

## INFORMATIVE BULLETIN OF THE PAPHOS LATIN PARISH

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Beauty is life...



...when life unveils her holy face

*With two wings man may rise above the worldly busyness: with simplicity and purity. Simplicity must be in our intentions and purity in our emotions. Simplicity seeks God, purity finds Him and delights in Him. If our heart be pure, then every creature will serve as a mirror of life and a book of divine instruction.*

The above words are from the *“Imitation of Christ”* (Book 2, ch. 4).

During this summer time it is easier for most of us to experience this profound insight of the author of the *“Imitation”*.

As we tend to spend some more free time near the sea or on the mountains and, as we are less in a hurry and under pressure from work or studies, we can purify our glance and simplify our desire.

If we let our eyes rest upon nature’s beauty we shall, almost effortlessly, become aware of the many blessings showered upon us.

If we focus on just the one thing we deepest desire in our heart, God’s grace will bring it into relief and we shall see its light and its darkness and we shall know whether it be a holy desire or not.

Our thirst for God involves our body, mind and spirit and that explains why pilgrimages have been so popular and wide spread throughout the world.

To physically move, to journey to a particular place, to walk regardless of the inclemency of season and weather, in order to honour our Lord and His Saints, is an exercise in humility, perseverance and trust.

The change of surroundings offer ample experiences and challenges which enrich and strengthen the pilgrim’s faith.

The Church supports and encourages the faithful to visit holy places of pilgrimage acknowledging the benefit and spiritual revival the latter may offer.

## The cedars of Lebanon



The beauty and majesty of nature evokes the majesty and glory of God.

“Well-watered are the trees of the Lord, the cedars of Lebanon, which he planted; in them the birds build their nests; fir trees are the home of the stork. The high mountains are for wild goats; the cliffs are a refuge for rock-badgers.” (Psalm 104, 16-18)

“The righteous flourish like the palm tree and grow like a cedar in Lebanon.” (Psalm 92, 12)

## The Holy Valley



**Qadisha Valley** is a gorge that lies within the North Governorate of Lebanon. The valley was carved by the Qadisha River, also known as the Nahr Abu Ali when it reaches Tripoli. Qadisha means "Holy" in Aramaic, and the valley, sometimes is called the Holy Valley. It has sheltered Christian monastic communities for many centuries. The valley is located at the foot of Mount al-Makmal in northern Lebanon.

The holy river, Nahr Qadisha, runs through the valley for 35 km from its source in a cave (grotto) a little way below the Forest of the Cedars of God. The sides of the valley are steep cliffs that contain many caves, often at more than 1000m and all difficult of access. The most scenic section of the valley

stretches for approximately twenty kilometers between Bsharri, the hometown of **Kahlil Gibran**, and Tourza .

The Qadisha Valley is near the Forest of the Cedars of God, survivors of the ancient Cedars of Lebanon, the most highly prized building materials of the ancient world. The forest is said to contain 375 individual trees, two claimed to be over 3000 years old, ten over 1000 years, and the remainder at least centuries-old. The Lebanon Cedar (**Cedrus Libani**) is described in ancient works on botany as the oldest tree in the world. It was admired by the Israelites, who brought it to their land to build the First and the Second temples in Jerusalem. Historical sources report that the famous cedar forests were beginning to disappear at the time of Justinian in the 6th century AD.

The Qadisha Valley's many natural caves have been used as shelters and for burials back as far as the Palaeolithic period.

Since the early centuries of Christianity the Holy Valley has served as a refuge for those in search of solitude. Historians believe that **the Qadisha Valley has had monastic communities continuously since the earliest years of Christianity**. It was also at times a destination for Muslim mystics, or Sufis, who also visited it for meditation and solitude.

Early Christian communities fleeing persecution found refuge in the Qadisha.

In 1998, UNESCO added the valley to the list of **World Heritage Sites** because of its importance as the site of some of the earliest Christian monastic settlements in the world, and its continued example of early Christian faith.

(source: Wikipedia)

### Did you know...



Khalil Gibran (1883-1931) was born in Bsharri in the Qadisha Valley in Lebanon and immigrated to the USA as a young man.

He wrote in both, English and Arabic, and his romantic style was at the heart of a renaissance in modern Arabic literature.

Gibran was a Maronite Catholic. He returned to Lebanon to study remaining there for several years before going back to America.

