



EPARCHY
OF ST. MARON
CANADA

*Fourteenth letter of His Excellency
Bishop Paul-Marwan Tabet
To the Maronite Community of Canada
Christmas 2019*

*To all the Monsignors, Priests and Brothers, Nuns and Sisters,
To all those people consecrated and committed to the life of the Church and the Society,
To all the Parents, Children, Young Men and Young Women,
To all the Parish Communities,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

With the preoccupations of our people and our brothers in Lebanon, and while we are in this welcoming land, the Nativity of the Lord Jesus dawns upon us to remind us of the importance of Peace.

“Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to people of good will” (Luke 2:14)

The angels' appeal to the shepherds brought together Divinity and Humanity. God the Father sends us His Son, the "Prince of Peace," to reconcile us to His Love and to embrace us in His glory. Born on earth, He calls on our eagerness and enthusiasm to build a just and lasting peace for every human being. He invites us to strengthen the bonds of brotherhood and to live together, away from fanaticism, dissonance and violence.

But, "What may this peace be?" What are its components?

- Is it social justice?
- Is it economic stability?
- Is it national peace and security?
- Is it international balance?

We might be stressing on all these components (justice, stability, security and balance). They might be achievable, yet they do not suffice nor provide peace and tranquility. Even if these components exist, but a person remains anxious, insurgent or rebellious; if his/her heart a prisoner of envy, hatred, love of authoritarianism and revenge; and if self-sufficiency and personal interest take precedence over common good, away from love, cooperation and respect of others, then where would we find peace and security!?

What are the sources of real peace? They, surely, are **God and Man**.

The three dimensions of this peace are indivisible:

- Peace from God and with God.
- Peace with one another.
- Peace with oneself.

Peace from God and with God

Peace is a gift from God. Amidst darkness and apprehension, the light of the Lord came upon the shepherds, who heard, through the angels, His greeting and peace. The Church invites us to look up to God the Father and listen to the revelation of Jesus: “***The Father Himself loves you***” (John 16:27). He opens with us the reign of love with the incarnation of His Son. His love “***will never leave you, my covenant of peace will never totter***” (Isaiah 54:10). He “***has engraved you on the palms of His hands***” (Isaiah 49:16).

This is the proclamation of peace that Jesus Christ embodies. He shows us the path that leads us to peace. Even more so, He is the “Path” to listen to the Father in order to “***be taught by God***” (John 6:45) and “***keep His words***” (John 14:23). We can therefore be true witnesses who reflect the peace of the Heavenly Father in our choices and behaviors, in our acceptance and service of others, and in the respect for God’s will in our lives.

Peace with one another

It is true that peace is a gift from God, but it is the work of mankind: “***Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called children of God***” (Matthew 5:9), and “***How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace ...***” (Isaiah 52:7). This peace is threatened by indifference, interpreted by a person who closes his/her heart, and does not consider the others, their problems and their concerns. He/she closes his/her eyes and does not see what surrounds him/her. This reality has gone beyond the individual encounter to reach a global dimension. The manifestation of indifference is also wandering away from God, to a place where His light is dimmed in a person’s life, forgetting that he/she was created in God’s image, as an act of love. God loves His creation who is destined to join Him again. Indifference expands towards the others, where confinement, selfishness and the search for individual well-being prevail, while the world today echoes with the cry of a majority of people living in poverty, hunger and pain. How can humanity possess real peace in light of such wars and dissolution!?

No peace without openness, giving and sacrifice. The glorification of God happens through the peace of humankind!

We cannot be peacemakers unless we reflect on the person of the Savior, the Celebrator, on His words and actions, and on the prevalence of “Love” over “Ego”.

Peace with Oneself

The word “**peace**” is recurrent in the gospel, the teachings of Jesus, the Epistles of Saint Paul and other apostles. But peace is a “life’s journey” that starts from the human heart. It starts from an inner spiritual position, and cannot be attained with the construction of external pillars, but with a change from within. This transformation happens only through the Christ, source of true peace. This peace can be built every day by taking concrete initiatives of solidarity and partnership with those around us.

Like the shepherds and the wise men, let us cross the cave’s doorstep, approach the manger to talk, face to face, to the Divine Child. In these times of blessing, we do not fear neither change nor transformation.

Jesus asks us to deny ourselves and follow Him, and to entrust Him with our lives. “***Anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it***” (Mark 8:35). He wants us to break the barriers of superficiality and fear in order to experience the joy of meeting Him through the Eucharist and one another, so we can experience the peace that no one can take away from us.

On this day, I hope that our concern for peace is not simply talking about it!

Are we really willing to bet on the Christ who is our full and comprehensive peace? Do we have³ the faith and courage to accept, like Mary, the peace that comes from the Lord and repeat with her: ***“Let it be according to Your word”*** (Luke 1:38) and to have truly ***“found the Messiah”*** (John 1: 41) the ***“Immanuel”*** (God with us)?

Dearly beloved,

I extend my heartfelt congratulations and wishes on this Holy Christmas. I join my prayers and hope to yours so that this Christmas day would be a period of joy and renewal for the whole world, and for all the countries where people suffer as a result of wars and persecutions, especially for Lebanon, for all its children and for us.

Lebanon

Away from politics, and with all what our families, relatives, compatriots from every spiritual family and affiliation in Lebanon, are going through, I cannot but address the economic and livelihood difficulties they are facing: more than 45% of Lebanese population live below the poverty line and more than 40% are unemployed. For this reason, I encourage you here in Canada to stand by your families, loved ones, friends and/or people you personally know, through direct financial assistance. On the Eparchy’s level, we took it upon ourselves, along with our brothers from other spiritual families, to collect medical equipment and necessities needed by the Lebanese Red Cross and the Civil Defense, in order for a team of doctors, participating in this campaign, to oversee the effective and transparent distribution of the provided assistance.

And I pray with you: *“O Christ, our Lord, Prince of Peace, who comes to reconcile the adversaries, make us Your peacemakers. Bring Your peace upon us and on earth”*, so that the true purpose of Christmas is achieved

The Savior is born... Halleluiah!

MERRY CHRISTMAS!

+Paul-Marwan TABET
Bishop