



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
TO LEBANON
(14-16 SEPTEMBER 2012)

**MEETING WITH MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT,
INSTITUTIONS OF THE REPUBLIC, THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS,
RELIGIOUS LEADERS AND REPRESENTATIVES OF THE WORLD OF CULTURE**

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XVI

*May 25th Hall of the Baabda Presidential Palace
Saturday, 15 September 2012*

[Video]

*Mr President,
Representatives of the Parliamentary, Governmental,
Institutional and Political Authorities of Lebanon,
Chiefs of Diplomatic Missions,
Your Beatitudes,
Religious Leaders,
Brother Bishops,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Friends,*

مُكِّي طَعُأَ يِمَ لَس [My peace I give to you] (Jn 14:27)! With these words of Christ Jesus, I greet you and I thank you for your presence and your warm welcome. Mr President, I am grateful to you not only for your cordial words of welcome but also for having allowed this meeting to take place. With you, I have just planted a cedar of Lebanon, the symbol of your beautiful country. In looking at this sapling, and thinking of the care which it will need in order to grow and stretch forth its majestic branches, I think of this country and its future, the Lebanese people and their hopes, and all the

people of this region which seems to endure interminable birth pangs. I have asked God to bless you, to bless Lebanon and all who dwell in these lands which saw the birth of great religions and noble cultures. Why did God choose these lands? Why is their life so turbulent? God chose these lands, I think, to be an example, to bear witness before the world that every man and woman has the possibility of concretely realizing his or her longing for peace and reconciliation! This aspiration is part of God's eternal plan and he has impressed it deep within the human heart. So I would like to speak to you about peace, echoing Jesus' invocation: مَكِّي طَعَامُ يَمِ السَّ [My peace I give to you].

The wealth of any country is found primarily in its inhabitants. The country's future depends on them, individually and collectively, as does its capacity to work for peace. A commitment to peace is possible only in a unified society. Unity, on the other hand, is not the same as uniformity. Social cohesion requires unstinting respect for the dignity of each person and the responsible participation of all in contributing the best of their talents and abilities. The energy needed to build and consolidate peace also demands that we constantly return to the wellsprings of our humanity. Our human dignity is inseparable from the sacredness of life as the gift of the Creator. In God's plan, each person is unique and irreplaceable. A person comes into this world in a family, which is the first locus of humanization, and above all the first school of peace. To build peace, we need to look to the family, supporting it and facilitating its task, and in this way promoting an overall culture of life. The effectiveness of our commitment to peace depends on our understanding of human life. If we want peace, let us defend life! This approach leads us to reject not only war and terrorism, but every assault on innocent human life, on men and women as creatures willed by God. Wherever the truth of human nature is ignored or denied, it becomes impossible to respect that *grammar* which is the natural law inscribed in the human heart (cf. [*Message for the 2007 World Day of Peace*](#), 3). The grandeur and the *raison d'être* of each person are found in God alone. The unconditional acknowledgement of the dignity of every human being, of each one of us, and of the sacredness of human life, is linked to the responsibility which we all have before God. We must combine our efforts, then, to develop a sound vision of man, respectful of the unity and integrity of the human person. Without this, it is impossible to build true peace.

While more evident in countries which are experiencing armed conflict – those wars so full of futility and horror – there are assaults on the integrity and the lives of individuals taking place in other countries too. Unemployment, poverty, corruption, a variety of addictions, exploitation, different forms of trafficking, and terrorism not only cause unacceptable suffering to their victims but also a great impoverishment of human potential. We run the risk of being enslaved by an economic and financial mindset which would subordinate “being” to “having”! The destruction of a single human life is a loss for humanity as a whole. Mankind is one great family for which all of us are responsible. By questioning, directly or indirectly, or even before the law, the inalienable value of each person and the natural foundation of the family, some ideologies undermine the foundations of society. We need to be conscious of these attacks on our efforts to build harmonious *coexistence*. Only effective solidarity can act as an antidote, solidarity that rejects

whatever obstructs respect for each human being, solidarity that supports policies and initiatives aimed at bringing peoples together in an honest and just manner. It is heartening to see examples of cooperation and authentic dialogue bearing fruit in new forms of coexistence. A better quality of life and integral development are only possible when wealth and competences are shared in a spirit of respect for the identity of each individual. But this kind of cooperative, serene and animated way of life is impossible without trust in others, whoever they may be. Nowadays, our cultural, social and religious differences should lead us to a new kind of fraternity wherein what rightly unites us is a shared sense of the greatness of each person and the gift which others are to themselves, to those around them and to all humanity. This is the path to peace! This is the commitment demanded of us! This is the approach which ought to guide political and economic decisions at every level and on a global scale!

