

FAITH OF THE MOUNTAIN OVERVIEW

The Name: The title *Faith of the Mountain* reflects the faith of our Maronite ancestors, which was as unshakable as the Lebanese mountains. The title also refers to the mountains mentioned in *Scripture* and in our Divine Liturgy. They are the dwelling place of God, the place where God communicates with his people.

The History: Work on the series initially began in 1980, which was called the *Year of the Family*. As pastor of St. Maron Parish in Youngstown, Ohio, Chorbishop Dominic Ashkar sought to help parishioners reflect on the meaning of the family – especially the Maronite family. He wrote a series of mimeographed booklets under the name *Faith of the Mountain* with various subtitles such as “I Am Maronite” and “The Liturgical Year and Spirituality” to distribute to every parish family. Chorbishop Ashkar arranged for similar documents to be distributed to teens during diocesan youth summer training sessions.

When the need for a formal Maronite religious education series became more apparent, under the leadership of Archbishop Francis M. Zayek, the former work was rewritten by Bruce Lawrence Brown and Carol Boasi Brown, in coordination with Chorbishop Seely Beggiani. This series, published 1984, became the official religious education text for American Maronites.

In 2000, the *Faith of the Mountain* series was revised again. The new texts presented age-appropriate stories and situations that engaged the children’s attention and piqued their interest in learning more about our Maronite heritage and faith. All religious vocabulary words were defined and each lesson’s faith content was linked to Scripture, the Divine Liturgy, and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. This revision presents many options for teachers and parents to choose the activities that best fit the time situation of the parish and the needs of the students.

May all who participate in this series grown deeper in the faith of our Maronite ancestors.
Saint Maron, pray for us.

Series Content: Here is a brief overview of the theme and faith content for each text in the Faith of the Mountain series.

GRADE I: GOD IS LOVE

This book focuses on God as *Father, Son and Holy Spirit*. The text begins by describing who we are as members of the Catholic Church. Children will appreciate the role of teachers in the Church and grow in love for the Bible and the holy seasons of our Maronite Church Year.

Once the children understand the concept of Church as family, they are introduced to Jesus. They learn how Maronites prepare for the birth

of Jesus. God’s own Son and our brother. Children will see how Mary, the mother of Jesus, is our mother, too. In addition the children will connect our present-day celebrations of Christmas with the birthday of Jesus and see how the Holy Family-Jesus, Mary, and Joseph-loved and obeyed God.

First graders next explore the divine Father of Jesus. They learn that God made everything in the world. Children will give thanks for the gift of life and recognize God as their good and loving Father. Finally, the students will explore ways they can show others what God the Father is like.

Next, the children look at what Jesus taught. Jesus calls us to have faith that he is always with us. Furthermore, the children will see how Jesus calls us to forgive those who hurt us. The basic message of Jesus is love.

As the children will see, whenever they love others, they act as God's children. They will then discover how people become followers of Jesus as Maronites. They will understand that Baptism is only the start of our journey of faith in the Church. They will also learn that Jesus is really present in the blessed Bread and Wine at the Divine Service.

The last part focuses on the *Holy Spirit*. Children will learn how the *Holy Spirit* led Jesus his entire life, even to his sacrifice on the cross for love of us. They will discover Jesus who raised from the dead and how the *Holy Spirit* came upon the apostles on Pentecost. Finally, the children will list ways they can live in the *Holy Spirit* in today's world.

Woven throughout the year are stories of Maronite saints and holy ones, notably St. Maron and St. Ephrem.

GRADE 2: JESUS

In this grade, the text explains how the children can find Jesus in each Holy Mystery. They will also meet the risen Jesus through personal prayer, the Bible, and Maronite Church celebrations throughout the year.

The second part focuses specifically on welcoming the Lord through the seasons of the Glorious Birth of Our Lord and Epiphany. Students will grow in their desire to imitate Mary, and they will learn how to welcome Jesus into their lives as she did. The second graders will understand that Christmas celebrates God's love for us and family love, too. They will discover that the mission of Jesus was to bring love to all people. Finally, they will see that Baptism takes away sin and makes us God's children and members of the Church.

From there, the focus shifts to the Season of Great Lent and the Holy Mystery of Penance. Students will define sin as disobeying the Ten Commandments. They will learn about God's great mercy and forgiveness. They will explore the steps in the Holy Mystery of Penance and list practical ways they can grow spiritually during Great Lent.

Next, the students learn about the Holy Mystery of the Eucharist. They are introduced to the Divine Savior. In general, they will study the parts of the Service of the Word and the *Anaphora*. They will learn what happens at the Holy Communion and grow in their own desire to participate in the Eucharistic Meal.

