

CANONISATION DE CHARBEL MAKHLUOF

HOMÉLIE DU PAPE PAUL VI

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Translated from French into English

The whole Church, from the East to the West, is invited today to great joy. Our heart turns to Heaven, where we now know with certainty that Saint Charbel Makhlouf is associated with the immeasurable happiness of the Saints, in the light of Christ, praising and interceding for us. Our eyes also turn to the place where he lived, to the dear country of Lebanon, We are pleased to greet the representatives: His Beatitude Patriarch Antoine Pierre Khoraiche, with many of his Maronite Brothers and Sons, representatives of others Catholic rites, Orthodox, and, on a civil level, the Delegation of the Lebanese Government and Parliament, which we warmly thank.

Your country, dear Friends, had already been hailed with admiration by the biblical poets, impressed by the vigor of the cedars that have become symbols of the lives of the righteous. Jesus himself came to reward the faith of a Syro-Phoenician woman: the first fruits of salvation for all nations. And this Lebanon, a meeting place between East and West, has become the homeland of various peoples who have bravely clung to their land and their fecund religious traditions. The torment of recent events has deep deep wrinkles on his face, and cast a serious shadow on the paths of peace. But you know our constant sympathy and affection: with you, we keep the firm hope of renewed cooperation among all the sons of Lebanon.

And today we are venerating together a son whose whole Lebanon, and especially the Maronite Church, can be proud: Charbel Makhlouf. A very singular son, a paradoxical artisan of peace, since he sought her out of the world, in God alone, of whom he was as intoxicated. But his lamp, lit at the summit of the mountain of his hermitage in the last century, shone with an ever greater splendor, and unanimity was rapidly made around his holiness. We had already honored him by declaring him blessed on 5 December 1965, at the time of the closure of the Second Vatican Council. Today, by canonizing him and extending his worship to the whole Church, we give as an example to the whole world this valiant monk, the glory of the Lebanese Maronite order and worthy representative of the Eastern Churches and Of their monastic tradition.

It is not necessary to retrace in detail his very simple biography. It is important, at least, to note to what extent the Christian milieu of his childhood rooted the young Youssef-his name of baptism-in his faith and prepared him for his vocation: a family of modest peasants, workers, united; Animated by a robust faith, familiar with the liturgical prayer of the village and with devotion to Mary; Uncles dedicated to the eremitic life, and above all admirable, pious, and mortified to the continual fast. Listen to the words that are reported of her after the separation of her son: "If you were not to be a good religious, I would say to you: Come home. But now I know that the Lord wants you in his service. And in my grief to be separated from you, I say to him, resigned: "May he bless you, my child, and make you a saint" (P. PAUL

DAHER, Charbel, a man drunk with God, Monastery S. Maron of Annaya, Jbail Lebanon, 1965, p.63). The virtues of the home and the example of parents are always a privileged environment for the emergence of vocations.

But the vocation also always involves a very personal decision of the candidate, where the irresistible call of grace composes with his tenacious will to become a saint: "Quit everything, come! Follow me!" (Ibid.: 52, cf. Mark 10:32). At twenty-three, our future saint leaves his village of Géga-Kafra and his family never to return. Then, for the novice become Brother Charbel, a rigorous monastic formation begins, according to the rule of the Lebanese Maronite order of Saint Anthony, to the monastery of Our Lady of Mayfouk, then to the more retired **Saint Maron of Annaya**, After his solemn profession, he studied theology at Saint-Cyprien de Kfifane, received priestly ordination in 1859; He will then lead sixteen years of community life among the monks of Annaya and twenty-three years of completely solitary life in the hermitage of Saints Peter and Paul dependent on Annaya. It was there that he put his soul back to God on Christmas Eve 1898, at seventy.

What, then, is such a life? The assiduous practice, carried to the extreme, of the three vows of religion, lived in the silence and the monastic scrutiny: first the strictest poverty in terms of housing, clothing, the unique and frugal daily meal Hard manual labor in the harsh climate of the mountain; A chastity which he surrounded with a legendary intransigence; Lastly and above all, a total obedience to his Superiors and even to his confreres, to the settlement of the hermits as well, translating his complete submission to God. But the key to this seemingly strange life is the search for holiness, that is, the most perfect conformity to the humble and poor Christ, the almost uninterrupted colloquy with the Lord, personal participation in the sacrifice of Christ by A fervent celebration of the Mass and by his rigorous penance joined to intercession for sinners. In short, the incessant search for God alone, which is the characteristic of monastic life, accentuated by the solitude of the eremitic life.

