

A New Star of The East



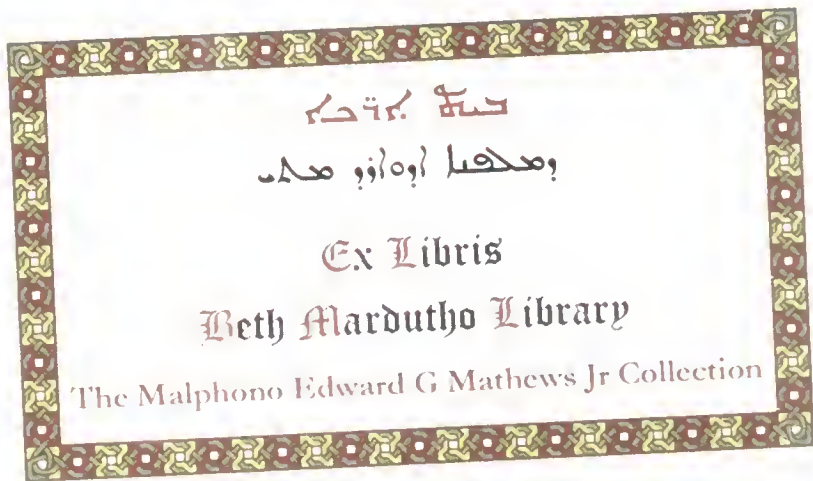
**SAINT SHARBEL MAKHLOOF,
Maronite Hermit
CANONIZATION, OCTOBER 9th, 1977**

By

**BISHOP FRANCIS M. ZAYEK, S.T.D.
DIOCESE OF ST. MARON — U.S.A.**

“The Just Man shall flourish like a palm tree, like a Cedar of Lebanon shall he grow.”

(Ps. 92, 12)



Saint Sharbel Makhloof:

Born: May 8, 1828

Priest: July 23, 1859

Died: December 24, 1898

Beatified: December 5, 1965

Canonized: October 9, 1977

SAINT SHARBEL MAKHLOOF

A New Star of The East

Everyone knows how in the first centuries of Christianity the Middle East and Egypt were populated by monks and religious. These men of God, thanks to their virtues and science, have shone and still shine within the Catholic Church as stars in the sky.

Since early times, the Aramaic Antiochian Rite is known for its love of the monastic life. St. Maron himself founded a school of hermits and cenobites. It is around the famous monastery of St. Maron and other dependent monasteries that the Antiochian Maronite Community was born, grew and expanded. The valleys of Lebanon were filled with anchorites and especially the valley called "Quadisha," meaning "the Holy One." This glorious monastic tradition of the Antiochian Maronite Church has been kept till today, and the example of Saint Sharbel is the revival in our century of the Fathers of the Desert; of St. Maron and his disciples; and of the Hermits of Siria, Lebanon and the Middle East. In 1926 the process for Sharbel's Beatification was presented to the Holy See, after he had performed so many miracles, but the commission for the introduction of the cause was not signed and sealed by Pius XII until April 2, 1954. The Apostolic investigation was closed on June 20, 1958 and he was beatified on December 5, 1965. At that time the Holy Father compared Saint Sharbel to a heavenly arch uniting the East to the West, "as a rainbow in the sky (AAS. 57, 1965, P. 955 ss); "the work of this eminent follower of Christ seems to join East and West in the present" (ibid, page 166).

Since the Beatification of Sharbel, new spiritual and material graces and miraculous physical cures have been obtained and passed on to the Congregation of the Saints, for his Canonization. The Congregation, after studying and obtaining the approval of the Holy Father on July 25, 1972, proceeded with the necessary steps toward his Canonization. He has been already presented as an example of renewal and reconciliation which were the themes of the Holy Year.

