenditures and needs.

HOW DO I SIGN UP?

Signing up is as simple as going to our church website listed above and look for the green computer mouse icon. That button will take you to the myEoffering page for our church. Simply sign up and begin giving online today! Or scan the code to the right with your mobile device to get started now.



SCAN THIS
CODE WITH
YOUR MOBILE
DEVICE NOW



PARISH MINISTRIES & NEWS

Religious Education - Sunday School

The Religious ED program will be selling Christmas ornaments again this year. We will have some new and different ornaments that represent our parish and saints. The sale will be after the liturgies beginning the weekend of November 17.

CCD students are preparing for the upcoming Christmas Pageant. Students in all grades will participate. The Pageant is on Sunday December 17, during the 9:30 liturgy.

Please help support our Knights of Columbus by having your child create a poster for their upcoming poster contest. Deadline to turn in posters is December 10.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Susan Veilleux, ccd@stanthonylawrence.org

MYO SCHEDULE 2017-2018

- ◆ November 12 - Faith Formation/Community Service
- ◆ December 1st - Faith Formation
- ◆ December 17th - MYO Christmas Party

Old and new members are encouraged to attend,
Grades 9-12~Dates are Subject to change~

KNIGHTS OF MARY SCHEDULE

All Events run from
5PM - 7PM

After 4PM Liturgy

Dates are Subject to change



2017- 2018
November 11
December 2
Christmas Recital
December 17
January 6
January 20

K of M Children's Choir



Practices will be held from
5:00PM - 6:30PM
Our calendar: November 18th



KNIGHTS
OF COLUMBUS

Next Meeting:
Tuesday, November 14th

Bible Study

everyone is welcome

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 14, 7 PM - ENGLISH
WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 7PM - ARABIC

مواعيد السهرات الأنجيلية:
باللغة الأنكليزية: الثلاثاء 14 تشرين الثاني الساعة 7 مساء.
باللغة العربية: الأربعاء 15 تشرين الثاني الساعة 7 مساء.

The Family of Saint Charbel

Thursday, November 16th

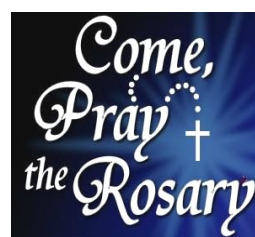
- ◆ 6:30 PM - Rosary of Saint Charbel
- ◆ 7:00 PM - Divine Liturgy
- ◆ 7:30 PM - 8:30 PM - Sharing the Word of God

عائلة مار شربل: الخميس 16 تشرين الأول:

6:30 مساء: صلاة المسبحة

7:00 مساء: القداس الإلهي

7:30 مساء: مشاركة روحية



Rosary Group
Every Wednesday @ 6PM

صلاة المسبحة الوردية
الأربعاء من كل أسبوع الساعة
السادسة مساء

Meet and Greet
Launching our
first MYA
get together



Saturday, November 25th
@ 5:30 PM

Christmas Liturgical & Social Celebrations

Ladies
Christmas Party!
Sunday, December 10th
@ 4 PM



Tickets are on sale Contact:
Lori Corey @ 978-273-3594
Mounira Daher @ 603-235-0801



Men's Christmas Party!
Friday December 8, 2017



Tickets are now on sale. Contact
Rodney Pica @ 603.489.8363 or
Jason Azzi @ 413.364.3333 or
Peter Sarkis @ 603-303-3165
To purchase your ticket

CHRISTMAS WEEKEND LITURGIES

Saturday, December 23rd - 4 PM

Sunday, December 24th

- ♦ 11:30 AM, English & Arabic

Christmas Novena - تساعية أليلا

- ♦ DECEMBER 15-23 Following the Divine Liturgy

Christmas Liturgies - قدايس عيد أليلا المجيد

Sunday, December 24th

- ♦ 4 PM, Vigil Liturgy
- ♦ 12AM - MIDNIGHT

Monday, December 25th

- ♦ 11:30 AM, English & Arabic

New Year's Weekend - قدايس عيد راس السنة الجديدة

Saturday, December 30th - 4PM

Sunday, December 31st

- ♦ 8:30 AM, Arabic
- ♦ 9:30 AM, English
- ♦ 11:30 AM, English & Arabic

Monday, January 1, 2018 - 5 PM Liturgy.



