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Address of the Rector  
**Closing Ceremony of UA's Silver Jubilee**  
Father Michel Jalakh, OAM

26<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Antonine University  
Feast of Our Lady of the Seeds  
May 15, 2022

Honorable Faculty Members and Employees,  
Dear Students,  
Dearly Beloved,

You have always heard me reiterate since the eruption of our crises, or more precisely from the moment our chronic crises have been ignited, that it will no longer be possible to view institutional occasions as mere celebrations, but rather as catalysts for the return to the self, to question it, ponder the situation we are in today, and decide how to react accordingly.

And I am reiterating it today. Indeed, today's occasion induce us to reflection and contemplation more than any other occasion. Today, we conclude the University's jubilee year, and celebrate a quarter century of tireless and ambitious work at the service of higher education, scientific research, cultural work and community service. On such occasions, the institutions are generally inclined to list their achievements and present their development plans for the future. We could have followed the same path, as despite everything, we still have a lot to praise ourselves for accomplishing, but I think it is our moral duty to break the culture of blindness and denial of reality. It is our moral duty to admit that it is no longer possible to speak and act as if our economy has not collapsed, our port has not exploded, our live savings have not been plundered, and the door has not been slammed, thus shattering our students' dreams.

It is our moral duty, before rushing to the literature of steadfastness, recovery and overcoming of challenges, to acknowledge that we are enduring a deep crisis and to build on what is required, starting with the words we utter. Moral honesty requires us to acknowledge that a world with all its capabilities, meanings and titles has ended, and that slogans, rituals, and high-pitched tones will not serve to change this reality.

Speaking from our position in the university, we witness in a terrifying way the severe human hemorrhage that threatens our society's structure and its hopes for its restoration one day. Speaking from our position in the university, we witness with the sharp decline in morale that forced the Lebanese to make a living outside their country. Speaking from our

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position in the university, we witness and live with the shortness of collective breath that silences everything, even the cry for help.

It is now inevitable to ask the following question: How do we celebrate the Jubilee in such circumstances?

For those of you who are not aware of it, the Jubilee in the Christian heritage is the holy year, the “year of the Lord’s favor”, not because it is rich in celebrations and rituals which distinguish it from other years, but because it is a time to remember God’s plan and act in conformity with it. As the Jubilee of the University coincides with the multiple crises in Lebanon, it brings our focus back to the original meaning of the Jubilee, to experience it as an invitation to remember the essence of things. From this perspective, our noncelebratory attitude this year may be more jubilean than any other celebration. In truth, we shared a real jubilean year primarily characterized by joining hands in solidarity to alleviate the burden of the crisis on each other. It was a real jubilean year in which we subjugated the Sabbath laws to humans, a year in which we stopped caring for buildings and equipment and the numerous affairs of Martha and her worries in order to watch exclusively over those who are the soul of the university that should not be taken away from it.

Dearly Beloved,

The crisis is an intensive period through which extreme possibilities are tested, for it pushes us outside our habitual behavioral patterns, and forces us to undertake an experiment, challenge and adventure, each in his field and at his level, and sometimes outside his field and level. When the whole model falls into an all-encompassing crisis, it leads to a hurricane-ravaged system. It is a period of imbalance, bumps, turmoil and uncertainty, which continues until a new equilibrium is established. The challenge, the whole challenge, is to preserve our strength in times of turmoil, so we protect each other, and dare to rise from stupor and despair to build the next equilibrium, and to make it closer to our ambitions and values, so that the crisis and the sacrifices associated with it will not go in vain, but will rather be an opportunity to build a more just, human and sustainable future.

The fact that the “year of the Lord’s favor” comes at the height of the crisis is an indication that it is possible to take advantage of the crisis and turn it into an opportunity, if we are able to find our way back to our true selves and question our relative knowledge and prejudices, and what we are accustomed to doing, saying and defending, to see that another world is possible, and so is the chance of taking a pathway other than the one resulting in our present situation.

It is not enough to regret, complain, or feel remorse. We should repent. The difference between repentance and both regret and remorse lies in the following two aspects: First, repentance does not only consist of grumbling about the results. In fact, the penitent, unlike the regretful or angry individual, admits his guilt and responsibility, and that is

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remorse. Nevertheless, repentance goes beyond the remorse, as it reflects the willingness to correct the mistakes. In addition, repentance does not look back to the past except to better embrace the future. And if today we stare with our burned fingers at what we have done or left them to do, it is to remember to refrain from doing it again. Our duty today is to still find, in the pitch darkness engulfing us, ways to converge our views and think together to get out of the tunnel and build a homeland worthy of life.

Why am I not talking about what the University has achieved in this context? It is because this direction is the easiest to follow. In reality, any institution can take local measures to mitigate the impact of the crisis on its members. And we did not spare any efforts in this regard. We will not cease to provide anything that can pour even a little balm into the hearts of the university family. However, what purpose does it serve to be self-sufficient or supported in a groaning society?

The Jubilee is an opportunity for each of us to remember the seeds sown by Jesus in our inner depths, that is, his call to bear everyone in his love, to give the mourners, as the prophet Isaiah says, "for ashes a garland, for mourning-dress, the oil of gladness, for despondency, festal attire;" (Isaiah 61:3). Let us take upon ourselves the fulfillment of God's promises, chanting with the Master: "The spirit of the Lord is on me, for he has anointed me to bring the good news to the afflicted. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives, sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim a year of favour from the Lord." (Luke, 4: 18-19).

Let us make it a favorable Jubilee year in which we put our society on the path of freedom, justice, joy and decent living. A Jubilee is not a decoration, dearly beloved, but a mission. And my wish is to prove together that can live up to it!

We owe God gratitude for this blessed feast, so let us take the first step with our Lady of the Seeds toward a new Jubilee of Antonine University, filled with grace and peace!