

My dear and holy people, fellow Catholics in the world-wide Body of Christ, I am honored to be with you today and to share in this time of prayer, sorrow, and hope. For so many of you your family roots trace their way back to Lebanon, and specifically to Beirut – a city which has suffered too often, and now with this terrible explosion. Our hearts are wounded, and our souls cry out to God for relief.

In the midst of our shock and grief we have two very important duties. The first, of course, is to honor the dead by praying for the repose of their souls and the consolation of their grieving families. We know that God the Father has a merciful heart. We know that God understands our grief and our aspirations for goodness. We trust in God. Then we have a second duty. This is the duty to accompany the people of Lebanon with our love and support, our devotion and care. We will be able to express this in practical ways through contributing to their rebuilding and helping them to secure a better future.

St. Paul tell us, in his Letter to the Romans which we read only moments ago, that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. For St. Paul this wasn't merely a pious statement, but rather, a lived reality. He was a man accustomed to experiencing threats, beatings, jailings, expulsions, and rejection. When he wrote these words, he was about to face a trial that would ultimately lead to his martyrdom by beheading. St. Paul was a man who understood the dangers and terrors of this world in a very personal way. Yet, he is filled with confidence. Why? Because, as he says, "in all these things we conquer overwhelmingly through him who loved us." Friends, beyond our grief we will be conquerors in Him who has loved us. We

need this confidence now! Our family members and friends in Beirut who have died or been wounded will not have died in vain because Christ will draw them to Himself in love and restoration.

The souls of our beloved dead are worth more than any sparrow or any other creature of God, for the human person has been made in God's own image and likeness, and the Father will not lose anyone whom Christ has gained for him. We need this unshakable confidence in our own hearts right now.

We need also to rally ourselves to the practical and charitable aid for this people who have suffered too much. Lebanon was already in peril because of this terrible Pandemic, and the nation's economy was already under tremendous strain. This explosion has taken over 100 lives, injured more than 4,000 people, and left in its wake over \$15 billion dollars in damage to homes, businesses, schools, markets, hospitals and health clinics, churches, mosques, and the disruption of normal life. Cardinal Rai, Patriarch of the Maronites, has said ““Hundreds of families are homeless. All this is happening, and the state is in an economic and financial situation which makes it incapable of dealing with this human and urban catastrophe,” and so he has appealed for the help of the whole world.

Our Holy Father, Pope Francis, said “Let us pray for the victims, for their families; and let us pray for Lebanon so that, through the dedication of all its social, political and religious elements, it might face this extremely tragic and painful moment and, with the help of the international community, overcome the grave crisis they are experiencing.”

And so, my dear friends, true brothers and sisters in Christ, as we attend to our grief and shock, let us resolve to assist our brothers and sisters in Lebanon to rebuild, restore, and renew the church and all of society in that most unique and beautiful of lands. Let us not grow slack, but rather, resolute in our determination to be the face of Christ to those who suffer and who grieve.