



# SAINT ANTHONY MARONITE CHURCH

A Parish Family of the Eparchy of St. Maron of Brooklyn, NY

كنيسة مار أنطونيوس المارونية

January 28, 2018 28 كانون الثاني 2018

145 Amesbury St \* Lawrence, MA 01841

Phone: 978.685.7233 \* Fax: 978.688.4475

email: [rectory@stanthonylawrence.org](mailto:rectory@stanthonylawrence.org) \*Website: [www.stanthonylawrence.org](http://www.stanthonylawrence.org)

## OFFICE HOURS

M-TH: 9 AM - 4PM

Friday: Office is Closed

Saturdays: By Appointment

## LITURGIES

*Daily Liturgies:*

M & W: 9 AM

T & TH: 7 PM

*Weekend Liturgies:*

*Saturday*

Vigil Liturgy @ 4 PM

*Sunday Liturgies:*

8:30 AM - Arabic

9:30 AM - English

11:30 AM - English & Arabic

## HOLY DAYS OF OBLIGATION

Vigil Liturgy @ 7 PM

Feast Day @ 9 AM

## Sacraments of

### Baptism & Confirmation

1 month in advance with the Pastor

### Sacrament of Matrimony

Couples should make arrangements  
six months prior to the wedding date

### Sacrament of

### Reconciliation

One hour Before Thursday &

Saturday Liturgies,

or by appointment

### Anointing of the Sick

Please notify the Rectory if a  
member of your family is ill,  
hospitalized, or unable to come to  
Church and would like to receive  
communion at home

Please refer to our website for more  
Sacrament Celebrations Guidelines



The Sunday of the Righteous and the Just

"The righteous will flourish like the  
palm tree, and grow like a cedar of

Lebanon." (Psalms 92:13)

@livingmaronite

Facebook: Saint Anthony Maronite Church Lawrence, MA



**Meet our staff:**

**Clergy**

*Father Elie Mikhael, Pastor*  
[pastor@stanthonylawrence.org](mailto:pastor@stanthonylawrence.org)

*Father Tony Youssef,*  
*Parochial Vicar*

Phone: 978-685-7233

**Emergency Contact:**

Fr. Elie Mikhael  
 305.807.9087

Fr. Tony Youssef  
 917.545.4955

*Sub-Deacon James T. Demers*

*Sub-Deacon Nadim B. Daou*

**Secretary:**

*Mrs. Susan Fuccillo*

978.685-7233

[rectory@stanthonylawrence.org](mailto:rectory@stanthonylawrence.org)

**Parish Ministries**

- ◆ Religious Education  
[ccd@stanthonylawrence.org](mailto:ccd@stanthonylawrence.org)
- ◆ Publishing: Bulletin  
[bulletin@stanthonylawrence.org](mailto:bulletin@stanthonylawrence.org)
- ◆ Choirs (English, Arabic & Syriac)
  - ◆ Kids Choir
  - ◆ Knights of the Altar
  - ◆ Knights of Mary
  - ◆ Maronite Youth : MYO
  - ◆ Maronite Young Adults
  - ◆ Bereavement Ministry
  - ◆ Cenacle of the Rosary  
 (Thursdays @ 6PM)
  - ◆ Cenacle of Divine Mercy  
 (Sundays Before the Liturgies)
  - ◆ Sacristan (s)

# Liturgies Intentions



HELPING THE POOR AND THE NEEDY IS HOW WE COME TO KNOW THE LORD

**Sunday of the Righteous & Just** أحد الأبرار والصدّيقين

Saturday, January 27	4:00 PM	Private Intentions.
Sunday, January 28	8:30AM	Private Intentions.
	9:30AM	Private Intentions.
	11:30 AM	For: 40 Day Anniversary-Mary F. Coury Adams, <i>By Sheryl Coury and Family.</i>

**Week of the Righteous & Just** أسبوع الأبرار والصدّيقين

Monday, January 29 @ 9 AM	<i>Private Intentions.</i>
Tuesday, January 30 @ 7 PM	<i>Private Intentions.</i>
Wednesday, January 31 @9AM <i>St. John Bosco, C</i>	<i>Private Intentions.</i>
Thursday, February 1 @ 7PM	Private Intentions. Eucharistic Adoration.
Friday, February 2	No Liturgies—Office Closed

