
Pope Francis: appeal for Lebanon, a universal day of prayer and fasting on 4 September

The first public audience since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic has ended today with a long and heartfelt appeal for Lebanon. During the first face-to-face audience held in the San Damaso courtyard after six months of lockdown, following the greetings in Italian that usually mark the end of the Wednesday audience, Pope Francis invited a young priest holding a Lebanese flag to stand next to him. He then made an off-the-cuff appeal, which ended with the proclamation of a universal day of prayer and fasting on 4 September and the announcement that Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin will be visiting Lebanon, as the Holy Father's representative, to convey his "closeness and solidarity" with the country, which has been severely hit by the recent explosion in Beirut. "One month after the tragedy that struck the city of Beirut - the Pope said -, my thoughts turn once again to Lebanon and its people, so sorely tried". "Lebanon cannot be abandoned in its solitude", the Pope said in his appeal. For over 100 years, Lebanon has been "a country of hope" and "a unique place of tolerance, respect and coexistence in the region". Lebanon, in the Pope's words, "is more than a State: it is a message of freedom and an example of pluralism, both for the East and for the West. We cannot let this legacy be lost". He then encouraged the inhabitants of Beirut not to abandon their homes and their communities and called on local pastors to give an example of poverty - "no luxury" - together with their suffering people. At the end of the audience, the Holy Father exhorted the faithful to stand, with him, and pray in silence for Lebanon, entrusting the country to the protection of Mary.

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