In order to make possible a future of peace for coming generations, our first task is to educate for peace in order to build a culture of peace. Education, whether it takes place in the family or at school, must be primarily an education in those spiritual values which give the wisdom and traditions of each culture their ultimate meaning and power. The human spirit has an innate yearning for beauty, goodness and truth. This is a reflection of the divine, God's mark on each person! This common aspiration is the basis for a sound and correct notion of morality, which is always centred on the person. Yet men and women can turn towards goodness only of their own free will, for "human dignity requires them to act out of a conscious and free choice, as moved in a personal way from within, and not by their own blind impulses or by exterior constraint" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 17). The goal of education is to guide and support the development of the freedom to make right decisions, which may run counter to widespread opinions, the fashions of the moment, or forms of political and religious ideology. This is the price of building a culture of peace! Evidently, verbal and physical violence must be rejected, for these are always an assault on human dignity, both of the perpetrator and the victim. Emphasizing peacemaking and its positive effect for the common good also creates interest in peace. As history shows, peaceful actions have a significant effect on local, national and international life. Education for peace will form men and women who are generous and upright, attentive to all, especially those most in need. Thoughts of peace, words of peace and acts of peace create an atmosphere of respect, honesty and cordiality, where faults and offences can be truthfully acknowledged as a means of advancing together on the path of reconciliation. May political and religious leaders reflect on this!

We need to be very conscious that evil is not some nameless, impersonal and deterministic force at work in the world. Evil, the devil, works in and through human freedom, through the use of our freedom. It seeks an ally in man. Evil needs man in order to act. Having broken the first commandment, love of God, it then goes on to distort the second, love of neighbour. Love of neighbour disappears, yielding to falsehood, envy, hatred and death. But it is possible for us not to be overcome by evil but to overcome evil with good (cf. *Rom* 12:21). It is to this conversion of heart that we are called. Without it, all our coveted human "liberations" prove disappointing, for they are curtailed by our human narrowness, harshness, intolerance, favouritism and desire for

revenge. A profound transformation of mind and heart is needed to recover a degree of clarity of vision and impartiality, and the profound meaning of the concepts of justice and the common good. A new and freer way of looking at these realities will enable us to evaluate and challenge those human systems which lead to impasses, and to move forward with due care not to repeat past mistakes with their devastating consequences. The conversion demanded of us can also be exhilarating, since it creates possibilities by appealing to the countless resources present in the hearts of all those men and women who desire to live in peace and are prepared to work for peace. True, it is quite demanding: it involves rejecting revenge, acknowledging one's faults, accepting apologies without demanding them, and, not least, forgiveness. Only forgiveness, given and received, can lay lasting foundations for reconciliation and universal peace (cf. *Rom* 12:16b, 18).

Only in this way can there be growth in understanding and harmony between cultures and religions, and in genuine mutual esteem and respect for the rights of all. In Lebanon, Christianity and Islam have lived side by side for centuries. It is not uncommon to see the two religions within the same family. If this is possible within the same family, why should it not be possible at the level of the whole of society? The particular character of the Middle East consists in the centuries-old mix of diverse elements. Admittedly, they have fought one another, sadly that is also true. A pluralistic society can only exist on the basis of mutual respect, the desire to know the other, and continuous dialogue. Such dialogue is only possible when the parties are conscious of the existence of values which are common to all great cultures because they are rooted in the nature of the human person. This substratum of values expresses man's true humanity. These values are inseparable from the rights of each and every human being. By upholding their existence, the different religions make a decisive contribution. It cannot be forgotten that religious freedom is the basic right on which many other rights depend. The freedom to profess and practise one's religion without danger to life and liberty must be possible to everyone. The loss or attenuation of this freedom deprives the person of his or her sacred right to a spiritually integrated life. What nowadays passes for tolerance does not eliminate cases of discrimination, and at times it even reinforces them. Without openness to transcendence, which makes it possible to find answers to their deepest questions about the meaning of life and morally upright conduct, men and women become incapable of acting justly and working for peace. Religious freedom has a social and political dimension which is indispensable for peace! It promotes a harmonious life for individuals and communities by a shared commitment to noble causes and by the pursuit of truth, which does not impose itself by violence but rather "by the force of its own truth" (*Dignitatis Humanae*, 1): the Truth which is in God. A lived faith leads invariably to love. Authentic faith does not lead to death. The peacemaker is humble and just. Thus believers today have an essential role, that of bearing witness to the peace which comes from God and is a gift bestowed on all of us in our personal, family, social, political and economic life (cf. *Mt* 5:9; *Heb* 12:14). The failure of upright men and women to act must not permit evil to triumph. It is worse still to do nothing.

These few reflections on peace, society, the dignity of the person, the values of family life,

dialogue and solidarity, must not remain a simple statement of ideals. They can and must be lived out. We are in Lebanon, and it is here that they must be lived out. Lebanon is called, now more than ever, to be an example. And so I invite you, politicians, diplomats, religious leaders, men and women of the world of culture, to testify with courage, in season and out of season, wherever you find yourselves, that God wants peace, that God entrusts peace to us. مُكِّي طَعُ أَي مَالَس [My peace I give to you] (Jn 14:27) says Christ! May God bless you! Thank you!