**Sunday of the Faithful Departed** أحد الموتى المؤمنين

Saturday, February 3	4:00 PM	For:+ 40 Day Anniversary-Bomar Kramer, <i>By His wife, Barbara Azzi Kramer, and Family.</i>
Sunday February 4	8:30AM	For: Private Intentions
	9:30AM	For:+ 40 Day Anniversary- Helen Blanchard <i>By Her niece, Leslie Hassan, and Family.</i>
	11:30 AM	For:+ 40 Day Anniversary-Saadallah Azzi <i>By His wife, Nabiha, daughter, Rita, grandchildren and family.</i>



January 21, 2018

Sunday Collection	\$ 3,055.00
Fuel	\$ 90.00
Candles	\$ 123.00
<b>Total Deposit</b>	<b>\$ 3,268.00</b>

**2nd Collection – January 28**

United States Catholic Bishops  
Worldwide Charities

Online Donation—Contribute to Our Parish Growth. Apply Online:

<http://stanthonylawrence.org/donate-now/>

Refer to Page 9 For more info



**Weekly offering envelopes for 2018** will be mailed to your home on a quarterly basis. You will receive envelopes every 3 months. For those who have signed up for online donations, you may disregard them or drop your empty envelope in the collection basket.



*The Sanctuary Lamp*  
The Light that Symbolizes  
the Eternal Sacrifice

**Left Sanctuary Lamp**

*In Loving Memory of Jean El-Helou,  
Offered by Tony El-Helou and family.*

**Right Sanctuary Lamp**

*In Loving Memory of Jean El-Helou,  
Offered by Tony El-Helou and family.*

# ALTAR SERVERS

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Altar Servers</u>
Saturday, January 27	4:00 PM	Fadi Chahine Youssef Chahine
Sunday, January 28	8:30 AM	Volunteers
Sunday, January 28	9:30 AM	George Hbaiter Michael Bejjani
Sunday, January 28 11:30 AM		Anthony Chamoun, Ryan ElKhoury Christopher Bou Satta, Giorgio Abounasr

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Altar Servers</u>
Saturday, February 3	4:00 PM	Elias Saab Sharbel Saab
Sunday, February 4	8:30 AM	Volunteers
Sunday, February 4	9:30 AM	Noah Hassan Caleb Hassan
Sunday, February 4 11:30 AM		Jonathan Merheb, Michael Merheb Rudy Bouraphael, Sebastian Ramey



## Lectors

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Lectors</u>
Saturday, January 27	4:00 PM	Alexa Ata
Sunday, January 28	8:30 AM	Hugette Sfeir
Sunday, January 28	9:30 AM	Jean Sarkis
Sunday, January 28 11:30 AM		English: George Saab Arabic: Selim Matta

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Lectors</u>
Saturday, February 3	4:00 PM	Fadi Chahine
Sunday, February 4	8:30 AM	Maroun Nassar
Sunday, February 4	9:30 AM	Michael Faris
Sunday, February 4 11:30 AM		English: Marie Charabati Arabic: Charbel Churfane

# PARISH MINISTRIES & NEWS

## Religious Education - Sunday School

THANK YOU!!!!!!! to the Knights of Columbus who spent their entire Saturday helping clean up and make our classrooms look beautiful with a fresh coat of paint. We so appreciate what you did to give a little boost to our classrooms.

Great job to all our kindergarten and grade 6 students who served the liturgy last Sunday. You make us proud in our CCD program when you serve the Church. Thank you to all the parents who brought their children to participate.

**Sunday, February 4, at 10:30 a.m.**, there will be a meeting for parents of children making First Communion this year. Please make every effort to attend. There will be important information regarding reconciliation and the First Communion celebration shared at this meeting.

*If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me. Susan Veilleux, [ccd@stanthonylawrence.org](mailto:ccd@stanthonylawrence.org)*

## Children's Choir

January 27th & February 10th

Practices are held from 5:00PM - 6:30PM



## Knights of Mary Schedule

Upcoming Meetings: February 3rd & 17th

All Events run from 5PM - 7PM After 4PM Liturgy

\*Dates are Subject to change\*

## MYA -Maronite Young Adults

Stay Tuned for our 2018 Calendar of Events

## Rosary Group Every Wednesday @ 6PM

صلاة المسبحة أوردية: الأربعاء من كل أسبوع الساعة السادسة مساء

## Bible Study

everyone is welcome

Tuesday, February 6, 7 PM - ENGLISH  
Wednesday, February 7, 7 PM - ARABIC

مواعيد السهرات الأنجليكية:

باللغة الأنكليزية: الثلاثاء 6 شباط الساعة 7 مساء.

