



The Holy See

***LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO H.B. CARD. NASRALLAH PIERRE SFEIR
ON HIS RESIGNATION AS PATRIARCH OF ANTIOCH FOR MARONITES***

*To His Most Eminent Beatitude
Cardinal Nasrallah Pierre Sfeir
Patriarch of Antioch for Maronites*

The year dedicated to the 1,600th anniversary of St Maron's death is drawing to a close; a time of grace has been granted to the Maronite Church during this exceptional Jubilee. It is also the crowning point of your service for the greater glory of God and for the good of all his faithful.

In his immense love God fashioned you and impressed upon you an indelible trace of himself, choosing you in particular to serve him. Your free and enthusiastic response, after the example of the Mother of God: "let it be to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38) corresponded to this mysterious choice.

Last year you were able to celebrate the 60th anniversary of your ordination to the priesthood: proof of your fidelity and love for Jesus Christ, the Sovereign Priest. Next July you will have another opportunity to raise your thanksgiving to the Blessed Trinity for having served in the episcopate for 50 years.

For almost 25 years you collaborated with your two predecessors in the See of Antioch before being selected by the Synod on 19 April 1986 to succeed them: an important event which today places you on the threshold of your silver jubilee in this office.

You began your noble ministry as Patriarch of Antioch for Maronites during the nightmare of the war that bathed Lebanon in blood for too long. You have led this Church with an ardent desire for peace in your country and have travelled the world in order to comfort your people who were

obliged to emigrate. Peace has returned at last, fragile as always but ever timely.

Pope John Paul II, whom I shall have the joy of beatifying on 1 May, called you to become a member of the College of Cardinals on 26 November 1994, in order to integrate you into deeper communion with the universal Church. My venerable Predecessor's arrival in Beirut in 1997, to sign the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *A New Hope for Lebanon*, once again emphasized the bond your country has always had with the Successor of Peter.

When I convoked the Extraordinary Synod for the Middle East in September 2009, I appointed you President Delegate *ad honorem* in order to stress the value of the ecclesial service you have carried out in Christ's name.

A few days ago, at the end of the Jubilee, I blessed the statue of St Maron at St Peter's Basilica and I was able to greet you, together with the President of the Lebanese Republic and numerous bishops and faithful.

You have chosen to resign from your office as Patriarch of Antioch for Maronites on this very special occasion. I now accept your free and magnanimous decision, which is the expression of a great humility and deep detachment. I am sure that you will always accompany the Maronite Church with your prayers, your wise advice and your sacrifices.

I ask Almighty God, through the intercession of St Maron and of Our Lady of Lebanon, to fill you with his blessings. I warmly impart the Apostolic Blessing to you, as well as to the bishops, priests, consecrated people and all the faithful of the Maronite Church and to the beloved Lebanese Nation.

From the Vatican, 26 February 2011.

BENEDICTUS P P. XVI

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