



**EPARCHY OF NEWTON**  
MELKITE GREEK CATHOLIC CHURCH

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

***To be read in all churches of the Eparchy at all Liturgies on Sunday, 25 September 2016***

23 September 2016

***Christ is among us! He is and always will be!***

My beloved brothers and sisters in Christ,

How great and awesome is the power of God's grace! What wonders and miracles He can work in our lives. Yet, how often we can fail to trust in God's miraculous providence for us, and how often we may think that God asks too much of us.

Perhaps that is how St. Peter felt in today's Gospel. He and his company had just returned from fishing all night long, having caught nothing, they were cleaning up and getting ready to go home. Just at this moment, Jesus calls to him: "put out into the deep and lower your nets for a catch." We can only imagine St. Peter feeling frustrated, or put upon, or impatient as he recounts to the Lord his long night of futile fishing. Yet, Peter did not give in to these passions; rather he allowed his simple, but obedient, faith to have the upper hand, saying to the Lord simply: "But at Your word, I will lower the net."

And when Peter's faith met Christ's will, the power of Divine grace had astonishing effects. They caught so many fish that, not one, but two boats were filled to overflowing, almost to the point of sinking! For the Divine will is all powerful, but it needed the acceptance of St. Peter for it to become effective. Christ willed Peter to catch a superabundance of fish, but unless Peter put out into the deep and lowered his nets, no fish at all would have been caught.

This powerful combination—what the Fathers call, *synergy*—the cooperation of man's will with Christ's grace, is the key to understanding the way God's grace operates in our lives. And by means of this incident, our Lord instructs His Apostles about how His Church will also operate. You see, the Church is a Divine institution—it is the manifestation of the Holy Spirit: the Kingdom of God on earth. Yet, the Church is made up of sinful human beings, who can enter into this Kingdom and receive the gracious gifts of the Holy Spirit only by means of personal faith and repentance.

And how in need of Christ's salvation is our world today! I can scarcely think of a time when our world and our society were more in need of the saving message of the Gospel than at this moment in history. Ours is a secular culture that forgets God, and lives as if God does not

exist. And everywhere we turn, we see the tragic consequences of this abandonment of God: violence, perversity, greed, dishonesty, corruption, persecution, and chaos on our streets.

My brothers and sisters, has there ever been a time when the beautiful and saving treasure of our Melkite Church was more needed than today? Though the world has abandoned Christ, Christ has not abandoned the world: He continues to desire that “all men be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.” Christ continues to offer salvation to every generation in and through His Church. Even if it may seem, at times, like we have fished all night and caught nothing, He continues to call us to “go out into the deep” and cast our nets to gather all into the saving ark of His Holy Church.

In our world today, you and I are the guardians of this very special treasure—the most ancient worship on earth of Our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ, which comes from the very place where His followers were first called “Christians”—Antioch. Do we not feel the awesome and transforming power of Christ every time we celebrate this Divine Liturgy? Truly, this is “heaven on earth,” and, to this heaven, Christ calls all people on earth to enter.

This is a blessed time for our Melkite Church in America: this is our 50<sup>th</sup> Jubilee. While there have been Melkite priests here since 1889, we have only had our own bishop in the United States since 1966. During these years, Christ has blessed us, indeed: 50 years ago, we had 23 Melkite parishes. Today, we have 58 priests and 60 deacons serving 43 parishes, missions, and religious institutes...we have doubled in size. And in the time since becoming your Eparchial Bishop, I have ordained 11 priests and 8 deacons: 8 of those priests are married men, continuing our ancestral tradition of married clergy.

Now, our Church in America is poised for tremendous growth. We, now, have two cathedrals, one on the East Coast and one on the West. Three men are currently studying for the Priesthood for our Eparchy, and I recently met with four more who show great interest. Next year, we will re-open our Deacon Formation Program, having restructured it to make it more accessible to our faithful around the country, and to incorporate theological studies for the Laity.

And I come to you today to ask for your help, because it is only with your generous help that our Eparchy can grow to its full potential. Christ wills our Church to grow exponentially in America, but, as in today’s Gospel, He requires your willing and generous cooperation with His powerful grace. The fish don’t jump into the boat by themselves!

And so I come to you. This year, in honor of our 50<sup>th</sup> Jubilee, my goal for the Bishops Appeal is \$500,000. It is a bigger goal than ever before, because our needs are greater than before, and I know I can count on you to be generous.

These are some of our most urgent needs: establishing a monastery for women in the US; renewing and expanding of our Deacon Formation Program; continuing to expand of our Office of Evangelization and Catechesis to prepare our youth and adults to be witnesses of our sacred tradition; increasing our mission growth fund; creating an endowment for the needs of families of married priests; expanding of our website; preparing and publishing liturgical and catechetical books; and the continued publication and distribution of *SOPHIA* magazine.

In addition, there are approximately 100,000 Melkites in the US today, but only 30,000 have access to a Melkite church within 50 miles of their home. This is why it is imperative that we grow, and why I am working so hard to start new missions and parishes. Last year, your generous response to the Bishop's Appeal made it possible for me to establish one new parish and two new outreaches. In the coming year, God willing, I hope to officially establish at least one or two more mission or outreaches so that more Melkites may worship in their own tradition.

Finally, with your help, we continue to provide relief to our suffering Melkites in Syria and the Middle East. Since last year, we have provided over \$57,000 for relief and aid to our Melkite Eparchies in Syria.

In honor of our Jubilee, I have determined that 100% of all gifts over your parish goal will be returned to the parish for the needs of your parish.

My beloved Melkite flock, your financial support is absolutely essential! Is it not especially now—at this time in history—that Christ our God speaks these bold words to us: “Put out into the deep and lower your nets for a catch.” Truly, this is the call our Lord is addressing to our Church, to you and to me! The Lord is calling us today to unite our own personal sacrifice with His powerful grace and He promises a miraculous catch.

So, I ask you, please be as generous as you possibly can when you receive my letter of appeal in the mail. Your sacrifice made with a loving heart is indeed a pleasing and fragrant offering in the sight of God.

May our heavenly Father reward your generosity. And may the most holy Theotokos, our "watchful Protectress and our unfailing Hope," be close to you, to all your loved ones, and to all those who suffer for their faith in Christ, especially in the ancestral homelands of our Melkite Church. With my prayers and blessing, I remain

Your Father and Shepherd,

✠ The Most Reverend Nicholas J. Samra  
Bishop of Newton