JOIN US FOR A
Christmas CONCERT
& SING ALONG

Featuring
St Anthony Choirs, The Children Choirs
Along with
St Augustine & St Bernard Bellarmine Choirs

Saturday December 2 @ 6PM
Reception to Follow - Parish Hall



PAGANT
Sunday, December 17th-9:30 AM Liturgy

Giving Tree Angels will be in the
foyer starting the weekend
of the 18th.

All gifts MUST be UNWRAPPED
and the angel should be attached to the gift. All gifts
need to be brought to the church for collection on
Sunday, December 10th.



تساعية أليلا
تبدأ ليلة 15 كانون الأول و تنتهي في 23 كانون الأول

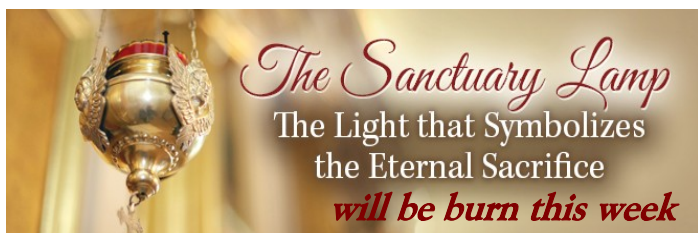
قدايس عيد أليلا المجيد
الأحد 24 كانون الأول: 4 مساء باللغة الأنكليزية
قدايس نصف الليل: باللغة العربية و الأنكليزية
قدايس يوم العيد، الأثنين 25 كانون الأول:
11:30 صباحاً: باللغة العربية و الأنكليزية

قدايس عيد راس السنة الجديدة
الأثنين 1 كانون الثاني: الساعة 5 مساء



November 5, 2017

Sunday Collection	\$ 3,361.00
Candles	\$ 245.00
Fuel	\$971.00
Sunday Coffee Hour	\$ 162.00
Total Deposit	\$ 4,739.00



Left Sanctuary Lamp

In Honor of Mia Abou Ezzi,

Offered by her Parents, Dr. George and Mirna Abou Ezzi.

Right Sanctuary Lamp

In Honor of Mia Abou Ezzi,

Offered by her Siblings, Marc, Monica, and Michael.

Guidelines:

Baptismal Guidelines: *(Check our Website)*

- ♦ Guidelines & Registration Form

Marriage Guidelines: *(Check our Website)*

- ♦ Guidelines & Check List Forms

Banquet Hall Guidelines:

- ♦ Contract Form *(Check our Website)*
- ♦ Banquet Hall Usage Donations:
 1. \$500 (For 6 Hours)
 2. \$250 For Registered & Active parishioners *(with contribution history)*
 3. Security Deposit \$250 *(Returned after the event, if no Damages)*
 4. Cleaning Donations: \$100

PATRIARCHAL CHARITIES 2ND COLLECTION

The Maronite Patriarchal Charities Collection will be taken this weekend, **November 11th and 12th**. Thank you for your generosity.

ALTAR SERVERS

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Altar Servers</u>
Saturday, November 11	4:00 PM	Elias Saab Sharbel Saab
Sunday, November 12	8:30 AM	Volunteers
Sunday, November 12	9:30 AM	Anthony Hassan Logan Gabriel
Sunday, November 12	11:30 AM	Charbel Merheb, Jonathan Merheb Michael Merheb, Ryan El Khoury

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Altar Servers</u>
Saturday, November 18	4:00 PM	Fadi Chahine Youssef Chahine
Sunday, November 19	8:30 AM	Volunteers
Sunday, November 19	9:30 AM	Jason Demers Joseph Safi
Sunday, November 19	11:30 AM	Anthony Chaya, Christopher Bou Saada Elias Azzi, Rudy Bouraphael



Lectors

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Lectors</u>
Saturday, November 11	4:00 PM	Lisa Abdallah
Sunday, November 12	8:30 AM	Hugette Sfeir
Sunday, November 12	9:30 AM	CCD Volunteers
Sunday, November 12	11:30 AM	English: Elias Azzi Arabic: Sleiman Ramy

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Lectors</u>
Saturday, November 18	4:00 PM	Alexa Ata
Sunday, November 19	8:30 AM	Maroun Nassar
Sunday, November 19	9:30 AM	Elaine Brousseau
Sunday, November 19	11:30 AM	English: Marie Charabati Arabic: Claudine Raad

POPE PRAYER INTENTIONS ~ NOVEMBER 2017

CHRISTIANS IN ASIA

That Christians in Asia, bearing witness to the Gospel in word and deed, may promote dialogue, peace, and mutual understanding, especially with those of other religions.