SAINT SHARBEL'S LIFE

Joseph Makhloof was born on May 8, 1828 in Beqa-Kafra, a small village near the immortal Cedars of Lebanon. He was the youngest of five children born to Anthony and Brigitte Makhloof. At Baptism his parents named him Joseph. His family was well known for their simple life, their piety, prayers, work in the fields and their care of the flocks. His father died on August 8, 1831, leaving the little Joseph orphaned. His two maternal uncles were religious and he used to visit them and listen to them. At the age of 23 he left Beqa-Kafra, his birth place, and joined the monks of the Monastery of Our Lady of Mayfouk (Djebeil). His mother and relatives tried to persuade him to return home but he refused firmly persisting in his vocation. As he was looking for a more secluded life, he left the Monastery of Mayfouk and requested to be accepted in the Monastery of St. Maron at Annaya of the same Lebanese Maronite Order. In 1851 he was admitted to the novitiate and chose the name of Sharbel, who was the Bishop of Raha and martyred in 121 A.D. The Maronites celebrate his feast on November 29. The Monk Sharbel pronounced his solemn vows on October 1, 1853.

Our future Saint studied Theology in the Monastery of Kfifan and his professors were two eminent and holy religious: Namattallah Al-Kafri and Namattallah Kassab Al-Hardini whose cause for beatification is pending in Rome. Sharbel was ordained a priest, July 23, 1859 and he afterwards returned to the Monastery of Annaya where for 16 years he performed his priestly duties in an edifying manner, while carrying out every kind of manual work in the fields. He fulfilled all his obligations with such a deep humility, perfect obedience, strict poverty and chastity that his companions called him "the angel."

However, Sharbel was seeking a greater life of perfection and a more intimate union with God, and for this purpose he requested the permission to lead the life of a hermit, like St. Maron, our founder, his disciples and St. Simon the Stylite.

After careful consideration, his superiors decided that his virtues were strong and that he was mature for this kind of life, and therefore they granted him his wish.

In 1875, Sharbel entered the hermitage of Sts. Peter and Paul which was dependent on and close to the Monastery of St. Maron. He spent 23 years of his life there leading a life of virtues, adorned with various charisms and especially by the gift of performing miracles, till his death in the Lord, on December 24, 1898, at Vespers time. “Sharbel represented anew the holy lives of these ancient anchorites who distinguished themselves with sanctity, poor and lonely dwellings. We can easily apply to Sharbel the words spoken by St. Athanasius: ‘The inward beauty of Anthony the abbot shone forth from his very bodily appearance,’ nor did he excel over others in stature or girth, but rather in his moral disposition and purity of soul; for a while he kept his mind unperturbed; he likewise kept his external senses at rest, so that from the happiness of his soul would flow the cheerfulness of his countenance and from the movements of his body would be felt the state of his soul” (Vita St. Antonii, 67, pg. 26, col. 940).

Sharbel was a diligent lector of St. Anthony’s life.

“Intent upon the contemplation of things above, he chastised himself with voluntary punishments and sought to imitate Christ in his poverty. Clad in a cheap tunic and a hairshirt, he dwelt in a bare cell. Once a day he ate a meager bit of food, but never meat. Boards covered with an animal’s skin provided him with a place to sleep. He spent all his spare time in prayer, especially liturgical prayer.” He was always in control of himself that no one ever knew what were his likes or dislikes (Ref. Apostolic letter, Fr. Eid, pg. 169).

I. His Faith:

We noticed how the environmental surroundings during the childhood of Sharbel, namely the high and isolated mountains, incited him to pray and taught him how to meditate. He continued to grow intensely in this practice through his Noviciate, during the preparation to the priesthood in the monastery, and finally in his hermitage becoming the habit of his life. The highlight of his prayers, however, was during Holy Mass, which was his whole life, or in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. He was a very devoted son of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

II. His Poverty:

He lived in poverty before and after he enrolled in the Order. He embraced this virtue for the love and sake of His Lord. He refused adamantly to know anything about property, ownership, or money which he did not like to touch. He would not even take a Mass stipend given to him. His bedroom and clothes were always of very poor quality, as mentioned before. As for food, he used to eat the leftovers from the meals served to his brother monks.

III. His Obedience:

According to St. Augustin, “obedience in man is almost like the mother and custodian of all other virtues” (De Civit Dei, Lib. XIV, c. 12). We know how much Sharbel was obedient to his superiors. He did not go to the hermitage to lead a solitary life without their permission and he carried out the least of their directives with readiness and joy, even though these services used to keep him often out of his cell and the hermitage, which he loved very dearly. His superiors used to ask him now and then to administer the sacraments to the people of the neighboring villages. Sharbel fulfilled these obligations to the best of his ability but returned immediately to his cell. He was also considered a very learned man, wise confessor and very prudent judge, although he was very simple in his daily life. His Superiors stated after his death that Sharbel’s obedience was exemplary. Anyone had the right to give him orders, because he considered himself a sinner and the least of creatures, as he often stated.

IV. His Chastity:

His companions and brothers called him “an Angel.” The reason for which he left the monastery of “Mayfouk” to enter the monastery of “St. Maron,” at Annaya, was his ardent desire and firm determination to be in less contact with people. He would refuse the visit of women, even those who were related to him, such as his own sister.

In regards to chastity, Sharbel used to say: “Man’s body is like a donkey, if you feed it too well, you lose control over it and it becomes arrogant and dissatisfied; but if you starve it, it becomes docile and contented.” Now we know the reason for Sharbel’s fasting and suffering.

V. Miracles which he performed during his life.

God rewarded his humble servant by granting him the gift of miracles. At various times:

- he saved his brothers from a snake by ordering it to vanish;
- he recited his Divine Office by the light of his lamp, which a brother purposely filled with water instead of oil;
- he cured a mad man by reciting a prayer while imposing his hands upon him;
- he went to visit a sick individual even though he was aware that this person would die before he could reach the house;
- he obeyed his superiors and saved several fields from grasshoppers, by sprinkling them with Holy water.

VI. His Humor:

Fr. Antonious, from Aytoo, reports that he wished once to test the patience of Fr. Sharbel. When the monks had to move out from one field to another, to work and sow the land, they had to carry their tools with them. Fr. Antonious started placing the tools one after the other on the shoulders of Fr. Sharbel, who began to bend under the burden. From between the tools, which were covering his face, Sharbel smiled, looked at Fr. Antonious and said: “Alas for you, because you load on men burdens that are unbearable, burdens that you yourselves do not move a finger to lift” (Lc, 11, 46). Everyone present laughed and Sharbel was relieved of his burdens.

We can report other humoristic events from his life, but we refer you to the book of Msgr. S. Garofalo, entitled: “The Perfume of Lebanon” in which he describes very well all these humoristic stories, p. 178-180.

VII. His Death:

On Christmas Eve, 1898, after struggling for eight days, being between life and death, but repeating often the

prayer which he started at the altar when he suffered a stroke, "Father of Truth," Sharbel ended his "Martyrdom of Love" at Vespers Time. During his last days on earth, he often looked at those standing around him and said: "Please, help me, I want to say Mass." The Holy Eucharist was the life of this holy hermit who lived in intimate union with Christ, Priest and victim.

His Superior at the Monastery of St. Maron, Annaya, wrote the following the day Sharbel passed away: "Because of what he will do after his death, I need not talk about his good behavior and above all the observance of his religious vows. We may truly say that his obedience was more angelic than human."

VIII. His "glorious" tomb.

Soon his tomb became famous. Many priests, religious, lay people and even non-Christians were able, at different occasions, to witness a light emanating from the tomb of the humble monk. The faithful from the surrounding villages started coming and praying at his tomb. With the necessary permission, the Superior of the Monastery exhumed the body of Sharbel on April 15, 1899, four months after his death. They found his body to be incorrupt and floating on water, because of the heavy rain of the season. Since then, the great miracle, despite all that was done to dry his body, has been a blood-like liquid dripping from it. From that day on, according to the testimony of a doctor, the quantity of blood and liquid which his body discharged has surpassed, three or four times, the natural amount in a human body. For 67 years his living body has been incorrupt and sweating until the day of his Beatification.

IX. Miracles which he performed after his death.

Through his intercession countless miracles have been obtained by people from all over the world. Sharbel is called the Great wonder worker of our century. From April 22 to July 14, 1950, 350 cases of cures, which were considered to be miraculous have been recorded at St. Maron's Monastery of Annaya. In detail, they consist of curing 31 blind, 37 deaf and dumb, 163 paralytic and lame and 119 incurable diseases. Twenty Moslem recipients are included in the 119 last cases. However, the

most important miracles are those of the soul, such as conversions, and returns to God. They have been and are still occurring, through the intercession of the Holy hermit.

