



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. MR NAJI ABI ASSI,
AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF LEBANON
TO THE HOLY SEE****

Friday, 2 April 2004

Mr Ambassador, I am pleased to receive Your Excellency at the Vatican on the occasion of the presentation of the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Lebanon to the Holy See. I thank you for your courteous words and I would be grateful if you would kindly convey to H.E. General Émile Lahoud, President of the Lebanese Republic, my thanks for the cordial good wishes he has expressed to me through you. I would also like through you to greet with affection the entire Lebanese People, as I remember with feeling their warm welcome when I visited their Country. Mr Ambassador, you recalled the uncertainties of the international situation today, marked by the deep destabilization of relations between countries due to the pressure of events in Iraq, but also and first of all by the unjustifiable and disturbing new outbreak of international terrorism. In the face of this precarious situation, the Holy See continues to implore a return to stability and international order through recognition of the regulatory role of the international bodies, especially the United Nations Organization, and the reinforcement of its means of decision-making and action in order to reduce the hotbeds of tension and guarantee peace. The Land of Lebanon, so harshly tried by the hardships of a long and terrible war, is once again endeavouring, in keeping with its exemplary tradition, to re-establish dialogue and balance between the various cultural and religious components which have always comprised the Lebanese Nation. The inhabitants have resumed their activities to rebuild their Country and to re-establish the economic and social conditions that will lead to the renewal of Lebanon and allow the many different treasures of Lebanese culture to flourish anew. It is to be hoped that your Country will rediscover the stable conditions which encourage a lasting economic and social development that benefits all, and the most underprivileged in particular. In this way, it will be possible to prevent the development of situations of injustice or financial difficulty and feelings of frustration that can weaken the social fabric, discouraging certain categories of the population from remaining in the Country who thus resort to emigration that enfeebles the Country by depriving it of its most precious resources: people. I hope that all the Lebanese will strive courageously to take part in the economic, social and political life of their Country in order to assure a future of peace and progress to their children. This likewise implies, as I have already had the opportunity to emphasize, "that the Country recover its total independence, complete sovereignty and freedom, without ambiguity" (*Une*

espérance nouvelle pour le Liban, n. 121). May your fellow citizens not be afraid to engage actively in the service of the common good, so as to promote a healthy practice of political customs, guarantee the smooth functioning of democracy, and safeguard and consolidate the identity of Lebanon, whose vocation is to be "a light for the peoples of the region and a sign of peace that comes from God" (*ibid.*, n. 125). I hope that the different human and religious communities which make up Lebanon may increasingly enjoy the same rights and the same respect, essential conditions for democratic life and for the freedom of persons. I also hope that they will do their part in this common task by constantly inviting respect and mutual dialogue, by expressing their views in civil society to remind everyone of the principles that must govern common life, and especially by taking part in the education of young people and increasingly arousing in them the love of justice and peace and respect for the dignity of each person. As you have forcefully stressed, Mr Ambassador, Lebanon's strategic situation places it at the heart of the Middle East and of the terrible war that continues to destroy it, starting with the ongoing confrontation between the Israeli and Palestinian Peoples, drawn out for more than 50 years. What is more, your Country, which must cope with a stream of people into its territory, obviously feels involved in this drama. As I have often recalled, the international community must not shirk its responsibilities under the pretext of other urgent tasks but must take them on courageously, inviting all who are involved, and primarily the Israelis and the Palestinians, to return to dialogue without delay and to find the means to put an end to this infernal cycle of reciprocal violence. This is the necessary prerequisite for a global solution to the conflict that must ally the group of countries in the region. I would also like to repeat that it will be impossible to re-establish lasting peace in this part of the world without political courage and the firm determination to recognize the rights of each one, including those of the adversary, to set out on the path to peace with respect for justice; not without accepting recourse to mutual forgiveness in order to heal the terrible wounds inflicted by reciprocal violence for so many years and by the many lives wrecked. May all the political leaders hear this appeal to work actively and without delay to restore relations, all at the service of rebuilding the peace so ardently desired! Mr Ambassador, through you, allow me now to reach out to the Patriarchs, Bishops and all the faithful of the Catholic communities of Lebanon. I know how deeply attached they are to their Country and I am aware of the active part they take, in the name of their faith, in its material and spiritual development. I encourage Catholics of different rites to work together at the service of communion and to pursue the path of unity with their brethren of other confessions. May they focus specifically on interreligious dialogue with the Muslims, especially in the area of the education of the young through universities and schools, but also in the dialogue of life: thus, they will become true peacemakers and help build a new Lebanon that can overcome misunderstandings and foster the common good at the service of all its children! At the end of our meeting, Mr Ambassador, I am pleased to address my cordial good wishes to you for the successful accomplishment of the noble mission to the Holy See that you are beginning today. Be assured that you will always find a warm welcome with my collaborators in the different services of the Roman Curia. Your Excellency, I wholeheartedly invoke upon you, upon your collaborators at the Embassy, upon those close to you, upon the leaders of the Nation and upon the entire Lebanese People an abundance of divine

Blessings.

* *L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly Edition in English* n. 16 p.3. © Copyright 2004 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana