



The Holy See

BENEDICT XVI

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Paul VI Audience Hall

Wednesday, 19 September 2012

[\[Video\]](#)

Apostolic Journey to Lebanon

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today I would like to return briefly in my thoughts and in my heart to those extraordinary days of the *Apostolic Journey that I made to Lebanon*. It was a Journey that I strongly desired, despite the difficult circumstances, considering how a father must always be beside his children when they come up against serious problems. I was moved by the fervent desire to proclaim the peace which the Risen Lord left to his disciples with the words: "My peace I give to you" (Jn 14:27). The main purpose of my Journey was the signing and the consigning of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente* to representatives of the Catholic communities of the Middle East, as well as to the other Churches and Ecclesial communities and to Muslim leaders.

It was a moving ecclesial event and, at the same time, a providential occasion for dialogue in a country that is complex but also emblematic for the whole region because of its tradition of coexistence and fruitful collaboration among diverse religious and social components. In the face of the suffering and drama in which this part of the Middle East is steeped, I expressed my heartfelt closeness to the legitimate aspirations of this dear people, bringing them a message of encouragement and peace. I am thinking in particular of the terrible conflict that is tormenting Syria, causing, in addition to thousands of deaths, a stream of refugees pouring into the region in a desperate search for security and a future. And I have not forgotten the difficult situation in Iraq.

During my Visit, the people of Lebanon and of the Middle East — Catholics, Representatives of other Churches and Ecclesial Communities and of the various Muslim Communities — experienced enthusiastically and in a calm and constructive atmosphere an important moment of mutual respect, comprehension and brotherhood. This is a strong sign of hope for all humanity. But above all it was an encounter with the Catholic faithful of Lebanon and of the Middle East, present in thousands, which inspired in my spirit a feeling of profound gratitude for the ardour of their faith and their witness.

I thank the Lord for this precious gift which promises hope for the future of the Church in those regions: young people, adults and families enlivened by the tenacious desire to root their lives in Christ, to stay anchored to the Gospel, to walk together in the Church. I also renew my gratitude to all those who worked tirelessly for my Visit: the Patriarchs and Bishops of Lebanon with their collaborators, the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, the consecrated people, the lay faithful, who are a valuable and significant reality in Lebanese society. I was able to see directly how the Catholic Lebanese community, through their 2,000-year-old presence and their commitment filled with hope, makes a significant and appreciated contribution to the daily lives of all the inhabitants of the country. I extend a respectful and grateful thought to the Lebanese Authorities, to the Institutions and Associations, to the volunteers and to those who offered their support in prayer. I cannot forget the cordial welcome that I received from the President of the Republic, Mr Michel Sleiman, as well as from the various components of the country and from the people: it was a warm welcome, befitting the fame of Lebanese hospitality. The Muslims welcomed me with great respect and sincere esteem; their constant participation enabled me to send a message of dialogue and collaboration between Christianity and Islam. It seems to me that the time has come to bear together an honest and decisive witness against division, against violence, against war. The Catholics, who also came from neighbouring countries, showed fervently their deep affection for the Successor of Peter.

After the beautiful ceremony for my arrival at the airport of Beirut, the first event was particularly solemn: the signing of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente* in the Greek-Melkite Basilica of St Paul in Harissa. On that occasion I invited Middle Eastern Catholics to fix their gaze on Christ Crucified to find the strength, even in difficult and painful situations, to celebrate the victory of love over hate, of forgiveness over revenge and of unity over division. I assured everyone that the universal Church is closer than ever, in affection and prayer, to the Churches in the Middle East: although they are a “small flock”, in the certainty that the Lord is always with them, they need not be afraid. The Pope does not forget them.

On the second day of my Apostolic Journey I met with representatives of the institutions of the Republic and of the cultural world, the Diplomatic Corps and religious leaders. I pointed out to them, among other things, a way to take to encourage a future of peace and solidarity: it is a question of working to ensure that the cultural, social and religious differences, in sincere dialogue, achieve a new brotherhood in which what unites is the shared sense of the greatness and dignity

of every person, whose life must always be protected and preserved. On that same day I had a meeting with the leaders of the Muslim religious community, which took place in a spirit of dialogue and reciprocal goodwill. I thank God for this meeting. Today's world needs clear and strong signs of dialogue and collaboration. Lebanon has been and must continue to be an example of this for the Arab countries and for the rest of the world.

In the afternoon, at the residence of the Maronite Patriarch I was welcomed with uncontainable enthusiasm by thousands of young people from Lebanon and from the neighbouring countries, who gave life to a festive and prayerful moment which will live on, unforgettable, in the hearts of many. I emphasized their good fortune in living in the part of the world which saw Jesus, who died and rose for our salvation, and the development of Christianity, as I urged them to fidelity and to love for their land in spite of the difficulties caused by the lack of stability and security. In addition, I encouraged them to be steadfast in faith, trusting in Christ the source of our joy, and deepening their personal relationship with him in prayer, as well as being open to the great ideals of life, of the family, of friendship and of solidarity. Seeing young Christians and Muslims celebrating in great harmony, I urged them to build together the future of Lebanon and of the Middle East, and to combat together violence and war. Harmony and reconciliation must be stronger than the impulsion of death.

The very intense moment of Holy Mass in which large numbers took part at the City Center Waterfront of Beirut was on Sunday morning. It was accompanied by evocative hymns, as were the other celebrations. In the presence of numerous Bishops and a huge crowd of the faithful from every part of the Middle East, I wanted to urge everyone to live their faith and to witness to it fearlessly, in the knowledge that the vocation of Christians and of the Church is to take the Gospel to everyone without distinction, following Jesus' example. In a context marked by bitter conflicts, I called attention to the need to serve peace and justice, becoming instruments of reconciliation and builders of communion. At the end of the Eucharistic celebration, I had the joy of consigning the Apostolic Exhortation that contains the conclusions of the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops dedicated to the Middle East. Through the Patriarchs and the Eastern- and Latin-rite Bishops, the priests, the consecrated and lay people, this Document intends to reach out to all the faithful of this beloved region, to sustain them in the faith and in communion and to spur them on the path of the longed for new evangelization. In the afternoon, at the headquarters of the Syrian-Catholic Patriarchate, I then had the joy of a fraternal ecumenical meeting with the Orthodox and Eastern Orthodox Patriarchs and the representatives of those Churches, as well as of the Ecclesial Communities.

Dear friends, the days I spent in Lebanon were a marvellous manifestation of faith, intense religious feeling and a prophetic sign of peace. The multitude of believers coming from the entire Middle East had the opportunity to reflect, to converse and especially, to pray together, renewing the commitment to root their life in Christ. I am sure that the Lebanese people, in its multiform but well amalgamated religious and social composition, will be able to witness with a new impetus to

true peace that is born from trust in God. I hope that the various messages of peace and esteem which I sought to convey, may help the government leaders of the Region to take decisive steps toward peace and toward a better comprehension of relations between Christians and Muslims.

For my part I continue to accompany those beloved peoples with prayers, so that they may stay faithful to the commitments they have assumed. I entrust the fruits of this Pastoral Visit, as well as the good resolutions and the just aspirations of the whole of the Middle East to the motherly intercession of Mary, venerated in so many ancient Lebanese Shrines. Many thanks.

To special groups:

I greet all the English-speaking pilgrims present today at this audience, including those from England, Scotland, Ireland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Malta, Australia, Taiwan and the United States. Upon all of you, I invoke God's blessings of joy and peace!

I now address a cordial greeting to the Italian-speaking pilgrims, in particular the Benedictine Abbots from across the world, as well as to the participants in the General Chapters of the Brothers and Sisters of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts and Perpetual Adoration. I greet the lay Carmelites, who are participating in an international congress and the seminarians of Basilicata. On each one I invoke the continuous protection of God and of the Most Holy Virgin for a fruitful service to the Gospel and to the Church.

With special affection my thought goes, lastly, to the young people, the sick and the newlyweds. May friendship with Jesus, dear young people, be a source of joy and support for you in making demanding decisions; may it be a comfort to you, dear sick people, in difficult times, and may it give you relief in body and in spirit. Dear newlyweds, stay constantly united to Christ in order to achieve your vocation in reciprocal love faithfully.

© Copyright 2012 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana