

The term "Maronite" designates that branch of the Catholic Church that traces its origins to St. Maron, a Monk who lived in Northern Syria at the end of the Fourth Century. The Maronites constitute the third largest branch of the Catholic Church, after the Latin and Byzantine. Maronite traditions are those of the apostolic See of Antioch. It was at Antioch that the followers of Christ were called "Christians" for the first time.

St. Maron and his monks and hermits constituted a spiritual family of their own which bore distinctive marks in spirituality, belief, and culture. After the death of Maron in 410 A.D. his spiritual successors built a monastery that was dedicated to his memory. Later, other monasteries were built which became centers of defense for the early Christian faith. The faithful gathered around these strongholds of the faith and the community grew under the leadership of its patriarchs and bishops.

During a period of 300 years this spiritual family developed and reached maturity under the leadership of the Patriarchs of Antioch. From their original group of monasteries the Maronites grew to include spiritual, social and humanitarian institutions. These stretched from Northern Syria to Lebanon and Palestine. The spiritual heirs of St. Maron converted many of the thousands that were attracted from paganism to Christianity.

At the end of the 7th Century, dire religious persecutions forced the Maronites to leave their homes and fertile lands in Northern Syria and to take refuge in the mountains of Lebanon. The Christian faith, their most prized possession, was brought with them and planted in their new home in Lebanon. Thanks to the heroic efforts of the Christians, Lebanon became a Christian land whose borders were open to all groups to live and worship in freedom. From their home in Lebanon, the Maronites spread their faith, their life-style, and their Christianity to Cyprus, Rhodes, Egypt, Palestine, Iraq, Europe, Africa, Australia, South America, Canada and the United States.

Maronites in the United States are well represented in almost every state of the Union and all levels of society. The Maronites of the U.S. divided into 2 Eparchy's: St. Maron of Brooklyn and Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles. Local Maronite institutions are St. Maron Church, St. Ephrem Educational Center, Our Lady of Lebanon Shrine, and the Maronite Center.

## **Liturgy**

It is in the Service of the Mysteries where one best finds the spirituality and theology of the Maronite Church expressed. The Liturgy is the most effective tool for catechesis of the faithful. Two central themes are developed:

1. Man's creation in the image of God, with the potential, through the power of the Spirit, to progressively grow in his likeness;
2. The deep consciousness of God's loving-kindness and of man's sinful condition. The tone of the Divine Service is simple and direct in the monastic spirit. A balance is achieved between the sense of Mystery and Otherness of God and the "Mystery-Present" among men through the enfleshment of Jesus. The life of the Kingdom is made communicable to the believers who become involved in an intensely human drama, which unfolds before and within them. The "Mysteries" are the meeting point with the Lord who by His Life-giving Spirit lights our darkness, guides our way, teaches us truth, gives us life, and transforms our universe. Since this Liturgy belongs to the Church of Antioch - Edessa, it takes its inspiration from it. The communal aspect of participation is emphasized by the fact that the faithful are absorbed in a continuous dialogue with the celebrant and the Deacon. This Dialogue of Love is one in which God, in the person of Jesus, calls man to life, and man, in the person of Christ, responds to God

with praise. The Service of the Word is styled on the Divine Office (Hour of Prayer). The Anaphora (of which there are over 100) has a trinital structure. The component parts are as follows:

**A. Liturgy of Preparation** -the bread and wine are set apart for celebration while the community prepares itself.

**B. Liturgy of Word** -calls forth a change of attitude and openness of heart so that the hearer of the Word may be receptive to the Good News.

1. Doxology
2. Prayer of Worthiness
3. Psalm
4. Prayers of Forgiveness (burn incense)
5. Trisagion
6. Psalm of glory
7. Reading -Homily -Creed

**C. Preanaphora** -presupposes conversion and invites the believer to bring his gift to the altar and to make peace with his friend before offering it.

1. Transfer of Gifts
2. Prayers of Commemoration (incensation)
3. Prayer and Greeting of Peace

**D. Anaphora** -Prayer of thanksgiving to the Trinity in which the worshippers praise the Father for His wondrous deeds, commemorate the Son's loving memorial, and glorify the Spirit Who transforms both the offering and the community.

1. Opening Greeting
2. Prayer of Praise to Father
3. Jesus -Words of Institution
4. Anamnesis
5. Invocation of Holy Spirit
6. Intercessions
7. Closing Doxology of Anaphora

**E. Service of Communion** -the Bread of Life is broken and made ready for the faithful who are invited to approach and receive.

1. Breaking of the Bread
2. Lord's Prayer
3. Embolism
4. Imposition of Blessing
5. Distribution and Ablutions

**F. Blessing and Dismissal**

1. Thanksgiving Prayer
2. Blessing
3. Prayer to Altar