News for prayer from our friends in Lebanon received on 12th April 2021

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| 12th April is the anniversary of the start of the 25 year civil war in Lebanon, but people who remember it are saying that conditions in the current Lebanon crisis are worse than those experienced during the civil war. One 58-year old mother of three who survived shelling and clashes is reported by AFP as saying she now fears a ‘slow death’ from the economic crisis. ‘even the worst days of the war weren’t this tough’ she says ‘we used to hide in houses or basements every time we heard shelling, but today where can we go to hide from hunger, the economic crisis, the coronavirus crisis and our political leaders? We used to fear death from bombardment or sniper fire, but now we fear everything: illness, poverty and hunger’. The Lebanese Pound has now lost 85% of its value against the dollar on the black market and prices have soared. But the deadlock in trying to form a new Government continues. The parliament Speaker is calling for a non-partisan Cabinet of specialists with no veto power for any side and US Under Secretary of State David Hale visited Lebanon the day after the civil war anniversary expressing concern over the worsening social and political situation and urging the early formation of a new Government saying the US needs a credible partner to work with to help the country recover. The leading church figure in Lebanon, the Maronite Patriarch, has been very vocal and courageous in telling the truth about malign foreign interference, the culpability of both the criminal corrupt political class and Hezbollah and calling for an international UN-sponsored conference to attend to the formalizing of Lebanon’s “neutral” status. Patriarch Ra’I inspired the heads of all the Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant Churches in Lebanon to sign a joint Declaration at the beginning of the current crisis in 2019 which particularly appealed for outside help from the international community saying:- *To the international community we say: Do not abandon your role in supporting the first democracy that emerged in the Middle East and to preserve the first experiment of Christian / Muslim partnership and coexistence that emerged since World War I. We call upon you to help Lebanon solve the problems resulting from the wars of the countries of the region, and to strictly implement all international resolutions.*  *We also call upon the international community, near and far, to support the Lebanese people and government to remain a beacon of light and freedom in this East, and to fulfill its calling to be a “nation with a message” as the late Pope, St. John Paul II, phrased it.*Please pray:* Pray the Lord will show mercy on Lebanon, to her people and her health system.  Ask the Lord to restore many to health and provide vaccines for its six million people. Give thanks that people are beginning to be called for their Covid-19 vaccination.
* For the Holy Spirit to break down the sectarianism within the country. To see churches more often come together and be a living witness of how to love the other and be an example to the rest of society. For strength for church congregations as they continue to help the poor and needy, helping people to rebuild their lives, giving thanks for all that God has already helped them to achieve. For the Holy Spirit to help church leaders to continue to be bold in speaking truth to power.
* For the Holy Spirit to heal the fractured lives and hearts of the Lebanese people from past conflicts and deeply rooted hurts. For forgiveness and reconciliation amongst all sections of society and all faiths.
* For wisdom and guidance for the leaders of the Lebanon and for freedom from influences beyond their borders. For the swift formation of a national interest government which will be a credible partner for international partners to work with.
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