



VATICAN - Pope: "The world today needs clear and unequivocal signs of dialogue and collaboration, something of which Lebanon has been and must continue to be an example"

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - The "extraordinary days" of the Apostolic Trip made in Lebanon, "despite the difficult circumstances, because a father must always remain alongside his children when they face serious problems" were the focus Pope Benedict XVI's catechesis dedicated during his general audience on Wednesday, September 19, which was held at the Paul VI Hall in the Vatican, from Castel Gandolfo.

After pointing out that the main purpose of the trip was the signing and delivery of the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in the Middle East*, the Holy Father continued: "In the face of the suffering and drama which persist in that area of the Middle East, I expressed my heartfelt participation in the legitimate aspirations of those dear peoples, bringing them a message of encouragement and peace. I think in particular of the terrible conflict which is ravaging Syria and which causes, apart from thousands of deaths, a flow of refugees who move around the region desperately seeking security and future, and nor do I forget the difficult situation in Iraq."

Benedict XVI focused in particular on welcoming the people of Lebanon and the Middle East (Catholic, representatives of other Churches and ecclesial communities and the various Muslim communities): "It was a warm welcome, according to the famous Lebanese hospitality. The Muslims welcomed me with great respect and sincere consideration. Their constant affable presence gave me the opportunity to launch a message of dialogue and collaboration between Christianity and Islam. I believe the time has come to bear sincere and definite witness together against divisions, violence, and war. The Catholics, who also came from neighboring Countries, expressed with fervor their deep affection for the Successor of Peter."

Retracing the steps of his trip, the Holy Father recalled the invitation addressed to the Middle Eastern Catholics "to fix their gaze on the crucified Christ in order to find, even at times of difficulty and suffering, the strength to celebrate the victory of love over hatred, of forgiveness over revenge, of unity over division" on the occasion of the signing of the Apostolic Exhortation.

During the meeting with representatives of State institutions and the world of culture, the diplomatic corps and religious leaders, the Pope stressed the importance of working to ensure "that cultural, social and religious differences are resolved in sincere dialogue, a new fraternity, where what unites us is a shared sense of the greatness and dignity of each person, whose life must always be safeguarded and protected."

On meeting the Heads of Muslim religious communities, "in a spirit of dialogue and mutual benevolence," the Pope said that "the world today needs clear and unequivocal signs of dialogue and collaboration, something of which Lebanon has been and must continue to be an example, for the Arab States and the rest of the world".

Especially exciting was the meeting with thousands of young Lebanese and neighboring countries: "I encouraged them to be steadfast in faith, trusting Christ, the source of our joy - the Pope said - and to deepen the personal relationship with Him in prayer as well as to be open to the great ideals of life, family, friendship and solidarity. Seeing young Christians and Muslims celebrate in great harmony, I encouraged them to build the future of Lebanon and the Middle East together, and to oppose violence and war. Harmony and reconciliation must be stronger than the forces of death".

During Sunday Mass in the presence of many Bishops and a large crowd of faithful from all over the Middle East, "I encouraged everyone to live their faith without fear and to witness it - recalled Benedict XVI - knowing that the vocation of Christians and of the Church is to bring the gospel to all without distinction, following the example of Jesus. In a context marked by bitter conflicts, I drew attention to the need to serve peace and justice by becoming instruments of reconciliation and builders of communion". (SL) (Agenzia Fides 20/09/2012)

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The full text of the Pope's catechesis: http://press.catholica.va/news_services/bulletin/news/29678.php?index=29678&lang=it: