



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
TO LEBANON
(14-16 SEPTEMBER 2012)

WELCOME CEREMONY

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XVI

*Rafiq Hariri International Airport, Beirut
Friday, 14 September 2012*

[[Video](#)]

*Mr President,
Messrs President of the Parliament and of the Council of Ministers,
Your Beatitudes, Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Civil and Religious Authorities, dear Friends,*

It is my honour to accept your invitation, Mr President, and that of the Catholic Patriarchs and Bishops of Lebanon, to visit your country. This dual invitation demonstrates, were it necessary, the dual purpose of my visit to your country. It underlines the excellent relations which have always existed between Lebanon and the Holy See, and seeks to contribute to strengthening them. This visit is also in response to your own visits to Rome in November 2008, and more recently in February 2011, a visit which was followed nine months later by that of the Prime Minister.

It was during the second of our meetings that the magnificent statue of Saint Maron was blessed. His silent presence at the side of Saint Peter's Basilica is a constant reminder of Lebanon in the very place where the Apostle Peter was laid to rest. It witnesses to a long spiritual heritage, confirming the Lebanese people's veneration for the first of the Apostles and for his successors. It is in order to underline the great devotion to Simon Peter that the Maronite Patriarchs add Boutros to their first name. It is wonderful to see how, from that Petrine sanctuary, Saint Maron intercedes

continually for your country and for the entire Middle East. Let me thank you in advance, Mr President, for all that you have done to make my stay among you a success.

Another reason for my visit is the important ecclesial event of the signature and the consigning of the post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of the Special Assembly for the Middle East of the Synod of Bishops, *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente*. I thank all the Catholic Patriarchs who have come, and particularly the Patriarch Emeritus, the beloved Cardinal Nasrallah Boutros Sfeir, and his successor Patriarch Bechara Boutros Raï. I offer fraternal greetings to all the Bishops of Lebanon, as well as to those who have travelled to pray with me and to receive this document from the hands of the Pope himself. Through them, I send fatherly greetings to all the Christians of the Middle East. Addressed to everyone, the Exhortation is intended as a roadmap for the years to come. During these days I am also pleased to be able to meet many representatives from the Catholic communities of your country, so as to celebrate and pray together. Their presence, commitment and witness are a valued contribution and are highly appreciated in the daily life of all the inhabitants of your beloved country.

I wish also to greet very warmly the Orthodox Patriarchs and Bishops who have come to welcome me, as well as the representatives of the other religious communities in Lebanon. Dear friends, your presence shows the esteem and the cooperation which, in mutual respect, you wish to promote among everyone. I thank you for your efforts and I am certain that you will continue to seek out the paths of unity and concord. I cannot forget the sad and painful events which have affected your beautiful country along the years. The successful way the Lebanese all live together surely demonstrates to the whole Middle East and to the rest of the world that, within a nation, there can exist cooperation between the various churches, all members of the one Catholic Church in a fraternal spirit of communion with other Christians, and at the same time coexistence and respectful dialogue between Christians and their brethren of other religions. Like me, you know that this equilibrium, which is presented everywhere as an example, is extremely delicate. Sometimes it seems about to snap like a bow which is overstretched or submitted to pressures which are too often partisan, even selfish, contrary and extraneous to Lebanese harmony and gentleness. This is where real moderation and great wisdom are tested. And reason must overcome one-sided passion in order to promote the greater good of all. Did not the great King Solomon, who knew Hiram, King of Tyre, consider that wisdom was the supreme virtue? This is why he pleaded to God for it insistently, and God gave him a wise and intelligent heart (1 Kg 3:9-12).

I have also come to say how important the presence of God is in the life of everyone and how the manner of coexistence, this conviviality to which your country wishes to bear witness, will run deep only if it is founded upon a welcoming regard for the other and upon an attitude of benevolence, and if it is rooted in God who wishes all men to be brothers. The celebrated Lebanese equilibrium which wishes to continue to be a reality, will continue through the good will and commitment of all Lebanese. Only then will it serve as a model to the inhabitants of the whole region and of the

entire world. This is not just a human task, but a gift of God which should be sought with insistence, preserved at all costs, and consolidated with determination.

The links between Lebanon and the Successor of Peter are ancient and deep. Mr President, dear friends, I have come to Lebanon as a pilgrim of peace, as a friend of God and as a friend of men. Christ says, *مُكَي طَعُ أَي مَاس*, "My peace I give to you" (*Jn 14:27*). And looking beyond your country, I also come symbolically to all the countries of the Middle East as a pilgrim of peace, as a friend of God and as a friend of all the inhabitants of all the countries of the region, whatever their origins and beliefs. To them too Christ says: *مُكَي طَعُ أَي مَاس*. Your joys and sorrows are constantly present in the Pope's prayers and I ask God to accompany you and to comfort you. Let me assure you that I pray especially for the many people who suffer in this region. The statue of Saint Maron reminds me of what you live and endure.

Mr President, I know that your country is preparing a fine welcome for me, a warm welcome, the welcome that is given to a beloved and respected brother. I know that your country wishes to be worthy of the Lebanese *Ahlan wa Sahlan* [welcome]. It is already so, and from now on it will be so even more. I am happy to be here with you. May God bless you all. (*مُكَي عَي مَجُّ ب ر ل ا ك ر ا بُّ ي ل*)
Thank you.