باللغة العربية: الأربعاء 7 شباط الساعة 7 مساء.

## Daughters' Meeting

The Daughters of St. Anthony are looking for new members to bring some fresh ideas to their monthly meetings. Membership is open to ALL women of the parish regardless of age.

New activities have been added to the monthly luncheon and social gatherings, which include community service, craft classes and games. Notification of meeting dates and activities will be announced in the weekly bulletins.

We are hoping you will join us for the next meeting on **February 5, 2018, 12:00 noon** in the Parish hall, where Valentine's Day cards will be crafted to send to our troops overseas. Cost of membership is \$5.00 and lunches run between \$5.00 and \$10.00.

Hope to see you there!

Contact Elaine Ferris at 978-682-2112 with any questions.

February 1, 2018  
Every 1st Thursday in the Month  
**Adoration**  
of the Blessed Sacrament



Next Meeting:  
Tuesday,  
February 13th

Saint Anthony will be launching a new group to face the new evangelization....

### MINE

"Maronites in the New Evangelization."

This group will be about empowering women to work within their God-given gifts as women to nurture, heal and build up the body of Christ. MINE is the answer for busy women who found themselves on fire to lead other women in the Catholic faith, and running a flourishing women's ministry in their parish.

## MYO Schedule of Events 2018

Friday, Feb. 2 <sup>nd</sup> – Saturday, Feb. 3 <sup>rd</sup>	Lock-In Retreat
Sunday, February 18 <sup>th</sup>	Community Service
Sunday, March 4 <sup>th</sup>	MYO Youth Liturgy Faith Formation
Saturday, March 17 <sup>th</sup>	Merrimack Valley Catholic Youth Conference*
Friday, April 13 <sup>th</sup>	MYO Youth Liturgy Faith Formation
Saturday, April 28 <sup>th</sup>	Regional MYO/MYA Retreat*
Friday, May 11 <sup>th</sup>	Faith Formation
Saturday, May 26 <sup>th</sup>	Social Outing

[www.facebook.com/stanthonysmyo](http://www.facebook.com/stanthonysmyo)

Faith Formation	5:15pm-7:30pm
Community Service	5:00pm-7:30pm
Special Events	Details To Be Provided

\*These events may involve additional cost not included in the Registration Fee

*Due to the Positive response to this Hafli,  
we are extending the cost of \$50 (per person) until February 3rd!  
After February 3rd, Tickets will be sold for \$75*

## SAINT ANTHONY MARONITE CHURCH

PRESENTS

# VALENTINE PARTY ST MARON CELEBRATION



FEATURING:  
DORIS & ENSEMBLE

DATE:

SATURDAY

FEBRUARY 10, 2018

DOORS OPEN: 7PM

LOCATION:

ST ANTHONY BANQUET HALL

FOR RESERVATION:

Wissam Merheb@  
978.853.5145

Mounira Daher@  
603.235.0801

TICKETS are available FOR SALE:

Adults \$50 (\$75 after January 22)  
Students: \$30 (\$50 after January 22)

*Dinner Included - Cash Bar Only*

ONLINE RESERVATION—SPECIAL EVENT DONATION: <http://stanthonylawrence.org/donate-now/>

Hebrews 12:18-24 Sunday of the Righteous & Just 24-18:12 العبرانيين

You have not come to something that can be touched, a blazing fire, and darkness, and gloom, and a tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that not another word be spoken to them. For they could not endure the order that was given, 'If even an animal touches the mountain, it shall be stoned to death.' Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, 'I tremble with fear.' But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

إِنَّكُمْ لَمْ تَقْتَرِبُوا إِلَى جَبَلٍ مَلْمُوسٍ، وَنَارٍ مُنْقَدَّةٍ، وَضَبَابٍ وَظِلَامٍ وَزَوْبَعَةٍ، وَهَتَافِ بُوقٍ، وَصَوْتِ كَلِمَاتٍ طَلَبَ الَّذِينَ سَمِعُوهَا أَلَّا يَزَادُوا مِنْهَا كَلِمَةً؛ لِأَنَّهُمْ لَمْ يُطِيفُوا تَحْمَلُ هَذَا الْأَمْرُ: «وَلَوْ أَنَّ بَهِيمَةً مَسَّتِ الْجَبَلَ تُرْجِمَ!» وَكَانَ الْمُنْتَظَرُ رَهِيْبًا حَتَّى إِنَّ مُوسَى قَالَ: «إِنِّي خَائِفٌ وَمُرْتَعِدٌ!» بَلْ أَقْتَرَبْتُمْ إِلَى جَبَلٍ صِهْيُونِ، وَإِلَى مَدِينَةِ اللَّهِ الْحَيِّ، أَوْرَشَلِيمَ السَّمَاوِيَّةِ، وَإِلَى عَشْرَاتِ الْأَلُوفِ مِنَ الْمَلَائِكَةِ، وَإِلَى عِيدِ حَافِلٍ، وَإِلَى كَنِيسَةِ الْأَبْكَارِ الْمَكْتُوبِينَ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ، وَإِلَى اللَّهِ دِيَانَ الْجَمِيعِ، وَإِلَى أَرْوَاحِ الْأَبْرَارِ الَّذِينَ بَلَّغُوا الْكَمَالَ، وَإِلَى وَسَيْطِ الْعَهْدِ الْجَدِيدِ، يَسُوعَ، وَإِلَى دَمِ رَشٍّ يَنْطِقُ بِكَلَامٍ أَفْضَلَ مِنْ دَمِ هَابِيلِ!

Matthew 25:31-46

أحد الأبرار والصادقين

متى 46-31:25

'When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me." Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." Then he will say to those at his left hand, "You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me." Then they also will answer, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?" Then he will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me." And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.'

«مَتَى جَاءَ ابْنُ الْإِنْسَانِ فِي مَجْدِهِ، وَجَمِيعُ الْمَلَائِكَةِ مَعَهُ، يَجْلِسُ عَلَى عَرْشِ مَجْدِهِ. وَتُجْمَعُ لَدَيْهِ جَمِيعُ الْأُمَمِ، فَيُمَيِّزُ بَعْضَهُمْ مِنْ بَعْضٍ، كَمَا يُمَيِّزُ الرَّاعِي الْخِرَافَ مِنَ الْجِدَاءِ. وَيُقِيمُ الْخِرَافَ عَنْ يَمِينِهِ وَالْجِدَاءَ عَنْ شِمَالِهِ. حِينَئِذٍ يَقُولُ الْمَلِكُ لِلَّذِينَ عَنْ يَمِينِهِ: تَعَالَوْا، يَا مُبَارَكِي أَبِي، رَثُوا الْمُلْكَوتَ الْمُعَدَّةَ لَكُمْ مِنْذُ إِثْنَاءِ الْعَالَمِ؛ لِأَنِّي جُعْتُ فَأَطْعَمْتُمُونِي، وَعَطِشْتُ فَسَقَيْتُمُونِي، وَكُنْتُ غَرِيبًا فَأَوْيْتُمُونِي، وَعُرْيَانًا فَكَسَوْتُمُونِي، وَمَرِيضًا فَزُرْتُمُونِي، وَمَحْبُوسًا فَأَتَيْتُمُونِي إِلَيَّ. حِينَئِذٍ يُجِيبُهُ الْأَبْرَارُ قَائِلِينَ: يَا رَبِّ، مَتَى رَأَيْنَاكَ جَائِعًا فَأَطْعَمْنَاكَ، أَوْ عَطِشَانَ فَسَقَيْْنَاكَ؟ وَمَتَى رَأَيْنَاكَ غَرِيبًا فَأَوْيْنَاكَ، أَوْ عُرْيَانًا فَكَسَوْنَاكَ؟ وَمَتَى رَأَيْنَاكَ مَرِيضًا أَوْ مَحْبُوسًا فَأَتَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ؟ فَيُجِيبُ الْمَلِكُ وَيَقُولُ لَهُمْ: الْحَقُّ أَقُولُ لَكُمْ: كُلُّ مَا عَمَلْتُمُوهُ لِأَحَدٍ إِخْرَتِي هُوَ لِأَخِي الصَّغَارِ، فَلِي عَمَلْتُمُوهُ! ثُمَّ يَقُولُ لِلَّذِينَ عَنْ شِمَالِهِ: إِذْهَبُوا عَنِّي، يَا مَلَاعِينَ، إِلَى النَّارِ الْأَبَدِيَّةِ الْمُعَدَّةِ لِلْإِبْلِيسِ وَجُنُودِهِ؛ لِأَنِّي جُعْتُ فَمَا أَطْعَمْتُمُونِي، وَعَطِشْتُ فَمَا سَقَيْتُمُونِي، وَكُنْتُ غَرِيبًا فَمَا أَوْيْتُمُونِي، وَعُرْيَانًا فَمَا كَسَوْتُمُونِي، وَمَرِيضًا وَمَحْبُوسًا فَمَا زُرْتُمُونِي! حِينَئِذٍ يُجِيبُهُ هُوَ لِأَخِي الصَّغَارِ قَائِلِينَ: يَا رَبِّ، مَتَى رَأَيْنَاكَ جَائِعًا أَوْ عَطِشَانَ أَوْ غَرِيبًا أَوْ مَرِيضًا أَوْ مَحْبُوسًا وَمَا خَدَمْنَاكَ؟ حِينَئِذٍ يُجِيبُهُمْ قَائِلًا: الْحَقُّ أَقُولُ لَكُمْ: كُلُّ مَا لَمْ تَعْمَلُوهُ لِأَحَدٍ هُوَ لِأَخِي الصَّغَارِ، فَلِي لَمْ تَعْمَلُوهُ. وَيَذْهَبُ هُوَ لِأَخِي الْعَذَابِ الْأَبَدِيِّ، وَالْأَبْرَارُ إِلَى الْحَيَاةِ الْأَبَدِيَّةِ.»

