



*Consecration of our chapel by Bishop Gregory, April 2005*

THE GRAND FINALE OF THE Maronite Liturgical year, the Season of the Glorious Cross, is crowned by its final Sunday of Christ the King, along with the following week that includes All Saints and All Souls of the faithful departed. Our new year opens with two Sundays of the Church: the Consecration of the Church (Nov. 5), and the Renewal of the Church (Nov. 12). These form a fitting portal to the Season of the Glorious Birth of Our Lord, when we begin our Advent with the six Sundays of Announcements: to Zechariah; to the Virgin Mary; the Visitation to Elizabeth; the Birth of John the Baptist; the Revelation to Joseph; and the Genealogy of Jesus. As an aside, it is interesting to note that the Ambrosian Rite of Milan, Italy, and the Mozarabic Rite in Spain, also have long Advents beginning the Sunday after the feast of St. Marin of Tours (Nov. 11).

Though the Sundays of the Church originated in the Fourth Century commemorations of the con-

secration of Constantine's Church of the Resurrection in Jerusalem, it now includes all consecrated churches. More importantly, they celebrate the dedication and sanctification of the Church herself—the Bride wholly devoted to her only Spouse, Christ Jesus, with Whom she forms one Mystical Body. She is the spotless Virgin Daughter of Zion, the New Jerusalem, the Father's House with its countless chambers prepared for us, her children, by the Divine Carpenter. We are the living stones joined together with Christ as the Cornerstone—stones shaped by the chisels, hammers, and files of suffering; purified in His Blood by baptism and penance; and anointed *with the oil of gladness* by the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life, so that we may become, individually, and as a communion of saints, the immortal dwelling of Triune Love.

*“Sanctify them in truth. Your word is truth. ... [F]or them do I sanctify myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.”* (Jn. 17:17,19)

After His final Passover meal, and just before

passing over the water of the Kidron valley to enter the garden where He would begin the great labor of our purification by the bloody sweat of His brow, the New Adam, Jesus—our High Priest and Sacrificial Lamb—beseeched His Father that His disciples would be *sanctified in truth*: that is (as St. Thomas Aquinas comments), in Himself Who is the Truth. The Eternal Word *is* the Truth through Whom all creation is given reality, existence, life.

Yet, because our first parents succumbed to the subtle questions and pleasing assurances of “*the father of lies*,” Satan—that by disregarding the Creator’s command, they would become gods themselves, tasting the knowledge of good and evil. As a result, they were no longer clothed with “the robe of glory” (as



the Syriac Fathers expressed it); man and woman were no longer radiant *images and likenesses* of the Holy One. When confronted by Divine Truth, their speech began to lose transparency. With the loss of holiness, of wholeness, sin began its course of evolution towards the darkness of Death’s abyss. Instead of passing over from the paradisaical life to the eternal life of celestial glory without dying, they and their offspring would become more and more ungodlike. The masking of their intentions, words, and actions would lead to the first death: a brother murdering his brother. With each new generation, the children of Adam and Eve substituted multiple images for the true God, myths for the mysteries of life and the cosmos. They made themselves into gods creating their own versions of reality, making human life more and more unreal. As St. Paul put it: “[T]hey exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped

and served the creature rather than the Creator...” (Rom. 1:25)

However, in mercy, “the Father of Truth” (as the Maronite Liturgy calls God) sent His Son, His Word, the *Truth in which the heavens and the earth stand*, that by becoming a human being in truth (not in myth), He would demolish the destructive works of the Deceiver. Thus, Man and Woman would be purified of all that corrupts and distorts the pure reflection of the All-Holy One,

Who is eternal and infinite light. Through His passion, death, and resurrection, the Word Incarnate renews the heavens and the earth, and all creation is re-established in Truth. Man and Woman are forever clothed in “the deifying light,” to borrow a term from the Rule of St. Benedict. Death no longer exists in *the*

*new heavens and new earth.*

“*Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.*” (Jn. 17:3)

St. Thomas Aquinas explains that, “the activity of the intellect is living activity in the highest degree. ... [T]o understand is to live, [and] to understand an eternal reality is to live an eternal life. But God is an eternal reality, and so to understand and see God is eternal life.” The Angelic Doctor goes on to say that, this understanding and seeing of God—i.e., the Beatific Vision—is the substance of eternal life, “it is love which moves one to this vision, and in a certain way its fulfillment: for the completion and crown of beatitude is the delight experienced in the enjoyment of God, and this is caused by charity.”

Jesus said: “And for them do I sanctify myself, that they may be sanctified in truth.” (Jn. 17:19) St.

Thomas writes that “Christ is holy by essence” because of His divine nature, which by grace makes holy His human nature. But, as “sanctification in the Old Testament involved a cleansing (baptism) and sacrificial offering, Jesus declared that He was offering Himself as a *sacrifice without blemish to God* (Heb. 9:14) ... *in order to sanctify the people through His own blood* (Heb. 13:12). He did this in truth, not in figure, as was done in the Old Testament.” Thus, the *Eternal Word made flesh*, Who is *the Way*, by way of His Cross (and through and in His Church) *sanctifies* us *in truth*, so

that we may enter into true and everlasting life.

“It is with Christ that we journey, and we walk with our steps in His footsteps: He is Who is our guide and the burning flame which illumines our paths; pioneer of salvation, He it is Who draws us towards heaven, towards the Father, and promises success to those who seek in faith. We shall one day be that which He is in glory, if by faithful imitation of His example, we become true Christians, other Christs.” –St. Cyprian