Second graders will learn how the Holy Mysteries help us follow Jesus. They will discover ways they can act as good neighbors and good stewards. They will learn how Maronites celebrate Jesus' unselfish love, especially on Lazarus Saturday and the days of Passion Week. Finally, the students will explore some the ways Maronites celebrate the Glorious Resurrection.

In the last part, students will learn more about our Maronite prayers and traditions. For example, they will learn about some Maronite saints, especially St. Maron, St. Sharbel, St. Rafka and the Massabki Brothers. They children will discover why Mary holds a special place in the Maronite Church and see that the Holy Spirit is always with us to help us meet Jesus in the Holy Mysteries.

GRADE 3: THE CHURCH

Students will discover the Church as a sheepfold, with Jesus as the Good Shepherd. They will see that faith grows when we are rooted in Jesus. They will also learn what it means to say that the Church is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Finally students will consider how God loves the Church as a groom loves his bride and a mother loves her child.

As the text continues, students will learn about the four characteristics of the Church – one, holy, catholic and Apostolic. Students will grow in their desire to be united with all other Church members. They will learn that all Church members are called to holiness. Furthermore, they will see how our Maronite Catholic is a Church of all nations, founded on the teaching of the apostles.

The third part focuses on Church organization. The text summarizes the duties of bishops, priests, deacons, and other Church leaders. The students learn about the role of monasticism in the Maronite Church. They will also explain ways lay people can continue the work of Jesus. They will appreciate the parish as a place where they can meet Jesus today.

Next, the students will see that faithful Church members are part of the communion of saints. The students will come to realize that the saints in heaven are role models who can show us how to imitate Jesus. The third graders will explore different ways Maronites remember and pray for the faithful departed. They will also learn about the feasts of Mary throughout the Church Year.

Students will then explore the Church Year in more detail. They will learn about the meaning of the Season of the Glorious Birth of Our Lord, as well as the Season of Epiphany. They will view Great Lent and Passion Week as a time of spiritual training. They will strengthen their belief in the resurrection of Jesus. And they will see how the Season of Pentecost draws us close to God through the Gift of the Holy Spirit and how the season of the Glorious Cross calls them to take up their own cross each day.

Finally, the students will review the seven Holy Mysteries and see the Church itself as a Holy Mystery. In and through the Church, we meet God. Baptism, Chrismation, and Eucharist are presented as Holy Mysteries of Church membership or initiation. Penance and Anointing of the Sick are described as Mysteries

of Healing. Crowning and Holy Orders are presented as Mysteries of Service. Students will end the year by considering ways they can use their own talents to serve others each day.

GRADE 4: FOLLOWING JESUS

Throughout the fourth grade, students learn about Christian morality. Specifically, they will study about right and wrong, and the gift of conscience. They students will discover that free will, baptismal grace, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit are additional gifts God has given them to help them make good decision throughout life. The students will learn how Mary, the mother of Jesus, always chose good over evil, and they will grow in their desire to follow Jesus as she did.

Next, the fourth graders will learn that the Maronite Way involves Christian morality. Students will learn about the Ten Commandments as the basis for living as good Maronites. They will discover the meaning of the new commandment of Jesus, and see that the Holy Spirit is always with the Church, guiding its moral teachings. Finally, the students will strengthen their desire to imitate certain Maronite saints in following the way of Jesus.

In the third part, students focus on the meaning of the first three commandments – the duty to love God. In studying the first commandment, students affirm the mystery of the One God, the Blessed Trinity. They will understand that the second commandment bids us to respect God’s name because of a sincere and loving relationship with God as Father. They will explore the third commandment and why Sunday became “the Lord’s Day” for Christians. In addition, the students will learn how prayer can help them grow in communication with God and lead moral lives.

In the fourth part, students focus on the challenge of family love as found in the fourth, sixth, and ninth commandments. They will

learn that the fifth commandment calls us to treat all people with respect. They will also study the seventh and tenth commandments in terms of the call to be stewards of earthly goods. Finally, students will explore what the eighth commandment means, using modern day examples.

From this foundation, students will learn that love of neighbor includes the love of strangers and enemies. They will explore the relationship between Christian morality and the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. The students will come to realize that mercy involves more than words and actions; it also involves our attitudes toward others. Finally, the students will discover their own call to work for the common good through humble service of others.

In the last part, students will explore what it means to live in God's Kingdom. They will discover that trust in God is the basis for Christian morality. The text affirms our call to love everyone, including those of other nations and races. The text also explains how Church rules and the Holy Mystery of Penance can help us grow in love of God and neighbor.