## 2017 Tax Statements

Those who would like a statement of their 2017 contributions, please call the office and we will be happy to forward it to you so you can claim it on your tax return. Keep in mind, if you have not used your weekly envelopes or have not contributed by checks, it is impossible for us to generate a record or statement with your donations and offerings.

## ALAA Scholarships are now Available

[www.americanlebaneseawarenessassociation.org/scholarships](http://www.americanlebaneseawarenessassociation.org/scholarships)

## Open House @ St. Joe's:

Sunday, 1/28/18, noon-2pm

The St. Joseph Regional Catholic School in Salem invites you to their Open House for coffee and donuts **1/28/18 at noon**.

Questions? Contact [info@sjrcs.com](mailto:info@sjrcs.com) or 603-893-6811 x 19.

### Guidelines:

Baptismal Guidelines: *(Check our Website)*

◆ Guidelines & Registration Form

Marriage Guidelines: *(Check our Website)*

◆ Guidelines & Check List Forms

Banquet Hall Guidelines:

◆ Contract Form *(Check our Website)*

◆ Banquet Hall Usage Donations:

1. \$500 (For 6 Hours)

2. \$250 For Registered & Active parishioners *(with contribution history)*

3. Security Deposit \$250 *(Returned after the event, if no Damages)*

4. Cleaning Donations: \$100

## BE IN TOUCH!! STAY CONNECTED!!

Membership Registration:

<http://stanthonylawrence.org/member-information-form/>

Online Donation:

<http://stanthonylawrence.org/donate-now/>

Upcoming Events:

<http://stanthonylawrence.org/upcoming-events/>

Monthly Calendar:

<http://stanthonylawrence.org/upcoming-events/calendar/>

## Saint Anthony Burial Guidelines

### Burial Charges and Fees:

<http://stanthonylawrence.org/charges-and-fees/>

The following charges for cemetery services are in effect January 1, 2017 at St. Anthony Cemetery and are subject to change without notice.

- Adult Opening – Graveside (Summer) \$875.00
- Adult Opening – Graveside (Winter) \$875.00
- Child Opening – (one to eight years) \$100.00
- Infant Opening – NO CHARGE
- Saturday & Holiday Overtime \$75.00
- Burial of Cremated Remains \$550.00
- Cremation Burial Unit \$350.00

When arrangements are made with a family and they wish to purchase a lot, we ask that you call the cemetery office (978) 985-7233 and arrange an appointment for them. Financial arrangements for new lot sales will be handled directly with the family.

Cemetery charges for grave openings are due and payable to the cemetery the morning of the funeral, unless charged to the funeral director's account. Cemetery charges billed to the funeral director's account are due and payable to the cemetery in 10 days

### Lot Sales

<http://stanthonylawrence.org/lots-sales/>

Saint Anthony Cemetery offers affordable payment plans to fit any family's budget. Please call us at 978-685-7233 or email [rectory@stanthonylawrence.org](mailto:rectory@stanthonylawrence.org) for more information about availability.

### Burial Pre-Arrangements

Making arrangements for a burial in advance should be no more difficult than providing insurance or having a will. It is a sensible thing to do. By pre-arranging your burial, you can avoid the unnecessary confusion plus the financial and emotional stress that death often brings.

