



Attending Mass in a village

In July of this year I was fortunate enough to visit Lebanon (my parent's homeland) for a few weeks. During my sojourn there I experienced many interesting things, one being life in the village.

In every Maronite village there is at least one church, a grotto and numerous roadside shrines to those saints who are well known and not so well known! And every Sunday morning the peal of the bells offers a wakeup call that Sunday Mass is half an hour away.

In my home village of Darbachtar the Church chimes its bells at 8 am. This is not so early considering the next door rooster starts crowing 5:30 am every morning!

The first Mass commences at 8:30 am (there is another at 10:30 am for those who want a sleep in and can get it!) The faithful gather, mostly the elderly, for this time of day. So on this day I joined their ranks. The village Church bears the name Saint George and is well over 100 years old although it has regular facelifts. Constructed of white stone it is a solid structure and seats about 200 people. Large fans and open doors keep the faithful cool in the summer heat. Despite being a village church, it boasts its own laptop and projector so that the laity follow Mass on a power point screened on the right side of the altar. The parish priest has learnt to allow the young to contribute and so the community have reaped the benefits in technology.

Mass commences with the Maronite favourite, 'Ya Oum Allah' (O Mother of God). However what strikes one as they spend the next 45 minutes in their pews is the contribution of the laity. Every hymn chosen is a favourite and every voice joins in. Now I'm not one for singing but experiencing this vocal participation is a wonderfully engaging experience. Indeed the atmosphere is uplifting. We seemed to be all carried away as music and song reverberated in the Church. Now that is definitely full, active participation that *Sacrosanctum Concilium* pleaded for. To know the power of prayer and song, I recommend you attend a village Mass.

For these faithful of old, attendance is not just compulsory, but a want and a desire, it is an interest. They gather as one, friends, cousins and relatives. They all know each other and the Mass is an affair dominated by their loud voices in unison.

At the dismissal, I have to mention I have never seen a Church empty out faster! However step out into the bright sunlight and you are greeted by distant relatives and neighbours you have never known. Yes I was the new face in the village and everyone wanted to greet me.

Attending Mass here was more than just filling up a Sunday morning. One could see in the faces of these people a joy and the fruits of the Mass were evident. For instance the Sunday Mass was the opportunity to see and meet the many people of the village. Including among them my cousin who decided that coming over for a cup of tea was the best thing at this time. Furthermore I witnessed among those gathered

outside the church a simple interaction with one another. One old lady asked my cousin if she could give her a lift in the car because she couldn't walk the distance home in the hot sun. My cousin willingly obliged despite the fact the house of this old woman was in the opposite direction to where we were heading.

Indeed all these little things build up the community of the Church.

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