
Pope Francis: “Lebanon is, and must remain, a project of peace”

Lebanon “cannot be left prey to the course of events or those who pursue their own unscrupulous interests.” It is a small “yet great country, but even more, it is a universal message of peace and fraternity arising from the Middle East”, the Pope said, with a message addressed specifically to the inhabitants of the Land of the Cedars at the end of the ecumenical prayer in St Peter's Basilica, the concluding moment of the Day of Reflection and Prayer for Lebanon.

“In these woeful times, we want to affirm with all our strength that Lebanon is, and must remain, a project of peace”,

is Francis’ appeal, reiterating the content of **his address delivered in Bari on July 7 2018**: “I would reiterate how essential it is that ‘those in power choose finally and decisively to work for true peace and not for their own interests. Let there be an end to the few profiting from the sufferings of many! No more letting half-truths continue to frustrate people’s aspirations!’ Stop using Lebanon and the Middle East for outside interests and profits! The Lebanese people must be given the opportunity to be the architects of a better future in their land, without undue interference.” **A "mea culpa" over "our own lack of clarity" in the ecumenical journey resounded from St Peter's Basilica**: “the mistakes we have made in failing to bear consistent witness to the Gospel, and above all the opportunities we have missed along the path to fraternity, reconciliation and full unity. For all this, we ask forgiveness, and with contrite hearts we pray: ‘Lord, have mercy!’” This, in the Gospel, “was the plea of the woman.” “Today her plea has become that of an entire people, the disillusioned and weary Lebanese people in need of certainty, hope and peace.” *Lebanon’s vocation is “to be a land of tolerance and pluralism, an oasis of fraternity where different religions and confessions meet, where different communities live together, putting the common good before their individual interests.”* “Let us not desist, let us not tire of imploring heaven for that peace which men and women find so difficult to build on earth.” “Let us insistently offer this prayer for the Middle East”, is the Pope’s appeal. “**Dear Lebanese brothers and sisters**, even in the most difficult moments over the centuries, you have distinguished yourselves by your resourcefulness and industriousness”, Francis said. “Sink your roots in their dreams of peace”, is the Pope’s recommendation, coupled by a fourfold encouragement: “Citizens: do not be discouraged, do not lose heart, find in the roots of your history the hope of a new flowering. Political leaders: in accordance with your responsibilities, may you find urgent and durable solutions to the current economic, social and political crisis, mindful that there can be no peace without justice. Beloved Lebanese of the diaspora: place the best energies and resources at your disposal at the service of your homeland. Members of the international community: through joint efforts, may conditions be created so that the country will not collapse, but embark upon a path of recovery. This will be to everyone’s advantage.”

“As Christians, today we wish to renew our commitment to building a future together. For our future will be peaceful only if it is shared”,

is the commitment pledged by the Pope and by the religious leaders of Christian communities in Lebanon. “We Christians are called to be sowers of peace and builders of fraternity, not nursing past grudges and regrets, not shirking the responsibilities of the present, but looking instead with hope to the future”, together with “our Muslim brothers and sisters, and those of other religions.” Peace, Francis explained reiterating his remarks during the interreligious meeting at the Plain of Ur, Iraq, “does not call for winners or losers, but rather for brothers and sisters who, despite the misunderstandings and hurts of the past, are journeying from conflict to unity.”

“Beyond the black curtain of the night, there is a dawn that awaits us.”

The Holy Father concluded his address-message to Lebanon making “our own” the “hope-filled words” of the poet **Gibran**, an invitation to extend our gaze to the young, “lamps burning brightly at his dark hour”, to build a future that has the eyes of children: “shining brightly yet brimming with tears.” Still “other lights are shining on the horizon of Lebanon: they are women.” *“Women generate life and hope for everyone. May they be respected, valued and included in decision-making processes in Lebanon.”* “There is no other way to come to the dawn than by passing through the night”, the Pope said paraphrasing the poet Gibran. “And in the night of crisis, all of us need to remain united. Together, through honest dialogue and pure intentions, we can bring light where there is darkness.” “May the night of conflicts recede before a new dawn of hope. May hostilities cease, disagreements fade away, and Lebanon once more radiate the light of peace”, Francis said in his concluding remarks.

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