

A Letter from Beirut

Tuesday, August 4th, 2020.

I am sitting in a room in the suburbs of Beirut, preparing to participate in a Zoom meeting when, suddenly, everything around me starts to move. Suddenly an explosion followed by another louder one. What's happening?

In about half of the city, the historical heart of the resistance, the whole neighbourhood is in ruins. The spectacle is apocalyptic. We think of a new nuclear catastrophe. The streets are littered with bodies, rubble, loose bodies ... The earth trembles for hundreds of miles around. Not a roof, not a single window is spared, shards of glass are scattered everywhere. Beirut devastated! Again, and like never before! Thousands injured, hundreds dead! Hundreds of thousands homeless! Beirut, martyred city! I have no words... While Lebanon is adrift, while corruption rages, my people, distraught, are licking their wounds, as best they can. Again, my heart explodes! Once again I feel torn, torn in the ruins... I mourn for lost friends and worry for those who are wounded. Impotent, I look at my family, nephews and nieces with great sadness. They did not experience the civil war that I myself survived. Why do they now have to live through the same atrocities and worse?

And now avalanches of messages and gestures of support are pouring in from all over; from my sisters and friends in France, and from all over the world. Without wasting an hour or a day, families and friends look for each other, organize the security of everything, everyone. Phones, social networks and emails roar with the power of supersonic aircraft engines. We're getting closer, sticking together. No sleeping outside, no leaving anyone alone. No lingering on our tears. We'll figure it out later... when there's time. How many times? The seventh time? The hundredth time? How many more times do we have to rebuild? Is it never going to stop? No, it will never stop, because that is the fate of mankind: to rebuild, again and again.

Oh how fragile peace is! In the face of this chaos, I think back to the words of the Lebanese poet Gibran Khalil Gibran: "No one can reach dawn without passing through the path of night". Yes, we will rebuild. I know the resilience of my people. Because we know that this is our fate in this part of the world. Because we are descendants of the Phoenicians. Because in Lebanon, the blessed land, the phoenix always rises from its ashes! Because building is our happiness. Tomorrow, we will rise again as we have always done. Because we know we are not alone. No flame gushing forth from the earth, no matter how dazzling, no matter how powerful, no matter how devastating, will ever be able to extinguish the flame that comes to us from heaven. We know how to grasp that light, how to make it shine. We know that nothing can ever extinguish it. Through it, with it, in it, we will rebuild together, with all our friends, a city of light, even more beautiful, a city where everyone feels at home. **Let me end with simply a heartfelt thank you to all of you who have shown us their presence and solidarity.**

Sr. Hanan Youssef.