He was also an accomplished water colour artist.

Many of Gibran's writings deal with Christianity, especially on the topic of spiritual love.

Gibran's best-known work is "The Prophet," a book composed of 26 poetic essays.

Since it was first published in 1923, The Prophet has never been out of print. Having been translated into more than 40 languages, it was one of the bestselling books of the twentieth century in the United States.

## A spiritual journey

Pilgrimage is a journey or search of a moral or spiritual significance.

From the very early times, the Holy Land where our Lord was born, lived and died on the cross and was risen was the principal destination of Christian pilgrims. With the spread of Christianity and the flourishing of martyrs and saints, many shrines connected with the Apostles and Saints have become places of pilgrimage.

**“To go on pilgrimage is not simply to visit a place to admire its treasures of nature, art or history. To go on pilgrimage really means to step out of ourselves in order to encounter God** where he has revealed himself, where his grace has shone with particular splendour and produced rich fruits of conversion and holiness among those who believe” as Pope Benedict XVI notes.

In addition to the numerous and popular places of pilgrimage scattered all over the world, we may “discover” our own personal place which holds a holy and spiritual significance for us.

That place could be a little chapel we know from our walks in the countryside, a beautiful and serene spot in our garden, a mountain trail, even our own parish church; it all depends on the spirit with which we approach them and on the intentions attached to them.

Once our inner attitude is watchful, prayerful and receptive we may rest assured that we have successfully embarked on our pilgrimage!

## Beauty, poem by Khalil Gibran

*And a poet said, 'Speak to us of Beauty.'*

*Where shall you seek beauty, and how shall you find her unless she herself be your way and your guide? And how shall you speak of her except she be the weaver of your speech?*

*The aggrieved and the injured say, 'Beauty is kind and gentle. Like a young mother half-shy of her own glory she walks among us.'*

*And the passionate say, 'Nay, beauty is a thing of might and dread. Like the tempest she shakes the earth beneath us and the sky above us.'*

*The tired and the weary say, 'beauty is of soft whisperings. She speaks in our spirit. Her voice yields to our silences like a faint light that quivers in fear of the shadow.'*

*But the restless say, 'We have heard her shouting among the mountains, And with her cries came the sound of hoofs, and the beating of wings and the roaring of lions.'*

*At night the watchmen of the city say, 'Beauty shall rise with the dawn from the east.'*

*And at noontide the toilers and the wayfarers say, 'we have seen her leaning over the earth from the windows of the sunset.'*

*In winter say the snow-bound, 'She shall come with the spring leaping upon the hills.'*

*And in the summer heat the reapers say, 'We have seen her dancing with the autumn leaves, and we saw a drift of snow in her hair.'*

*All these things have you said of beauty. Yet in truth you spoke not of her but of needs unsatisfied, And beauty is not a need but an ecstasy. It is not a mouth thirsting nor an empty hand stretched forth, But rather a heart enflamed and a soul enchanted. It is not the image you would see nor the song you would hear, But rather an image you see though you close your eyes and a song you hear though you shut your ears. It is not the sap within the furrowed bark, nor a wing attached to a claw, But rather a garden forever in bloom and a flock of angels for ever in flight. People of Orphalse, beauty is life when life unveils her holy face. But you are life and you are the veil. Beauty is eternity gazing at itself in a mirror. But you are eternity and you are the mirror.*

### Lebanon, officially a country of pilgrimage



As Lebanon is seeking to become once more a destination for religious tourism, the Vatican is going to re-integrate it in its **list of Catholic Pilgrimages**, in 2019.

In the official list of the Vatican, which counts about twenty countries, principally European, one more is to be added, that of Lebanon.

In the light of the eastern Mediterranean, the cradle of the great monotheistic religions where Islam and Christianity neighboured harmoniously, Lebanon witnessed on its soil the flourishing of shrines, meditation homes, asceticism and confrontation with the absolute.

None can forget that Lebanon was one of the first lands the Gospel reached, and that the Son of God himself has been on its soil.

From north to south, passing through the coastal roads and the Bekaa, these Christian worship places are scattered.

They are either carved into the stones of the most impressive valleys or perched on the heights of the mountains with the most breathtaking views.

Above we see the statue of **our Lady of Harissa**, a renowned place of pilgrimage in Lebanon.