

The Prelate's trip to Lebanon: Peace is a gift of God

Bishop Javier Echevarria has returned to Rome from a brief pastoral visit to Lebanon. Following the recent outbreak of war, the Prelate wanted to encourage the faithful of Opus Dei and their friends of all faiths to be "sowers of peace."

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The four-day trip began on Wednesday, October 11. "During the

conflict," the Prelate began, "we joined the many Christians everywhere who were praying very much for this country. We suffered along with you and for you. This experience must stir us all to spread peace in our ordinary dealings with people, one by one. You have to be, in the words of Opus Dei's Founder, sowers of peace and joy."

Opus Dei began its apostolate in Lebanon in 1996. Along with Christians, people of other faiths take part in its means of formation.

While in the country, Bishop Echevarria visited Al Tilal, an international center for professional, cultural, and spiritual formation located in the Byblos Mountains 28 miles north of Beirut. He met with the center's staff, with people who take part in its activities, and with families who live nearby.

The Prelate urged everyone present, whatever their religious affiliations, to pray for peace; imploring God for it, he said, is the best way to preserve peace. With this same intention, he went to pray at the shrine of Our Lady of Lebanon in Harissa. After spending several minutes in the Eucharistic chapel, he prayed the Rosary on the esplanade in front of Our Lady's image.

Later Bishop Echevarria met with the Maronite Bishop of Byblos, Bechaara Rai. They spoke of various ways the lay faithful are being helped to assume their responsibilities in building up the Catholic Church in Lebanon. The Prelate also spoke with Msgr. Luiggi Gatti, the Apostolic Delegate in Lebanon, concerning the present situation and the Church's hopes for Lebanon and in the Middle East.

Next he visited the Maronite Patriarch, Nasrallah Sfeir, who was especially interested to learn of the social activities promoted by Al Tilal, and encouraged Opus Dei's faithful and their friends to continue developing that work, so necessary for Lebanon.

In his meetings with Christians and those who profess other faiths, the Prelate emphasized that all believers need to support each other with their prayers: "All these prayers, the graces received, and the particular concerns of everyone in this period of reconstruction must stimulate us to speak more about God to all kinds of people. Help them renew their optimism in doing what each one can do to improve our society."

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