Formed | Your Faith Matters to Us!! Parish Code: N3CCNK

<https://formed.org/watch/593ac0021ccf198c29ce3c21>




What is “right” and “wrong”? Is what’s right for you right for me? Is there a right and wrong for everyone, all the time?

These are difficult questions to discuss in our culture. We live in a society that supports the opinion that each person should make up his or her own morality—that there is no moral truth that applies to everyone. Many of us have been affected by the relativistic outlook that pervades the modern world. Maybe some of us wonder whether there

really is an absolute right and wrong for everyone. Or maybe we accept that there is a moral standard for all, but we don’t know how to explain our moral convictions in a convincing way. Maybe some of us are afraid of saying something is immoral because we’re afraid of offending others or of being labeled intolerant. How do we talk about morality in a relativistic world?

In this small group study program featuring Edward Sri, we’ll explore the classical view of morality and find that it’s not merely a set of guiding principles for theoretical situations—it is an entire way of life.

News from Around the Way...



Committee on International Justice and Peace
3211 FOURTH STREET NE • WASHINGTON DC 20017-1194 • 202-541-3160
WEBSITE: WWW.USCCB.ORG/JPHD • FAX 202-541-3339

October 4, 2017

Your Eminence/Excellency,

In July, Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, President of our Conference, and I announced the designation of **Sunday, November 26, as A Day of Prayer for Persecuted Christians** that initiates “Solidarity in Suffering,” a Week of Awareness and Education. The Solemnity of Christ the King is a fitting time to reflect on religious freedom and persecution.

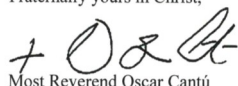
USCCB is collaborating with the Knights of Columbus, Catholic Relief Services, CNEWA and Aid to the Church in Need on this project. I wanted simply to update you on resources that are now available to assist your parishes, schools and campus ministries in observing this Day of Prayer and Week of Awareness. These **resources** are available on the following webpage: www.usccb.org/middle-east-Christians

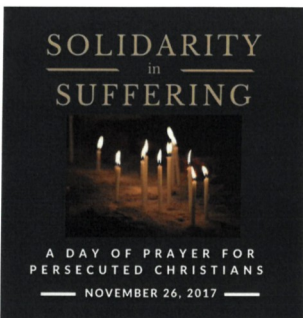
- Homily Notes
- Intercessions
- Recommended Aid Agencies
- Prayer Card (in English and Spanish)
- Background on Catholic Churches in the Middle East
- Background on Christians of the Middle East
- Logos for Local Use (in English and Spanish)

In addition, Catholic schools and parish religious education programs will also have access to educational materials produced in conjunction with “In RESPONSE to PERSECUTION: Findings of the Under Caesar’s Sword Project on Global Christian Communities,” produced by Notre Dame’s Center for Ethics and Culture, the Religious Freedom Institute, and Aid to the Church in Need. These resources are also linked from the above page. For social media, we are using the hashtag: #SolidarityInSuffering.

As our Conference has said, “To focus attention on the plight of Christians and other minorities is not to ignore the suffering of others. Rather, by focusing on the most vulnerable members of society, we strengthen the entire fabric of society to protect the rights of all.”

Fraternally yours in Christ,


Most Reverend Oscar Cantú
Bishop of Las Cruces
Chairman, Committee on International Justice and Peace

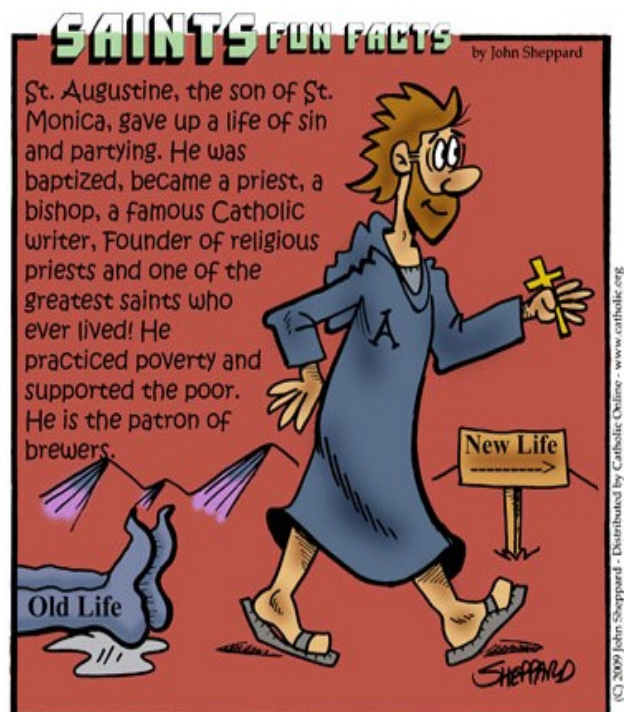


#SolidarityInSuffering

KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS Catholic Citizenship Essay Contest

Knights of Columbus are hosting a Catholic Citizenship Essay Contest for Grades 8-12. Knights of Mary 8th

Graders and all MYO are participating. This contest is also available to those who are not in these organizations. Please refer to the bulletin board in the foyer, there will be a poster and a packet for you to take. Submission are due on **November 26th**. For more information they can contact Christian Hbaiter at 978-857-4815.



When Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and perfect tent, not made with hands, that is, not of this creation, he entered once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls, with the sprinkling of the ashes of a heifer, sanctifies those who have been defiled so that their flesh is purified, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God! For this reason he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, because a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant.

أَمَّا الْمَسِيحُ فَقَدْ ظَهَرَ عَظِيمَ أَحْبَارِ الْخَيْرَاتِ الْآتِيَةِ، وَاجْتَّازَ الْمَسْكِنَ الْأَعْظَمَ وَالْأَكْمَلَ، غَيْرَ الْمَصْنُوعِ بِالْأَيْدِي، أَيِ لَيْسَ مِنْ هَذِهِ الْخَلِيقَةِ، فَدَخَلَ إِلَى قُدُسِ الْأَقْدَاسِ مَرَّةً وَاحِدَةً، لَا بِدَمِ الثِّيُوسِ وَالْعُجُولِ، بَلْ بِدَمِهِ هُوَ، فَحَقَّقَ لَنَا فِدَاءً أَبَدِيًّا. فَإِذَا كَانَ رَشُّ دَمِ الثِّيُوسِ وَالتَّيْرَانِ وَرَمَادِ الْعَجَلَةِ عَلَى الْمُتَجَسِّسِينَ، يُقَدِّسُ أَجْسَادَهُمْ فَيُطَهِّرُهُمْ، فَكَمْ بِالْأَحْرَى دَمُ الْمَسِيحِ، الَّذِي قَرَّبَ نَفْسَهُ لِلَّهِ بِالرُّوحِ الْأَزَلِيِّ قُرْبَانًا لَا عَيْبَ فِيهِ، يُطَهِّرُ ضَمِيرَنَا مِنَ الْأَعْمَالِ الْمَيِّتَةِ، لِنَعْبُدَ اللَّهَ الْحَيَّ! وَلِذَلِكَ فَهُوَ الْوَسِيطُ لِعَهْدٍ جَدِيدٍ، وَقَدْ صَارَ مَوْتُهُ فِدَاءً لِنَعْدِيَّاتِ الْعَهْدِ الْأَوَّلِ، حَتَّى يَنَالَ بِهِ الْمَدْعُورُونَ وَعَدَ الْمِيرَاثِ الْأَبَدِيِّ.

At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, 'How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.' Jesus answered, 'I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me; but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand. The Father and I are one.' The Jews took up stones again to stone him. Jesus replied, 'I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these are you going to stone me?' The Jews answered, 'It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you, but for blasphemy, because you, though only a human being, are making yourself God.' Jesus answered, 'Is it not written in your law, "I said, you are gods"? If those to whom the word of God came were called "gods" and the scripture cannot be annulled can you say that the one whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world is blaspheming because I said, "I am God's Son"? If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me. But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.' Then they tried to arrest him again, but he escaped from their hands. He went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing earlier, and he remained there. Many came to him, and they were saying, 'John performed no sign, but everything that John said about this man was true.' And many believed in him there.