As in previous years, the text includes stories of Maronite saints and holy ones who can serve as role models of Christian morality. Included among these role models are St. Ephrem, St. Maron, St. Simon, St. James (disciple of Maron) and others.

GRADE 5: THE CHURCH'S LITURGY

The text begins by discussing basic signs that communicate God's love. Students will learn that they are called as Maronites to be signs of God's love in everyday life. They will then identify some symbols that help them see with "the eyes of faith." They will also learn about some of the symbols Jesus used to describe himself and the Kingdom of God.

In Part II, the students will learn that liturgy is a form of communication in which we worship

God and grow in holiness. They will see how the seasons of the Maronite Church Year are connected to the Paschal mystery of Jesus. The fifth graders will realize that all liturgy is basically prayer, heartfelt communication with God. They will then review the seven Holy Mysteries as celebrations that enable us to sense God's presence and love.

Part III focuses on the experience of Christian Initiation. Students will learn how people become members of the Church. They will understand that Baptism makes us members of the Church and celebrates our identity as God's children. Next, the students will study the symbols and meaning of the Mystery of Chrismation. They will learn to appreciate the Eucharist both as a Mystery of Initiation and as the center of Christian life.

Next in Part IV, the students will explore the parts of the Divine Service of the Holy Mysteries. They will begin by looking at the parts of the Service of the Word. Then they will study the Divine Service as the Church's sacrifice, offered in union with the sacrifice of Jesus. Further study will affirm the Divine Service as the Church's great prayer of thanksgiving and as a memorial of Christ's Passover. Students will learn to value frequent participation in the Divine Service as a way to increase their union with God and other Church members.

Part V deals specifically with the Holy Mysteries of Healing and New Life. First, the students explore the elements of confession, contrition, and satisfaction found in the Holy Mystery of Penance. They will grow in their understanding that Penance brings us reconciliation with God and with others. Next, students will connect the healing ministry of Jesus with the Holy Mystery of Anointing of the Sick. They will also see how the Order of Christian Funerals celebrates our belief in the resurrection of Jesus and our own resurrection after death.

In the last part, the students focus on the Holy Mysteries of Service. The text describes the special roles given to deacons, priests, and bishops in the Church through the Mystery of Holy Orders. Students will next discover how the Mystery of Crowning affects not only the husband and wife, but also all family members. Finally, the students will examine the role of religious communities and lay people in today's Maronite Church.

Throughout the year, the students are again presented with specific saints and holy people who can be role models to them. In the last chapter, students come to see that they, too are called to be role models of holiness in today's world.

GRADE 6: THE BIBLE

Holy Scripture is the focus of the sixth grade. The text begins by giving the students an overview of the Bible as the inspired Word of God. Students will explore some of the different kinds of writing found in the Bible. Through their study, the students will understand that human happiness comes from loving and obeying God, choosing good instead of evil. They will also see that God's love for us, which is eternal, is stronger than sin and death.

The students next learn about some of our ancestors in faith. They will learn about the history of Abraham's family, from Isaac to Moses, and how God rescued his people from slavery in Egypt. The students will examine the Israelites' concept of God as all powerful and loving and see how the Ten Commandments identified the Israelites as God's People. Briefly the students will explore what living as God's People meant on a day-to-day basis.

Students will continue their study of the Old Testament by learning about David, a shepherd boy who became king over the Twelve Tribes. Students will discover the importance of prayer and worship in ancient Israel and learn how God raised prophets, such as Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah,

and Ezekiel, to call his unfaithful people back to him. Sixth graders will encounter some of the prophecies regarding the Messiah especially those describing him as a meek and suffering servant.

Next, the students will explore how the New Testament presents Jesus as the second Adam and Mary as the new Eve. Students will then compare Jesus to Abraham in terms of faith, hospitality, and obedience in God's will. Sixth graders will view Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection in terms of the original Passover meal and events. Through their study, students will come to realize that Jesus calls us to a New Covenant that emphasizes a loving relationship with God and others.

Then the students will focus on the message of Jesus. They will learn that Jesus, as savior, calls us to sincere repentance and belief in God's merciful love. The students will also discover what Jesus teaches, both in his parables and in his miracles about the Kingdom of God. They will learn to connect the presence of God's Kingdom with Christian morality.

Finally, the students will study the parts of the New Testament dealing with the Apostles and first Christians. They will learn what is meant when we say the Church is apostolic. They will grow in their understanding of the Holy Spirit and appreciate the Spirit's continued presence in the Church. By studying the *Acts of the Apostles* and strove to build community with one another. In the last lesson, they will see that disciples of Jesus are called to holiness and prayer.

GRADE 7: OUR MARONITE FAITH

This year students will discover why faith is important to human happiness and will explore what Maronite Catholics believe about the Trinity. The text explains why we believe God's love is merciful and forgiving and helps the students recognize Jesus as the center and foundation of our Catholic faith.

As the students will come to realize faith is a virtue that is with us in all times and seasons throughout life. Part II focuses on faith in joyful times, when times are good. The students will grow in their realization that God is here with us today in the events of daily life. They will examine how the birth of Jesus calls us to live as peacemakers, and they will discover their own call to bring the light of God's love to others, regardless of race or nationality. Next, the students will explore the meaning of Baptism and Chrismation and see how these Mysteries strengthen us to live as Maronites.

Part III focuses on faith in times of struggle. The text helps students explore the importance of discipline and perseverance in a life of virtue. The students will grow in their realization that God loves us and always offers us healing and reconciliation. They will deepen their appreciation of the connection between the Paschal Mystery of Jesus and the Passover lamb and Isaiah's suffering servant. Finally, the students will affirm the Eucharist as spiritual food that continually strengthens, heals, and reconciles us with God and others.

The next part focuses on faith in glorious times. Students will explore the resurrection of Jesus as the central truth of our faith. They will learn what Maronites believe happens after death. Students will realize how their own call to holiness is related to other members of the communion of saints. They will also see how the Holy Spirit helps us grow as a Church that is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.

Next, the students will find out that they are called to have lifelong faith. They will appreciate the Church as the teacher of faith and learn how all Church members participate with ordained ministers in the one priesthood of Christ. Students will discover how some people are called to live out their baptismal commitment through religious vows. They will then examine the role of the laity in today's Church.

Finally, the students will explore their call to daily faith. They will see how Jesus defines true happiness in terms of the Beatitudes. They will affirm their responsibility to show active care and concern for the poor, and will discover that true love of others involves responding to their psychological and spiritual needs in addition to physical needs. In the last chapter, students will examine the need for constant prayer in Maronite life.

As with previous years, the text provides saints and holy ones as role models of faith. Among the role models presented throughout grade 7 are St. Shmoon and her seven sons, St. Maura, St. Jude, St. Anthony the Abbot, and Our Lady of Lebanon.

GRADE 8: OUR MARONITE CHURCH HISTORY

Eighth graders have a growing appreciation of time and are usually interested in history of our Maronite Church. In the first part, students will connect the Church to the Old and New Covenants. They will understand that the Maronite Church is founded on truth. The students will explore the early Church's struggle to explain its faith in Jesus. Students will also explore the link between our Maronite family and monasticism.

The second part covers the fifth through eleventh centuries. Students will learn how the first Maronites were a community of believers, steadfast in their faith. The students will see how the virtue of hope brought the Maronites to Mount Lebanon from Syria. They will learn about some of the spiritual gifts (charisms) present in the early Maronite Church and appreciate the diversity of the universal Church as expressed in its six Traditions.

The third part deals with the eleventh through fifteenth centuries. Students will learn that the cross of Jesus is an important focus on Maronite spirituality and will connect the crusades with our present-day call to justice and the

protection of human rights. Students will study the twelfth-century re-establishment of communication between Maronites and Roman Catholics. They will grow in their appreciation that Church unity is enriched not threatened by cultural diversity in the celebration of the Holy Mysteries.

In their study of the Church from the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries, the students will appreciate the teaching authority of the Maronite bishops in union with the Pope. The students will explore reasons for the Protestant Reformation and will understand the Church's teaching regarding the Mystery of Crowning. Finally, the students will learn how the Council of Trent affected the Maronite Church.

Part V deals with the Church in the seventeenth through mid-eighteenth centuries. From their studies, students will learn how ongoing conversion is an important part of Maronite faith, especially during Great Lent. They will explore how the Maronite Church Year celebrates the mystery of Christ. In addition, they will study the structure of the Divine Service of the Holy Mysteries, both the Service of the Word and the Anaphora.

The last part covers the mid-eighteenth century to the present time. Students will explore the history and nature of priesthood in the Maronite Church. They will appreciate the devotion Maronites have shown to Mary throughout history. They will discover ways the Maronite Church is presently working toward religious and civil unity in Lebanon. Finally, the students will examine the history and development of the Maronite Church in the United States since the Second Vatican Council.

A number of Maronite patriarchs serve as role models through this grade level. Among the patriarchs discussed are St. John Maron, Patriarch Jeremias Al-Amchiti, Patriarch Gabriel of Hjoula, Patriarch John Al-Jaji, and Patriarch Nasrallah Peter Cardinal Sfeir.