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Audience with the Members of the “Maronite Foundation” and the Lebanese Authorities

This morning, in the Clementine Hall of the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of the “Maronite Foundation” and the Lebanese authorities, accompanied by His Eminent Beatitude Cardinal Béchara Boutros Raï, Patriarch of Antioch of the Maronites, at the end of the “ad Limina Apostolorum” visit of the Patriarchal Church of Antioch of the Maronites.

The following is the greeting the Pope addressed to those present during the meeting:

Improvised greeting of the Holy Father

Good morning!

Thank you for your visit. It is interesting, what the Patriarch [Cardinal Raï] said, that is, that the *ad Limina* visit is accompanied by the faithful. It is a good idea, it can be made official, in that way they can gossip about the bishops! It could work! In this way we will know the most concrete things about the community.

This reminds me of the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves, because they told me, “There will be about forty [people] to greet”, but I witnessed the multiplication of the Lebanese! But thank you for coming in such large numbers! Thank you.

I would like to say thank you to the Lebanese community for all they do in Lebanon. For two things: maintaining the balance – this creative balance, strong as cedars – between Christians and Muslims, Sunni and Shiite, an equilibrium of patriots, of brothers. I thank you first of all for this. And I would also like to thank you for another thing: your generosity, your welcoming heart with refugees; you have more than a million of them. Thank you, thank you very much.

And now I will ask the Lord to bless you all. May the Lord bless you, your families, your homeland, your sons,

your refugees. May He bless you all. Amen.