Funeral pre-arrangements are available and recommended with guarantees of no increase in cemetery charges at the time of interment. Pre-Arrangement Funds are placed in a separate account and are withdrawn at the time of the interment. An interest free Time-Payment Plan is available for your convenience.



### **POPE PRAYER INTENTIONS -**

#### **January 2018 Evangelization: Religious Minorities in Asia**

That Christians, and other religious minorities in Asian countries, may be able to practice their faith in full freedom

# The Knights of Columbus stayed all day Saturday painting the CCD Classes. Thank you!!!



**ONLINE GIVING**  
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**A THREAT TO OUR DECENCY**  
**BY: RONALD ROLHEISER**

Jesus tells us that in the end we will be judged on how we dealt with the poor in our lives, but there are already dangers now, in this life, in not reaching out to the poor

Here's how Bryan Stevenson, *Just Mercy*, teases out that danger: "I've come to believe that the true measure of our commitment to justice, the character of our society, our commitment to the rule of law, fairness, and equality cannot be measured by how we treat the rich, the powerful, the privileged, and the respected among us. The true measure of our character is how we treat the poor, the disfavored, the accused, the incarcerated, and the condemned. We are all implicated when we allow other people to be mistreated. An absence of compassion can corrupt the decency of a community, a state, a nation. Fear and anger can make us vindictive and abusive, unjust and unfair, until we all suffer from the absence of mercy and we condemn ourselves as much as we condemn others."

What needs to be highlighted here is what we do to ourselves when we don't reach out in compassion to the poor. We corrupt our own decency. As Stevenson puts it: An absence of compassion corrupts our decency – as a state, as a church, as family, and as individuals. How so?

St. Augustine teaches that we can never be morally neutral, either we are growing in virtue or falling into vice. We never have the luxury of simply being in some neutral, holding state. There's no moral neutrality. Either we are growing in virtue or sliding into virtue's opposite. That's true for all of life. A thing is either growing or it's regressing.

So too with our attitude towards justice and the poor: Either we are actively reaching out to the poor and being more drawn into concern for them or we are unconsciously hardening our hearts against them and unknowingly sliding into attitudes that trivialize their issues and distance ourselves from them. If we are not actively advocating for justice and the poor, it is inevitable that at a point we will, with completely sincere hearts, downplay the issues of poverty, racism, inequality, and injustice.

It's interesting to note that in the famous text on the final judgment in the Gospel where Jesus describes how God will divide the sheep from the goats on the basis of how they treated the poor, neither group, those who did it correctly and those who didn't, actually knew what they were doing. The group who did it right state that they didn't know that in touching the poor they were touching Christ; and the group who got it wrong protest that had they known that Christ was in the poor, they would have reached out. Jesus assures us that it doesn't matter. Mature discipleship lies simply in the doing, irrespective of our conscious attitude.

And so we need to be alert not just to our conscious attitudes but to what we are actually doing. We can, in all sincerity, in all good conscience, in all good heart, be blind towards justice and the poor. We can be moral men and women, pious church-goers, generous donors to those who ask help from us, warm to our own families and friends, and yet, blind to ourselves, though not to the poor, be unhealthily elitist, subtle racists, callous towards the environment, and protective of our own privilege. We are still good persons no doubt, but the absence of compassion in one area of our lives leaves us limping morally.

We can be good persons and yet fall into a certain hardness of heart because of kindred, ideological circles that falsely affirm us. Within any circle of friends, either we are talking about ways that we can more effectively lessen the gaps between rich and poor or we are talking, however unconsciously, about the need to defend the gaps that presently exist. One kind of conversation is stretching our hearts; the other is narrowing them. Lack of compassion for justice and the poor will inevitably work at turning a generous heart into a defensive one.

We all have friends who admire us and send us signals that we are good, big-hearted, virtuous persons. And no doubt this is substantially true. But the affirmation we receive from our own kind can be a false mirror. A truer mirror is how those who are politically, racially, religiously, and temperamentally different from ourselves assess us. How do the poor feel about us? How do refugees assess our goodness? How do other races rate our compassion?

And what about the mirror that Jesus holds up for us when he tells us that our goodness will be judged by how we treat the poor and that the litmus test of goodness consists is how well we love our enemies?

An absence of compassion in even one area subtly corrupts the decency of a community, a state, a nation, and that eventually turns our generosity into defensiveness.