



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO LEBANON (MAY 10-11, 1997)

DEPARTURE SPEECH AT BEIRUT INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

Sunday, 11 May

Mr President of the Republic,

1. At the end of my Pastoral Visit to your country, you have wished to come and greet me with the delicate sense of hospitality which is part of Lebanese tradition. I would like to tell you again how grateful I am for your welcome and for the arrangements which were made and ensured the smooth running of the various meetings I attended.

I extend my thanks to the civil and military authorities, and to the leaders of the various Churches and Ecclesial Communities for their thoughtfulness during the two days I have spent in this beautiful country, so dear to my heart. I also express warm gratitude to the members of the security services and all the volunteers who, with generosity, efficiency and discretion, contributed to the success of my visit.

2. During the celebrations and the different interviews I was able to have, I noticed the deep love that Lebanese Catholics and all their compatriots have for their country, and their attachment to its culture and traditions. They have remained faithful to their land and their heritage through many travails, and they continue to show the same fidelity today. I urge them to continue in this direction by giving an example of harmony between the cultures and religions, in a society where all the people and different communities are considered equal.

3. Before leaving your land, I renew my appeal to the authorities and to the entire Lebanese people to develop a new social order based on essential moral values and with the concern to guarantee individuals and human groups their essential place in national life and community decisions: this attention to man, which belongs naturally to the Lebanese soul, will bring peace to the country and to the region. I urge national leaders to respect international law, especially in the Middle East, so that the sovereignty, legitimate autonomy and security of States will be guaranteed and the law and

understandable aspirations of peoples respected. In acknowledging the efforts of the international community in the region, I hope that the process of seeking a just and lasting peace will continue to be upheld with determination, courage and consistency. I also hope that efforts will be pursued and intensified for supporting the country's growth and the advance of the Lebanese towards an ever more democratic society, with the total independence of its institutions and recognition of its borders, indispensable conditions if its integrity is to be guaranteed. But it will be impossible to do anything unless all the citizens are involved, each one in his own sphere, on the path of justice, equity and peace, in political, economic and social life and by sharing responsibilities in the life of society.

4. I would like once again to express my warm gratitude to the Patriarchs, the Lebanese Bishops, the clergy, the religious and the Catholic laity who busily prepared for my coming. I entrust my Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation to them all, that it may guide and support them on their spiritual journey and in their commitments as they accompany their brothers and sisters. Touched by my welcome from Lebanese Catholics, whose pastoral vitality I could appreciate, I would like to assure them of my affection and deep spiritual communion, as I invite them to be merciful witnesses of God's love and messengers of peace and brotherhood.

My respectful greetings are also extended to the heads of the other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, to all the Christians of other denominations, to the followers of Islam, in the hope that that all will pursue religious dialogue and co-operation to show that religious beliefs are a source of brotherhood and to testify that it is possible to live friendship, through love for God, for one's brothers and sisters and for one's homeland.

Through you, Mr President, I greet and thank all the Lebanese, offering them my fervent wishes for peace and prosperity. May your nation, whose mountains are like a beacon on the sea coast, offer the countries of the region a witness of social cohesion and good understanding between all its cultural and religious constituents.

As I renew my gratitude to you, I invoke an abundance of divine blessings upon all your compatriots.