

“Everyone who has given up houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands for the sake of my name will receive a hundred times more, and will inherit eternal life” (Mt 19:28). At the age of 23, Youssef Makhoul left his home village and his family never to return. He entered religious life undertaking a life of fasting and prayer. In honor of a 2nd century martyr, he took Charbel as his religious name, symbolic of his new way of lifeⁱ. After his ordination to the priesthood in the Maronite Rite, he lived in a Lebanese Monastic Community for 16 years.

Father Charbel once said: “Persevere in prayer without ceasing ... to understand and live according to his will, not to change it.”ⁱⁱ In 1875, he embarked on a new phase of religious life, alone with God in a hermitage. He spent the next twenty-three years of his life in quiet, solitary prayer and hard manual labor. His life of self-denial was characterized by his vows of Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience to the rule of hermits and to his religious superiors. While living in the harsh climate of the mountains, he had the simplest housing, clothing, and diet possible. His isolation was only interrupted by requests from his superiors to help administer the sacraments to nearby villages.ⁱⁱⁱ

Pope Paul VI, who canonized him in 1977 put his vocation in context. “Today's social life is often marked by exuberance, excitement, an insatiable search for comfort and pleasure, combined with a growing weakness of will: it will not regain its balance except with an increase in self-control, asceticism, poverty, peace, simplicity, interiority, silence.”^{iv} Saint Charbel virtuously lived the vocation that God called him to. “Austerity, at home, put him on the path to perfect serenity, to true happiness; she left plenty of room for the Holy Spirit.” The fruits of this deep interior life of prayer and mortification were gentleness, humility, mercy, peace, joy, and Christ’s healing power.

Hermits devoted to a life of prayer gain a wisdom from God that is very attractive to those caught in the business of the world. Christians and non-Christians sought out this doctor of souls. In life, Fr Charbel had the gift of healing the sick. In death, the miracles continued in abundance.

He suffered a stroke on December 16, 1898 and was called home to the Lord late afternoon on Christmas Eve. With the onset of winter, the days begin to grow longer marked by a steady growth in light each day. Many witnesses testified of a light above the tomb of Father Charbel^v that lasted for 45 days after his death. At that time, they exhumed him from the grave and found that his body was incorruptible.^{vi} In death, he continues to look fully alive. His body was transferred to a more visible tomb to make him more accessible to pilgrims.

A few years ago, a coordinator for the Shrine of Saint Charbel in Lebanon reported that 4 million people visited the shrine. “Since 1950, the year the monastery began to formally record the miraculous healings, they have archived more than 29,000 miracles.”^{vii} This does not count the miracles from his lifetime, nor the many from the time of his death until 1950. “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that a person took and sowed in a field. It is the smallest of all the seeds, yet when full-grown it is the largest of plants. It becomes a large bush, and the ‘birds of the sky come and dwell in its branches’” (Mt 13:31-32).

Saint Charbel led a very austere life as a monk and hermit that helped draw people to the truth, beauty and goodness of Jesus Christ. Christian and non-Christian, believer and non-believer have all been helped by Saint Charbel. In eternity, Saint Charbel continues to lead people to Christ. “Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven” (Mt 5:3).

ⁱ franciscanmedia.org/saint-sharbel-makhoul/

ⁱⁱ quotepark.com/quotes/2030656-charbel-makhoul-persevere-in-prayer-without-ceasing-to-understan/

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid ⁱ

^{iv} vatican.va/content/paul-vi/fr/homilies/1977/documents/hf_p-vi_hom_19771009.html

^v charbel.org/saint/charbel/life/3lights03.asp

^{vi} Youtube - The most impressive incorrupt saint: St Charbel Makhoul

^{vii} catholicnewsagency.com/news/the-lebanese-saint-who-unites-christians-and-muslims-31761