حَانَ عِيدُ التَّجْدِيدِ فِي أُورُشَلِيمَ، وَكَانَ فَصْلُ الشِّتَاءِ. وَكَانَ يَسُوعُ يَتَمَشَّى فِي الْهَيْكَلِ، فِي رِوَاقِ سُلَيْمَانَ. فَأَحَاطَ بِهِ الْيَهُودُ وَأَخَذُوا يَقُولُونَ لَهُ: «إِلَى مَتَى تُبْقِي نُفُوسَنَا حَائِرَةً؟ إِنْ كُنْتَ أَنْتَ الْمَسِيحُ، فَقُلْ لَنَا صِرَاحَةً». «أَجَابَهُمْ يَسُوعُ: «قُلْتُهُ لَكُمْ، لَكِنِّكُمْ لَا تُؤْمِنُونَ. الْأَعْمَالُ الَّتِي أَعْمَلُهَا أَنَا بِأَسْمِ أَبِي هِيَ تَشْهَدُ لِي. لَكِنِّكُمْ لَا تُؤْمِنُونَ، لِأَنَّكُمْ لَسْتُمْ مِنْ خِرَافِي. خِرَافِي تَسْمَعُ صَوْتِي، وَأَنَا أَعْرِفُهَا، وَهِيَ تَتَّبَعُنِي. وَأَنَا أُعْطِيهَا حَيَاةً أَبَدِيَّةً، فَلَنْ تَهْلِكَ أَبَدًا، وَلَنْ يَخْطِفَهَا أَحَدٌ مِنْ يَدِي. أَبِي الَّذِي أَعْطَانِي إِيَّاهَا هُوَ أَعْظَمُ مِنَ الْكُلِّ، وَلَا يَقْدِرُ أَحَدٌ أَنْ يَخْطِفَهَا مِنْ يَدِ الْآبِ. أَنَا وَالْآبُ وَاحِدٌ». فَأَخَذَ الْيَهُودُ، مِنْ جَدِيدٍ، حِجَارَةً لِيَرْجُمُوهُ. قَالَ لَهُمْ يَسُوعُ: «أَعْمَالًا حَسَنَةً كَثِيرَةً أَرَيْتُكُمْ مِنْ عِنْدِ الْآبِ، فَلَا يِيَّ عَمَلٍ مِنْهَا تَرْجُمُونِي؟». «أَجَابَهُ الْيَهُودُ: «لَا لِعَمَلٍ حَسَنٍ نَرْجُمُكَ، بَلْ لِنَجْدِيفٍ. لِأَنَّكَ، وَأَنْتَ إِنْسَانٌ، تَجْعَلُ نَفْسَكَ إِلَهًا». «أَجَابَهُمْ يَسُوعُ: «أَمَا كُتِبَ فِي تَوْرَاتِكُمْ: أَنَا قُلْتُ إِنَّكُمْ إِلَهَةٌ؟ فَإِذَا كَانَتْ التَّوْرَةُ تَدْعُو إِلَهَةً أَوْلِيكَ الَّذِينَ صَارَتْ إِلَيْهِمْ كَلِمَةُ اللَّهِ، وَلَا يُمَكِّنُ أَنْ يُفَضَّ الْكِتَابُ، فَكَيْفَ تَقُولُونَ لِي، أَنَا الَّذِي قَدَّسَهُ الْآبُ وَأَرْسَلَهُ إِلَى الْعَالَمِ: أَنْتَ تُجَدِّفُ؛ لِأَنِّي قُلْتُ: أَنَا ابْنُ اللَّهِ؟ إِنْ كُنْتُ لَا أَعْمَلُ أَعْمَالِ أَبِي، فَلَا تُصَدِّقُونِي، أَمَّا إِذَا كُنْتُ أَعْمَلُهَا، وَإِنْ كُنْتُمْ لَا تُصَدِّقُونِي، فَصَدِّقُوا هَذِهِ الْأَعْمَالِ، لِكَيْ تَعْرِفُوا وَتُؤْمِنُوا أَنَّ الْآبَ فِيَّ وَأَنَا فِي الْآبِ». فَحَاولُوا مِنْ جَدِيدٍ أَنْ يَقْبِضُوا عَلَيْهِ، فَأَقْلَّتْ مِنْ يَدِهِمْ. وَعَادَ يَسُوعُ إِلَى عَبْرِ الْأَرْدَنْ، إِلَى حَيْثُ كَانَ يُوحَنَّا يَعْمَدُ مِنْ قَبْلُ، فَأَقَامَ هُنَاكَ. وَأَتَى إِلَيْهِ كَثِيرُونَ وَكَانُوا يَقُولُونَ: «لَمْ يَصْنَعْ يُوحَنَّا أَيَّ آيَةٍ، وَلَكِنْ، كُلُّ مَا قَالَهُ فِي هَذَا الرَّجُلِ كَانَ حَقًّا». فَآمَنَ بِهِ هُنَاكَ كَثِيرُونَ.

