



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY

OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

TO LEBANON (MAY 10-11, 1997)

ARRIVAL CEREMONY

AT BEIRUT INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

SPEECH OF POPE JOHN PAUL II

Saturday, 10 May 1997

Mr President,

Your Eminence,

Your Beatitudes and Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen, 1. First of all I thank His Excellency the President of the Republic for the cordial words of greeting which he has just addressed to me in the name of all the Lebanese people and I am particularly grateful for the welcome accorded to me on this memorable occasion. My gratitude goes also to the supreme State Authorities, and in particular to His Excellency the President of the Parliament and His Excellency the President of the Council of Ministers. I am grateful for the warm welcome given to me by the Catholic Patriarchs and Bishops, the other Christian, Muslim and Druze religious leaders, the civil and military Authorities and all my Lebanese friends. I greet the sons and daughters of this land who have wished to take part in this ceremony by radio or television. Allah iuberekum! (*God bless you!*) 2. How can I not begin by recalling the stop which Pope Paul VI made in Beirut on 2 December 1964, on his way to Bombay? In this way he demonstrated his special interest in Lebanon, showing that the Holy See esteems and loves this land and its people. Today, with great emotion, I have kissed the soil of Lebanon, as a sign of friendship and respect. I come among you, dear Lebanese people, as a friend who wishes to visit a people and support them in their daily journey. It is as a friend of Lebanon that I come to encourage the sons and daughters of this land of hospitality, this country of ancient spiritual and cultural traditions, so desirous of independence and freedom. On the threshold of the Third Millennium, Lebanon, while preserving her particular treasures and remaining faithful to herself, must be able to embrace the new realities of modern society and to take her full place in the community of nations. 3. Throughout the years of war, together with the whole Church, I closely followed the difficult times experienced by the Lebanese people and united myself in prayer with the sufferings which they endured. On numerous occasions, from the beginning of my Pontificate, I have urged the international community to help the Lebanese people once again to live peacefully within a national territory recognized

and respected by all, and to foster the rebuilding of a society of justice and brotherhood. From a human standpoint, many people died in vain as a result of the fighting. Families were displaced. Some Lebanese were forced into exile far from their native land. People of different cultures and religions who had been living on friendly terms and as good neighbours found themselves separated, even bitterly opposed. That period, which has happily come to an end, is still present in everyone's memory and has left many scars on people's hearts. Nonetheless, Lebanon is called to look resolutely to the future, a future freely determined by the choice of its people. In this spirit, I wish to pay homage to the sons and daughters of this land who, in the troubled times which I have just mentioned, gave an example of solidarity, fraternity, forgiveness and charity, even at the risk of their lives. I especially hail the attitude of many women, including mothers of families, who were a leaven of unity, educators in peace and coexistence, and tireless dialogue partners between different groups and between generations.⁴ Henceforth all are called to commitment on behalf of peace, reconciliation and fraternal life, by offering at their various levels signs of forgiveness and by working in the service of the national community, so that violence will never again prevail over dialogue, fear and suspicion over trust, resentment over fraternal love. In this new Lebanon which you are slowly rebuilding, it is important to give a place to every citizen, particularly to those who, inspired by legitimate patriotism, wish to become involved in political activity or economic life. From this point of view, the first condition for any truly democratic process is a just balance between the vital forces of the nation, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity which demands that each individual should share in and take responsibility for decision-making. On the other hand, the management of the *res publica* is founded on dialogue and compromise, not for the sake of making particular interests prevail or of preserving privileges, but so that political activity can be a fraternal service, independently of cultural or religious differences.⁵ On 12 June 1991 I announced the convening of the Special Assembly for Lebanon of the Synod of Bishops. After many stages of reflection and sharing within the Catholic Church in Lebanon, the Assembly met in November and December 1995. Today I have come among you for the solemn phase of the Synodal Assembly. To Catholics, to the Christians of other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, and to all people of good will, I am bringing the results of the Bishops' work, enriched by cordial dialogues with the fraternal delegates: the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *A New Hope for Lebanon*. This document, which I shall sign this evening in the presence of the young people, is not a conclusion or the final point in the journey which has been begun. Quite the opposite: it is an invitation to all Lebanese to begin with confidence a new page in their history. It is the contribution of the universal Church to the greater unity of the Catholic Church in Lebanon, to the overcoming of divisions between the different Churches and to the development of the country, in which all Lebanese are called to take part.⁶ As I arrive for the first time on Lebanese soil, I wish to say once more, Mr President, how grateful I am to you for your welcome. I offer warm good wishes for yourself and for your mission on behalf of your fellow-citizens. Through you, I offer cordial greetings to all the citizens of Lebanon. With all of them, I pray for Lebanon, that it may become what the Most High desires it to be. Allah iuberekum! (*God bless you!*)