



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II
TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR
OF THE REPUBLIC OF LEBANON
TO THE HOLY SEE***

Thursday, 26 October 2000

Mr Ambassador,

1. I am particularly pleased to welcome Your Excellency as you present the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Lebanon to the Holy See.

I thank you for the kind words you addressed to me and I would appreciate it if you would express my gratitude to His Excellency General Émile Lahoud, President of the Lebanese Republic, for the wishes he sent me through your good offices. Through you I would like affectionately to greet all the Lebanese people. I cherish in my heart the memory of the warm welcome they gave me during my visit to Lebanon.

2. I listened attentively to what you told me about developments in the situation in southern Lebanon and of the political changes that have occurred in recent weeks. I hope that the love which all Lebanese have for their homeland will help them to live together, as they look to the future with a burning concern to "meet this challenge of reconciliation and brotherhood, of freedom and solidarity, which is the essential condition for Lebanon's existence and will cement your unity on this land which you love" (Apostolic Exhortation *A New Hope for Lebanon*, n. 120). The temptation to reawaken feelings that had grave consequences in the past can be avoided particularly through the growth of democracy and by giving all citizens the possibility to participate in their country's life, regardless of the religion or community to which they belong.

The strengthening of trust between the human and religious communities that make up the country is a necessary condition for banishing the fear of others and for reacquiring a taste for living

together.

This mutual trust, which should inspire social life at all levels, first depends on everyone's acceptance of universal moral values such as respect for life and fundamental human values, and freedom of conscience and religion. It is particularly urgent to allow everyone to have decent and worthy living conditions. Trust is also increased by patient and respectful dialogue among all the nation's constituents, as well as by shared participation in the country's development.

To succeed in this, it is up to those who have been given the task of leading the nation to work for the common good with determination, unselfishness and perseverance, and to encourage an equitable sharing of responsibilities, without seeking privileges for oneself or for one's community. However, as I have already had occasion to stress, "this also requires that the country regain its total independence, complete sovereignty and unequivocal freedom" (*A New Hope for Lebanon*, n. 121).

3. The current situation in the Middle East remains particularly disturbing. The definitive establishment of peace and security in the region is ever longer in coming and at times seems more and more remote. We can only note that the spiral of violence always brings great hardship to everyone, rekindling conflicts and making every prospect of reconciliation more difficult. The Holy Land, where God revealed himself and spoke to mankind, must become the place *par excellence* where peace and justice flourish. Jerusalem must be a particularly strong symbol of unity, peace and reconciliation for the whole human family!

Mr Ambassador, you mentioned the efforts taken by the Holy See to help find a just and equitable solution for the Holy City, particularly for the Holy Places of the three religions that coexist there.

The trusting relations that are growing between the Apostolic See and the region's peoples give reason to hope that the day will come when, through dialogue and negotiation, with respect for the dignity and identity of the communities, a special, internationally guaranteed statute can be established for the city's holiest sites.

4. Mr Ambassador, allow me through you to extend my most cordial greeting to the Patriarchs, Bishops and all the faithful of Lebanon's Catholic communities. In this year of the Great Jubilee, I invite them to be renewed by Christ and to find strength, joy and hope in him. By resolutely pursuing their efforts to continue strengthening their fraternal relations with the faithful of other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, as well as with the members of the monotheistic religions, particularly Muslims, they are helping to build a new Lebanon that can overcome misunderstandings and seek above all the happiness and prosperity of all her children. While remaining firmly attached to their land, may they continue to work tirelessly, with all their compatriots, to serve the common good by drawing from their faith the inspiration and principles of life to bear witness to Gospel values in society!

5. Mr Ambassador, as you officially begin your mission to the Apostolic See, I offer you my heartfelt wishes for the noble task that awaits you. Be assured that you will always receive an attentive welcome here and the help you may need from those who work with me.

Upon Your Excellency, upon your staff and loved ones, upon the nation's leaders and all the Lebanese people, I wholeheartedly invoke an abundance of divine blessings.

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