

Testimony of Deacon Michael Chirichella at St. Joseph Roman Catholic Church (Astoria, New York) on October 24, 2022.

Good evening all. Thank you for coming out this evening on this tough night, with the rain and on a Monday night, to come to this beautiful mass, this healing mass in honor of Saint Sharbel.

In today's Gospel Jesus tells us the parable of the sower of the seeds. What a beautiful parable it is. And he challenges us today, to bear good fruit, to plant good seeds. And I know myself in my own life, I was not always a good seed sower. But we had a good foundation Father Vincent and myself, my mother Margaret sitting here in the front pew, and my Father John sowed those seeds for us, and we had that rich soil that gave us the ability maybe not to flourish when we were that young, but now that we got older, the fruits of mom and dad's labor are coming to fruition this evening.

When Father Vincent and I were growing up in Brooklyn, in Williamsburg, about 15 minutes from here, we had a garden. And we had our grandfather Vincenzo, my mother's father, who would plant all these beautiful things in his little garden in Brooklyn. He put a section for the tomatoes, and a section for the basil, and for roses, and a beautiful fig tree. And he loved planting these seeds and tending to that garden. And he had so much patience and so much love for that garden. And that's what we need to have when we sow those seeds in our lives. We need to be a little more like grandpa Vincenzo who sowed the seeds in his family, and showed patience, love and prayer to his own family. That rich soil. But life happens, life gets in the way and the Evil One tries to distract us, when really our end game is to be with Jesus Christ.

And who better to segue into tonight then this beautiful Saint Sharbel, who sowed so many seeds, who planted the seeds and has sprouted up among you tonight to come out here this evening and learn a little bit about this saint. Who is he? Where did he come from?

I was asking that question myself. Earlier this year at the end of January, I was diagnosed with cancer. It was quite serious; the tumors were quite large, the cancer was in the bladder. And I was beside myself, looking for answers. This man of faith, this deacon, shaken to my core, to my foundation. About a week after my diagnosis a statue was delivered here at St Joseph to Father Vinnie's rectory. His maintenance man, Joe, brought it in, brought it to Father Vincent and father said what is this? I did not order this; I did not order the statue. Who is this? His (the statue's) hand was broken. He had no idea how it got there. He called the company that sent the statue, and they said, "Father, sorry, it was a mistake. It doesn't belong to you but you can keep it."

It piqued Father Vincent's interest and he called his good friend, Father Justin, a Carmelite priest, who was proficient in Saints. And he told him, yes! St Sharbel!. He's a hermit for the Eastern Rite, a Maronite priest. He's the Padre Pio of the East. Many miracles were attributed to him. He piqued our interest, so father Vincent and I looked into it further. We started to pray to this powerful saint. There was a 9-day novena that we started. Father Justin told me about the shrine to St Sharbel in St Patrick's Cathedral. There was a Lebanese businessman that had

many miracles with his family, and he asked Cardinal Dolan, "I would like to build a shrine here to Saint Sharbel." Cardinal Dolan said, "Who is he?". He said, "He answered many, many prayers for me and my family. I want to donate a million dollars to St Patrick's if you put the shrine here." Cardinal Dolan said, "Where do you want it?". So right behind the main altar to Saint Patrick's to the left is a shrine in honor of Saint Sharbel.

Saint Sharbel was born in Lebanon in the 1800's, in 1828, to a poor family of farmers. His father died when he was three years old, his mother would go on to remarry and he was raised by his uncle, him and his siblings. And he had a call to the priesthood. He entered the priesthood as a young man, and he was different from everybody else: very humble, putting others before himself. Later on, in his priesthood about the last 20 years, he lived as a hermit. He would die in 1898 at the age of 70 years old, on Christmas Eve. The next day, they buried him, on Christmas day. There was a terrible blizzard and the men of the town of Annaya, Lebanon, volunteered to bring his body to the cemetery -- but they couldn't go all the way in! So they went just to the front of the cemetery in a sloped area, buried his body, they were up to their knees in mud and they left. Shortly afterwards, the people of the town saw light coming from the cemetery. They went and told the priest, and the priest told them, "We don't see any light." They dismissed them! but they persisted and they followed that light. There was a light permeating from his grave site. And the Miracles started to be attributed to him early on.