This enumeration, which the hagiographers can illustrate with many concrete facts, gives the face of a very austere sanctity, is it not? Let us pause on this paradox which leaves the modern world perplexed, even irritated; one admits in a man like Charbel Makhoul a heroic out-and-out, before which one bows, retaining above all his firmness above the normal. But is it not "madness in the eyes of men," as the author of the book of Wisdom already expressed it? Even Christians will ask themselves: Did Christ really demand such a renunciation, he whose hospitable life broke with the austerities of John the Baptist? Worse still, some advocates of modern humanism will not, in the name of psychology, go so far as to suspect that uncompromising austerity, contempt, abuse and trauma, healthy values of the body and love, Friendly relations, creative freedom, life in a nutshell?

Thus, in the case of Charbel Makhoul and so many of his fellow monks or anchorites since the beginning of the Church, it is a serious misunderstanding, as if it were only a human performance; It is to show a certain myopia before an otherwise deep reality. Of course, human equilibrium is not to be despised, and in any case the Superiors, the Church must watch over the prudence and authenticity of such experiences. But human prudence and balance are not static notions, limited to the most common psychological elements or to human resources alone. It is first to forget that Christ himself expressed such abrupt demands for those who would be his disciples: "Follow me. . . And let the dead bury their dead" (Luke 9: 59-60). "If anyone comes to me without preferring me to his father, his mother, his wife, his children, his brothers, his sisters and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple" (Ibid. 14, 26).). It is

also forgetting in the spiritual the power of the soul, for which this austerity is at first a mere means, is to forget the love of God which inspires it, the Absolute which attracts it ; Is to ignore the grace of Christ who sustains and makes her participate in the dynamism of her own Life. It is ultimately a misunderstanding of the resources of the spiritual life, capable of bringing depth, vitality, mastery of being, a balance that is all the greater because they have not been sought for Themselves: "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and the rest will be given to you moreover" (Matt 6:32).

And indeed, who would not admire in Charbel Makhoulf the positive aspects which austerity, mortification, obedience, chastity, and solitude have made possible to a degree rarely attained? Think of his sovereign freedom in the face of difficulties or passions of all kinds, the quality of his inner life, the elevation of his prayer, his spirit of adoration in the heart of nature, Sacrament, to his filial tenderness for the Virgin, and to all those marvels promised in the beatitudes and realized literally in our saint: sweetness, humility, mercy, peace, joy, participation in this life, the power of healing and Of conversion of Christ. In short, austerity, at home, put him on the road to perfect serenity, true happiness; it has left a great place for the Holy Spirit. Moreover, the people of God were not mistaken.

As soon as Charbel Makhoulf lived, his holiness radiated, his compatriots, Christians or not, worshiped him, and ran to him as to the physician of souls and bodies. And since his death, light has even shone above his grave: how many people in search of spiritual progress, or distant from God, or in the throes of distress, continue to be fascinated by this man of God, Praying fervently, while so many others, so-called apostles, have left no wake, as those spoken of in Scripture (Epistola ad Missam). Yes, the kind of sanctity practiced by Charbel Makhoulf is of great weight, not only for the glory of God, but for the vitality of the Church. Of course, in the one Mystical Body of Christ, as St. Paul says (Rom 12: 4-8), the charisms are numerous and diverse; they correspond to different functions, each of which has its indispensable place.

Pastors are needed, bringing together the people of God and presiding wisely in the name of Christ. We need theologians who scrutinize the doctrine and a Magisterium who watches over it. We need evangelizers and missionaries who carry the word of God on all the roads of the world. Catechists must be teachers and educators wise of the faith: this is the object of the present Synod. We need people who devote themselves directly to the help of their brothers. . . But we also need people who are open to victims for the salvation of the world in a freely accepted penance in ceaseless prayer of intercession, like Moses on the mountain, in a passionate quest for the Absolute, testifying that God Is worth being worshiped and loved for himself.

The style of life of these monks, of these monks, of these hermits is not proposed to all as an imitable charism; but pure, in a radical way, they embody a spirit which no faithful of Christ is not provided they fulfill a function which the Church cannot do without, they recall a beneficial way for all. Allow us, in closing, to emphasize the special interest of the hermit vocation today. It seems, moreover, to have enjoyed a certain increase of favor, which explains not only the decay of society, nor the constraints which it imposes.

Moreover, it can take appropriate forms, provided that it is always conducted with discernment and obedience. This testimony, far from being a survival of a past passed, appears to us very important, for our world, as for our Church. Let us bless the Lord for having given us Saint Charbel Makhoulf, to revive the strength of his Church by his example and prayer.

May the new saint continue to exert his prodigious influence, not only in Lebanon, but in the East and in the whole Church! Let him intercede for us, poor sinners, who too often dare not risk the experience of the beatitudes which lead to perfect joy! Let him intercede for his brothers of the Lebanese Maronite order, and for all the Maronite Church, of whom everyone knows his merits and trials! Let him intercede for the dear country of Lebanon, help him to overcome the difficulties of the hour, to heal the still vivid wounds, to walk in hope! Let him support and guide him on the right and just way, as we shall sing it just now! Let its light shine above Annaya, rallying men into concord and attracting them to God, whom he now contemplates in eternal happiness! Amen!