

**HOMILY OF CARDINAL CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
QURBONO FOR THE SEVENTH SUNDAY OF THE CROSS
ST. TOMA SYRIAC CATHOLIC CATHEDRAL
FARMINGTON HILLS, MICHIGAN
OCTOBER 29, 2023**

Dear Friends in Christ,

Greetings! As the personal representative of the Holy Father to the United States, it is my privilege to convey to you the spiritual closeness of Pope Francis, together with his paternal affection. To Bishop Habash, the shepherd of this Eparchy of Our Lady of Deliverance: thank you for your invitation to be here. Greetings to the clergy and religious, to the lay faithful and to all who are gathered here in worship.

+ + +

As you well know if you are part of the Syriac Catholic tradition, *Qurbono* – the word for this holy liturgy – is derived from the Aramaic *qurbana*, or as today’s Gospel gives us in Hebrew, *qorban*. *Qorban* was always meant to signify a holy offering to God. On this basis, Jesus confronts the Pharisees and scribes for their hypocrisy in today’s Gospel passage. Some of those religious leaders were allowing people’s *qorban* to become a substitute for the duty to assist one’s parents. In essence, some people were neglecting one of God’s commandments – “Honor your father and mother” – in order to follow a human tradition. In commenting on this passage, Pope Francis said that such people “create a sort of ‘caricature of God’... ‘a false identity card’”, because by setting up the practice of *qorban* in opposition to the observance of the Fourth Commandment, “‘they have forgotten God’ and see only ‘the tradition of men’.”¹

As disciples of Jesus who are on a journey with him, we must act differently than this. We must begin with those aspects of the Gospel that are most essential. If we neglect these, then any custom or tradition that we follow becomes simply an ideology. The Holy Father has insisted that we root out tendencies to obscure the Gospel message through various forms of misguided religiosity, or what he refers to as “spiritual worldliness”. “Spiritual worldliness,” says Pope Francis, “which hides behind the appearance of piety and even love for the Church, consists in seeking not the Lord’s glory but human glory and personal well-being.... It is a subtle way of seeking one’s ‘own interests, not those of Jesus Christ’ (PHIL 2:21). It takes on many forms, depending on the kinds of persons and groups into which it seeps.”² Spiritual worldliness can occur when we allow ourselves to become attached to “mediocrity and habit”, or to be seduced by “the temptations of power and social influence”.³

How do we avoid such spiritual worldliness? One way is to enter fully and actively into the Church’s community worship, such as we are celebrating right now in this *Holy Qurbono*. Our Catholic worship, or liturgy, guarantees the possibility of an encounter with Christ. Because of this, says Pope Francis, the liturgy is “by its very nature, the most effective antidote against” the poison of spiritual

worldliness.⁴ If we truly enter the liturgy as “the sacrament of mercy, the sign of unity, and the bond of charity”⁵, then “the liturgical celebration frees us from the prison of a self-referencing nourished by one’s own reasoning and one’s own feeling”, while instead offering us “the gift of the Paschal Mystery of the Lord which, received with docility, makes our life new”.⁶ That’s what a real encounter with Christ does! It doesn’t close us in on ourselves and make us isolated from each other, interested in our own pursuits and ideas. Rather, it opens us up to each other, because together we have experienced Jesus in our midst, and so we begin to see that he is present in each other.

What we are celebrating now is not just any *qorban*, but it is the *Holy Qurbano*. It is the *holy* offering because it is the self-offering of Christ, in which we participate. It is the “complete offering”, the “sacrament of perfection”, and the “queen of the sacraments”. We can call it this because it is the offering that includes and brings to perfection all other gifts. Our daily acts of love, the fulfillment of our duties to our families and to the poor: these offerings find their completion, their fullest expression, and their redemptive value in this *Qurbano*.

+ + +

In our gathering today, one last thing which adds to the “completeness” of the offering, is the fact that we come from traditions of both the East and the West, united in our one Catholic faith. Jesus, our one Shepherd, appointed Peter to be his vicar on earth. Peter was Bishop first in Antioch, and then in Rome. Still today we enjoy unity under Peter’s successor. Thank God for this Catholic unity between East and West, which has either survived the conflicts of history, or has been re-established through dialogue and reconciliation. Thank God for the offering of unity which we make to our one and triune God: a *qorban* which is his gift, and which is pleasing to him. May our encounter with Christ in this Eucharist help us to see the Lord’s presence in one another.

¹ Pope Francis, Morning Meditation in *Domus Sanctae Marthae*, February 10, 2015.

² Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, November 24, 2013, 93.

³ Pope Francis, Letter to the Priests of the Diocese of Rome, August 7, 2023.

⁴ Cf. Pope Francis, Apostolic Letter *Desiderio Desideravi*, June 29, 2022, 18.

⁵ Cf. St. Augustine, Tractate 26 on the Gospel of John, 13; cited in *Desiderio Desideravi*, 16.

⁶ *Desiderio Desideravi*, 19, 20.