

Archbishop Smith prays with Maronite Catholics for healing, peace and hope in Lebanon

In the wake of a disaster that shattered a city as well as hearts around the world, Maronite Catholics in Edmonton heard a message of faith, hope and solidarity from Archbishop Richard Smith.

The Aug. 4th explosion in the Lebanese capital of Beirut caused massive destruction, killing at least 200 people and injuring some 5,000 others. The Archbishop visited Edmonton's Our Lady of Good Help Maronite Parish, home to many Catholics of Lebanese heritage, on Aug. 9 to celebrate a bilingual Mass in Arabic and English with their pastor, Chorbishop Charles Saad.

Archbishop Smith said it was important to draw together in prayer for the people of Lebanon and their loved ones, for strength, for stability, and for a future of hope:

"The shock waves of the blast in Beirut destroyed everything within a certain geographical radius," Archbishop Smith said. "More than that, they reached far beyond city limits to shatter hearts everywhere, and none more painfully than yours. So, I've come to be with you today to assure you that the Bishops of Canada stand with you, the people of this Archdiocese stand with you, and, of course, I stand with you."

Chorbishop Saad welcomed the Archbishop, thanking him for his letter of condolence to parishioners and saying, "we appreciate so much your gesture and humbleness. Today, you are the father of all among us. Your presence today is like Jesus' presence; you are and will be welcome anytime you desire to visit us."

Archbishop Smith stressed that the disaster caused much more than physical damage.

"It hurts our very souls," he said. "And when we hurt at such a deep level, it's really important to draw together. As people of faith we understand we must draw together in prayer, because it takes our suffering and our pain and gives it to the Lord, who has that unfathomable power to turn even those grievous things into something that can give birth to hope and good. We don't always know how that is, but we know from our experience of faith that it is true."



Parishioners at Edmonton's Our Lady of Good Help Maronite Parish, home to many Catholics of Lebanese heritage, on Aug. 9 to celebrate a bilingual Mass in Arabic and English with Archbishop Richard Smith and their pastor, Chorbishop Charles Saad.

Smith also recalled his 2017 visit to Lebanon, which was made possible by the parishioners of Our Lady of Good Help.

"The memories remain vivid. They are memories of a beautiful and hospitable people, who for centuries have exhibited enormous resilience in the midst of extraordinary complexity and fragility. I remember marvelling at the multiple intersections between and among religion, politics and economics, not only nationally but also internationally, all playing out in the small and beautiful corner of the world known as Lebanon. I recall how apt was the statement of St. John Paul II, who, when he visited your country, said: 'Lebanon is more than a nation, more than a country. It is a message.'

"I would characterize the message of Lebanon this way: resilience born of faith. It may well be difficult to state that right now, when the situation is so dire and the resources upon which the people might rise up from the disaster are practically nil. The natural tendency is to despair. But what we hear in the Scriptures tonight prevents us from despairing. Rather, it strengthens resolve and even allows us to dare to hope.

"Lebanon is very much in a state of mortal peril. But we know that the Lord will not abandon the people of this beloved country. He will draw near. He comes with the same words that he spoke to the disciples: 'Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.' (*Matthew 14.22-33*)

“I think it is helpful to notice that Jesus does not tell them straightaway what he will do, or what they are to do. That’s the first thing the disciples would have wanted to know. ‘What are we supposed to do now? What will you do?’ Jesus simply states that he is near, and wants them to trust that that is enough. ‘I am God and I am with you. Don’t be afraid.’”

“Faith in the presence, the power and the love of God is what gives birth to resilience. We know he is with us, will never abandon us and will take us by the hand across the stormy seas of destruction and hardship to safety and peace.”