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# **Michelle, Lebanon: The Pope's visit brought us hope**

On 4 August 2020, the explosion in Beirut shattered a nation and reduced Michelle's home to rubble. Five years later, the Pope's visit brought renewed hope and reconciliation to a people who "always find the courage to rise again."

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On 4 August 2020, Michelle, then working as an interior architect, was

spending a quiet afternoon at home in Mar Mikhael, Beirut. Within seconds, a deafening blast and a scorching wave of air tore through her apartment and thousands of homes across the capital. A new and unexpected challenge rose from the dust, screams, and rubble: that our rebuilding her home, her life, and her community.

Five years later, she shares what she went through during the explosion and how, for many Lebanese, the Pope's recent visit has opened a new chapter of hope and reconciliation for a people who "do not give up, but always find the courage to rise again."

Michelle finished her story joyfully: "His visit brought hope not only for Lebanon, but for the world."

**New hope**

The explosion left more than 200 dead, 7,000 injured, and 300,000 displaced. Pope Leo XIV's journey – fulfilling his predecessor Pope Francis' dream – brought a breath of fresh air to a country longing for unity and peace. The successor of Peter spoke to all Lebanese people in his addresses, especially those striving to spiritually and materially rebuild the country: families who've remained steadfast, communities seeking reconciliation, and individuals making sacrifices in order to stay in or return to the country and foster peace and hope.

**“You are people who do not give up, who rise again with courage”**

In his first address, the Pope highlighted the resilience of a people “who do not give up” and are able to rise even in the hardest trials. He invited them to begin again through dialogue and truth, recalling that

“there can be no lasting reconciliation without a common goal, or without openness towards a future in which good prevails over the evils.” He also praised the courage of those who have continued to accompany others with love and care.

He also spoke to young people, greeting them with the same affectionate and enthusiastic words as on the day of his election: “Peace be with you!” He encouraged them to aspire to full happiness, founded on the hope that the Holy Spirit plants in every person, and reminded them that they are the present and the future of the country. “You have the enthusiasm to change the course of history!” he told them. “The true opposition to evil is not evil, but love – a love capable of healing one’s own wounds while also caring for the wounds of others.”

He invited them to safeguard the heritage they have received: “Your homeland, Lebanon, will flourish once again, beautiful and vigorous like the cedar, a symbol of the people’s unity and fruitfulness. You know well that the strength of the cedar lies in its roots.” And he reminded them that Christ is the true beginning of a new life and the foundation of our confidence and every authentic commitment.

## **Reacting to suffering with charity and prayer**

“We live in in an era when personal relationships are fragile and consumed as if they were objects,” the Pope said, “If love has a time limit, it is not truly love. Conversely, friendship is genuine when it places ‘you’ before ‘I.’ This respectful and welcoming way of looking at others makes it possible for us to build a

greater “we,” open to society as a whole and to all of humanity.”

Reflecting on how to make God present in a time marked by pain and fatigue, he suggested two keys: an effort to live charity and finding time for daily prayer. “Take time each day to close your eyes and look only to God. He sometimes seems silent or absent, but he reveals himself to those who seek him in silence.” The saints accompany us in our efforts, especially Mary, the Mother of God: “How beautiful it is to look at Jesus through the eyes of Mary’s heart!”

**“The garden will seem like a forest, and we shall rejoice”**

The Pope’s visit was a reminder that Lebanon is not alone. The Church and many nations stand with it. It is possible to rise again, and God does not ask us to be strong all the time – only faithful. The everyday heroism

of constancy in little things is a path to holiness.

Amid the crowds, prayers, and chants, the Pope's message rekindled hope for many wounded families: "Very soon, Lebanon will become a garden once more, and the garden will seem like a forest. The oppressed shall again rejoice in the Lord, and the poor shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel" (Is 29:17,19).

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