This is how our life, spent in seclusion or in the world, can be useful when we are intimately united to Christ and to His Mystical Body, the Church.

X. Conclusion

Saint Sharbel is called the second St. Anthony of the Desert, the Perfume of Lebanon, the first Confessor of the East to be raised to the Altars according to the actual procedure of the Catholic Church, the honor of our Aramaic Antiochian Church, and the model of spiritual values and renewal. Sharbel is like a Cedar of Lebanon standing in eternal prayer, on top of a mountain.

In commemorating the Saints, our Maronite Divine Office praises the Trinity likewise: "Glory to the Father who crowns the struggles of the Saints, Glory to the Son who manifests His power in their lives and relics, Glory to the Holy Spirit who works through their remains to give us comfort in our sorrows."

If Sharbel is the glory of the entire Church and especially of the Eastern Church, he is for us Maronites a personal pride and the perfect example of St. Maron, our Father. Sharbel is one of our army of Saints mentioned in our history. We Maronites have also three other causes for Beatification, pending in Rome.

This proves that the Aramaic Maronite Antiochian Church is indeed a living branch of the Catholic Church and is intimately connected with the trunk, who is Christ, our Savior, the beginning and the end of all things. The sicknesses of the body are often nothing in comparison to those of the soul. May Saint Sharbel cure our blind, our indifferent, our deaf, and restore life to our dead. May God through his intercession bless our faithful and keep them loyal to their faith, tradition and heritage just like St. Maron wants them to be, even if they live in a land of abundant material wealth and they are inclined

to forget or ignore their ancestry and what price their forefathers have paid to keep them faithful to Christ and His Church.

In a conversation with a high-ranking Roman Prelate of the Sacred Congregation for the Causes of Saints, just before the beatification of Sharbel Makhloof, I was happy to hear the following:

“Reading about the holy hermits who lived in the desert, we used to consider many reported facts as mere fables. In the life of Blessed Sharbel, however, we notice that these facts are authentic and true. Blessed Sharbel is another St. Anthony of the Desert, or St. Pachomius or St. Paul, the Anchorite. It is marvelous to observe how your Rite was able to preserve the same spirituality of the fathers of the desert throughout the centuries, and at the end of the 19th century, 1500 years later, produce a Sharbel for the Church.”

PRAYER TO OBTAIN GRACES

O Lord, who continue to sanctify Your Mystical Body the Church, giving also to us the living examples of Your precepts and divine commandments in the lives and virtues of Your saints making them shining models for everyone to follow in Your footsteps, You have revived in Saint Sharbel, in this era of materialism, the detachment, penance and silence of the Fathers of the Desert and have shown Your wondrous, miraculous power in his life and death. We beseech You, by the intercession of this humble Hermit, which grows tall like the Cedar of Lebanon, to grant us the grace (.....) which we request from You through his intercession. Amen. Our Father . . . Hail Mary . . .

OR

Lord, infinitely Holy and Glorified in your Saints, Who has inspired Sharbel, the blessed monk, to lead the perfect life of a hermit, we thank You for granting him the blessing and the strength to detach himself from the world so that the heroism of monastic virtues, poverty, obedience, and chastity may triumph in his hermitage. We beseech You to grant us the grace of loving and serving You, following his example. Almighty God, Who has manifested the power of Saint Sharbel's intercession through his countless miracles and favors, grant us the grace (.....) which we request from You through his intercession. Amen. Our Father . . . Hail Mary . . .

NOTE:

If you have obtained any favor through the intercession of Saint Sharbel Makhloof, please inform your Pastor or the Diocese of St. Maron, 11470 Kercheval, Detroit, Mich. 48214.



SISTER RAFKA AL-RAYES
A CLOISTERED NUN
OF
THE LEBANESE ORDER
1833 - 1914

**(THE CAUSE FOR HER BEATIFICATION
IS PROGRESSING IN ROME)**