
Address of the Rector

We choose to Exhibit Steadfastness and Call for Solidarity Where Lies our Strength

Father Michel Jalakh, OAM

25th Anniversary of Antonine University
Feast of Our Lady of the Seeds
May 15, 2021

Dear friends of Antonine University,
My loved ones,

We stand ready to celebrate the 25th anniversary of Antonine University, which unfortunately is taking place in a strange mood, as our hearts are emptied of joy and overwhelmed with sadness. What saddens us most is to see that the dismay has rapidly become widespread, hit hard and tighten its grip on every individual, institution, sector and community. We cannot but notice that a gloomy atmosphere reigns all around and that a dark cloud hangs over the country and triggers constant worries: Starting with the pandemic that seized control of our lives and had a massive impact on our visits and meetings, and going through the devastating explosion of August 4 and the serious humanitarian and psychological repercussions it entailed; not to mention the stifling economic crisis that led to a rise in poverty and a heightened sense of vulnerability, coupled with political instability which fueled the fear of abandonment and the feeling of hopelessness induced by other crises, to name but a few examples. We got tired of repeatedly going over and over the same situation, yet we do not have the luxury of thinking about other matters at the present moment.

We are conscious that the calendar contains a list of celebrations which we are unable to savor, given that our friends and loved ones, at both the individual and institutional levels, were not spared from this hurricane that swept the country. Higher Education had its share of problems, and this sector that has helped Lebanon to earn a brilliant reputation and to carry out its glorious mission, is now forced to devote its efforts to preserve its human and intellectual wealth.

There is no doubt that the magnitude of the crisis and the complexity of selecting optimal solutions can weaken even the most optimistic ambitions, yet we will not give up hope. On the contrary, we choose to face it and take up this challenge. We are known to be the children of a Church whose identity is defined by distress, destitution, existential anxiety towards its destiny, a Church driven by hope, and believing in a God who has conquered death through death. Indeed, it is He who comforts us whenever the difficulties worsen, by speaking these words: "Have faith, I have conquered the world!".

Although the crisis may hinder the celebration, nonetheless it does not lessen its value. In reality, this founding anniversary, and even before being a celebration ceremony, is above all an opportunity for us to return to our true selves and dig deep into the spirit of the institution. The latter remains authentic and draws its vitality from the roots that are buried in the soil of Antonine Order, which continues to vigorously support the University and its mission, and accompany it on its journey since its foundation until nowadays.

It is worth mentioning that the University succeeded in taking a promising path and made great strides that led it to rank among the best universities. In fact, Antonine University obtained accreditation from the Swiss Agency of Accreditation and Quality (AAQ). Moreover, its Faculty of Music and Musicology (FMM) became the first musical unit in the Arab world to be accredited, as the programs in Music and Musicology received the official accreditation from the Music Quality Enhancement Agency (MusiQue). Furthermore, the Department of Physical Therapy (DPT) was granted a prestigious accreditation by the World Confederation for Physical Therapy (WCPT).

Furthermore, UA was able to change the outlook of sports science education in Lebanon, to offer its graduates in dental laboratory the opportunity to stand out, to allow its electronics engineer to join multinational companies, to form a choir which enabled Beirut to gain international notoriety in the field of classical music.

In short, UA became a pioneer in the fields of education, research, community service and integral human development. However, we are upset to see that the University is still unable to find the resources, support and adequate opportunities to realize its ambition and put its innovations into practice.

At this stage, it is difficult for us to decide and plan, as long as we are engulfed in a thick fog and plunged into darkness. It is difficult for us to support our laboratories which are strangled by the financial crisis and the scarcity of foreign currencies. It is difficult for us to continue to pay social assistance allowances, given our limited funding capacity. It is difficult for us to rekindle our determination to move forward, when our hearts and minds are immersed in an atmosphere of apprehension and instability. It is difficult for us not to be able to fairly compensate Faculty members in a way that suits their expertise and enables us to praise them for their efforts. It is even more difficult to see our students rushing to get their diplomas and leave this country that needs them most to rise from its ashes.

What the crisis has revealed is indeed the depth of a problem that cannot be solved by taking sedatives and analgesics. Here we are, faced with the disastrous consequences of past choices that have been considered judicious back then.

Here we are, confronted with a political system, whose reputation cannot be improved, and which can no longer meet our lofty ambitions, no matter how hard we try to let ourselves be fooled by its appearance which we vainly seek to embellish.

Here we are, confronted with a fictitious economy that was laid bare, and is based on instantaneous services and the falsification of the truth.

Here we are, confronted with the obscured face of a culture of consumerism, debt, mending and lack of planning.

Here we are, in front of our capital, Beirut, whose cultural presence, influence, innovation and existence, are now in the grip of so many threats.

Here we are, confronted with the squandering of natural resources, on the pretext of reconstruction, tourism and production, with a disastrous impact that results in the destruction of the environment and the lack of production.

Here we are, forced to draw the necessary lessons that were not previously learned, to apply them appropriately.

Nevertheless, we are assembled here today to celebrate, to pride ourselves, to rejoice in our achievements, to remind each other that the true self is revealed in such difficult times, and that the struggles that we have previously overcome can in no way be less severe than the ones that await us in the future.

Let us remind ourselves that we made a bet – and we will not regret it – on quality in all its aspects, despite the challenges and requirements that are intrinsically related to it, and while we know beforehand that we will incur sunk costs, amid the chaos governing the Higher Education sector in Lebanon.

Let us remind ourselves that we made a bet – and we will not regret it – on ambitious and pioneering strategies, and we will not take a step back in their implementation.

Let us remind ourselves, that we made a bet - and we will not regret it - on mankind, and in particular on its integral human development, thus proving that Antonine University was always able to count its students, instructors and staff, among its family, giving them the support and love they need, and serving as a model for them to follow.

It is obvious that the 25th anniversary of Antonine University is accompanied by shortages in everything, to the point of losing joy and happiness. This is why I would like to encourage you to consider this feast as an opportunity for us to reflect on our current situation, in order to find out what we can, and most importantly what we must do, to shoulder responsibility in the face of the crisis. As the latter is profound, global and historic, so too must our efforts be to respond to it. We need to call for a true reconciliation founded on truth, justice, respect for others, acceptance of their differences, and lastly on forgiveness and love, especially that thirty years have passed since the end of our senseless war.

I urge you to start by examining the expressions we use when describing others, to avoid facing psychological barriers and rigid thinking that are pointless and are not likely to bear fruit in the country we love and where we have chosen to live.

Dear friends,

We are on the verge of collapse which will be hastened if our practices remain unchanged. As for the solution, it cannot be fortuitously reached. On the contrary, it has to be built, discussed, requires sacrifices and painful decisions, needs resources, perspicacity, courage

and patience. If we manage to shape it together, we will be able to turn the crisis in our favor, especially that in such times, social solidarity is strengthened, chances of being able to undertake large-scale initiatives that can help to implement the desired changes become greater, and the time frame required to make the necessary improvements is shortened.

On this occasion, I will keep it brief and tell you that although the night is dark, we will stay awake and keep our lamps lit. Not only success is our destiny, but also under no circumstances should it be hampered, and for this to happen, it requires willpower, solidarity and steadfastness. This is how we define our history, our present, and our future!

We look forward to serving UA students, alumni, Faculty members, academic staff, friends and loved ones for many more years to come!