
Lebanon: Fr. Abboud (Caritas), “Pope’s words moved us, he wants to protect Lebanon”. Card. Parolin visiting Beirut Port on Friday

“The Pope’s appeal at the general audience today gives us strength and hope. It is moving to see the pictures where he holds the Lebanese flag in his hand and kisses it”. Father Michel Abboud, president of Caritas Lebanon, said this in an interview from Beirut, his voice broken by emotion. “The Pope is close to Lebanon”, he told SIR news agency. “The kiss means love, and this tells us that Lebanon is in Pope Francis’ heart. It is a love that wants to protect everything that Lebanon represents as recalled by the Pontiff: ‘a place of tolerance, respect and coexistence unique in that region, a message of freedom and an example of pluralism, both for the East and for the West’. It comforts us to know that the Pope does not want this legacy to be lost”. “Today our country is threatened by a serious crisis. An economic and political crisis which, in the aftermath of Covid, and following the Beirut port explosion, has now also turned into a civil and social crisis. It is good that the Pontiff encouraged all the Lebanese people to find the “strength and energy needed to start anew and that he asked political and religious leaders to commit themselves with sincerity and openness to the work of rebuilding, setting aside all partisan interests”. Father Abboud reminded SIR news agency that “following the 4 August explosion at Beirut port, many Christians lost their homes, jobs, churches, schools. The whole Christian centre of the capital was hit and destroyed. The Pope’s words are a source of hope for us. Christians are an important component of this country and, together with Muslims, offer the world a beautiful example of coexistence”. “We welcome with great commitment - the President of Caritas Lebanon added - the Pope’s invitation to pastors, bishops, priests, and consecrated and lay persons to be close to our faithful in poverty, giving an example of poverty and humility. For our part, as Caritas, we will continue to share what we have with all the poor and the needy. It is on this very mission and service that the future of Lebanon and its inhabitants depends”. As for the universal day of prayer and fasting for Lebanon convened for next Friday, 4 September, Father Abboud said he is certain that “all the Lebanese people, not just Christians, will participate. The Secretary of State, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, will arrive here tomorrow, bringing us Pope Francis’ closeness and solidarity. As Caritas, we organised a mass tomorrow evening with all our volunteers. On Friday, we will visit the place of the explosion, the port of Beirut, to pray for all the victims together with Card. Parolin and the Papal Nuncio to Lebanon, Mgr. Joseph Spiteri”.

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