LESS PEOPLE ARE GOING TO CHURCH – WHOM TO BLAME? *By Ronald Rolheiser*

It's no secret that today there's been a massive drop-off in church attendance. Moreover that drop-off in church-going is not paralleled by the same widespread growth in atheism and agnosticism. Rather, more and more people are claiming to be spiritual but not religious, faith-filled but not church-goers. Why this exodus from our churches?

The temptation inside religious circles is to blame what's happening on secularity. Secular culture, many people argue, is perhaps the most powerful narcotic ever perpetrated on this planet, both for good and for bad. It swallows most of us whole with its seductive promises of heaven on this side of eternity. Within our secularized world, the pursuit of the good life simply squeezes out almost all deeper religious desire. Interestingly, this is also the major criticism that Islamic extremists make of Western culture. For them it's a drug, which once ingested, has no cure. That's why they want to block their youth from Western influences.

But is this true? Is secular culture the enemy? Are we, church-goers, the last true remnant of God and truth left standing, prophetic and marginalized in a society that's shallow, irreligious, and godless? Many, including myself, would argue that this conclusion is far, far too simple. Secular society can be shallow, irreligious, and godless, there's more than sufficient evidence for that; but, beneath its shallowness and its congenital allergy to our churches, real religious desire still burns and the churches must ask themselves: Why aren't more people turning to us to deal with their religious desires? Why are so many people who are seeking spirituality not interested in looking at what the church offers? Why, instead, are they turning to everything except the church? Why, indeed, do so many people have the attitude: "The church has nothing to offer me: I find it boring, irrelevant, caught up inside its own petty issues, hopelessly out of step with my life."

Secularity is, no doubt, partly to blame, but so too are the churches themselves. There's an axiom that says: All atheism is a parasite off of bad theism. That logic also holds regarding attitudes towards the church: Bad attitudes towards the church feed off bad church practices.

The great Jewish scholar, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, would agree. In his book, *God In Search of Man*, he writes: "It is customary to blame secular science and anti-religious philosophy for the eclipse of religion in modern society. It would be more honest to blame religion for its own defeats. Religion declined not because it was refuted, but because it became irrelevant, dull, oppressive, insipid. When faith is completely replaced by creed, worship by discipline, love by habit; when the crisis of today is ignored because of the splendor of the past; when faith becomes an heirloom rather than a living fountain; when religion speaks only in the name of authority rather than the voice of compassion – its message becomes meaningless."

Novelist Marilynne Robinson (who has both a deep sympathy for and a commitment to the church) echoes Heschel. For her, as churches today, we are not radiating the immensity of God and the larger mystery of Christ. Rather, despite our good will, we are too much subordinating the mystery of Christ to tribalism, resentment, fear, and self-protection. This is one of the major reasons for our marginalization. Christianity, Robinson submits, "is too great a narrative to be reduced to serving any parochial interest or to be underwritten by any lesser tale." It is our narrow attitudes, she believes, that denigrate the Christian message and leave the churches, for good reason, marginalized: "Undignified, obscurantist, and xenophobic Christianity closes the path for many" to enter the church." Blaming the world for our problems, she argues, does nothing to enhance the respect the world has for religion or for Christianity. The drop-off in church attendance is very much our own fault because far too often we are not radiating a church with a compassionate embrace and we are not in fact addressing the real energies that are burning inside people. For Robinson, the secular world isn't, per se, irreligious. Rather it sees our churches as self-absorbed, non-understanding, and non-empathetic to its desires, its wounds, and its needs. And so her challenge to us, church-goers, is this: "It behooves anyone who calls himself or herself a Christian, any institution that calls itself a church, to bring credit to the faith, at very least not to embarrass or disgrace it. Making God a tribal deity, our local Baal, is embarrassing and disgraceful."

Some years ago, I heard an Evangelical minister state the problem this way: As Christian churches we have the living water, the water Christ promised would quench all fires and all thirsts. But, this is the problem: We aren't getting the living water to where the fires are! Instead we are spraying water everywhere, except where it's burning!

He's right. The answer to the mass exodus from our churches is not to blame the culture; it's to make better churches!