Remember now, his body was buried on the side of the hill of the cemetery with all kinds of weather, rain, snow... but his body was uncorrupted. They opened up his grave and found his body was untouched. Not only was it untouched and uncorrupted, it was warm to the touch and it was oozing light blood and oil. His vestments that he was buried in were drenched. They moved the body somewhere else. Again, a few days later they would open it up, uncorrupted again, with light blood and the oil that we have here today. For 72 years his body was incorrupt. Amazing. Many miracles were attributed to him.

I called my cousin, father Jerry - who lives as a Hermit, he is a priest in Rockville Centre - after father Vincent got the statue. I said, "Jerry, Father Vinny got a statue of St Sharbel." He said, "Michael, how do you know Saint Sharbel? Nobody from this part of the world hardly knows about him." He said I was just there at the shrine at Maryknoll looking for a statue of Oscar Romero, and next to it was a statue of Saint Sharbel and I bought it." I said, "My God, two hits now from Saint Sharbel, he keeps on working!".

After they removed the tumors, the doctor did not give me good news. They wanted to go further and further and remove more things from my body. They didn't know how far the cancer was progressing. We went to three other doctors, and they all had the same opinion. Father Vincent and I were praying the prayer to St Sharbel daily, we had family members and friends praying to St Sharbel. I had to keep explaining to them who he was. Father Justin sent me a relic and a cross, a first-class relic, that he says, "Michael you just wear it when you've got to go for your test, anytime you go to get checked out." I wore it. I still wear it today. He sent me the holy oil that he had from Lebanon. His brother monks went to Lebanon and they had that oil. I

applied it daily. We went to the last doctor, my wife and I, and he said, "I think we can treat it." This is after about 2 months.

I went to the shrine of Saint Sharbel before my second procedure and prayed for his intercession. The night before, the following day, we had the procedure and my bladder was clear of cancer. Truly a miracle, but we weren't finished. I had to go for treatments. I had to go for immunotherapy. For 6 weeks. Every time I went, Saint Sharbel went with me.

I explained and talked about him to all the people I came in contact with. I did that for 6 weeks, then I rested the bladder for another 6 weeks, and I was volunteering: I was ministering at the Lady of Mount Carmel, my parish in Williamsburg, ministering at The Shrine. The night before I was to go to see if the therapy worked, this gentleman was going into the church and he says to me, "Can you bless me, Deacon?". I said, "Absolutely!". So I blessed him, and I said, "Can you pray for me? I'm going in for a procedure tomorrow. Pray to Saint Sharbel." So I had Saint Sharbel cards on me, and I gave him one. He opened up his cell phone case, he says, "Deacon I have one! I was in the Holy Land about 15 years ago and I brought this back with me." Again, Saint Sharbel is working in my life.

When I spoke to that gentleman that I didn't know, I felt very confident. And the next day, the doctor told me the most beautiful words I'd ever heard. He said, "Michael, your bladder is clear. There are no tumors in your bladder."

What can I say? We're here tonight because I made a promise to Saint Sharbel. If he healed me through the intercession of our Lord Jesus Christ, we would let everybody know who Saint Sharbel is in this part of the world. How powerful he is, how many healings he's had. And my brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ, you are here tonight to sow the seeds, my brothers and sisters. You are the missionaries to go out in the world and tell the world about Saint Sharbel, about his healings, about what you heard tonight.

We have Novena booklets, we have relics in the back, we have prayer cards for you to take into your communities and into your families and sow the seeds of this powerful saint who has been with me my whole life, whom I just recognized now. The Saints who are with you since you're small, to your middle, till you're grown, forever! It's just that you have to recognize them in your life.

When he presented himself to me and I was healed, and I was praying in adoration a few months ago, I said, "What do you want Lord? What am I to do, Lord? tell me." He said, "I want you to work with people who have cancer." I said, "Where am I going to find them, Lord, where are they?" He said, "I will send them to you." And so it began.

I'm ministering to 9 people at least that have stage 4 cancer that have come into my life, that I introduced Saint Sharbel to, that I tell about the Holy Oil. A miracle? Yes. He's here to heal us tonight spiritually, physically, mentally, whatever you want to bring tonight to his intercession to Jesus Christ Our Lord.

What an honor it is to give testimony tonight, my brother and I spoke about this months ago. "What are we going to do after you're healed, brother? How are we going to tell the people about Saint Sharbel, brother?". I said, "We will figure it out." And so it began. And so we are here.

Thank you for being the missionaries, for evangelizing and going on to the world and letting people know what you heard this evening, what you're going to experience this evening and who Saint Sharbel is. God bless you.