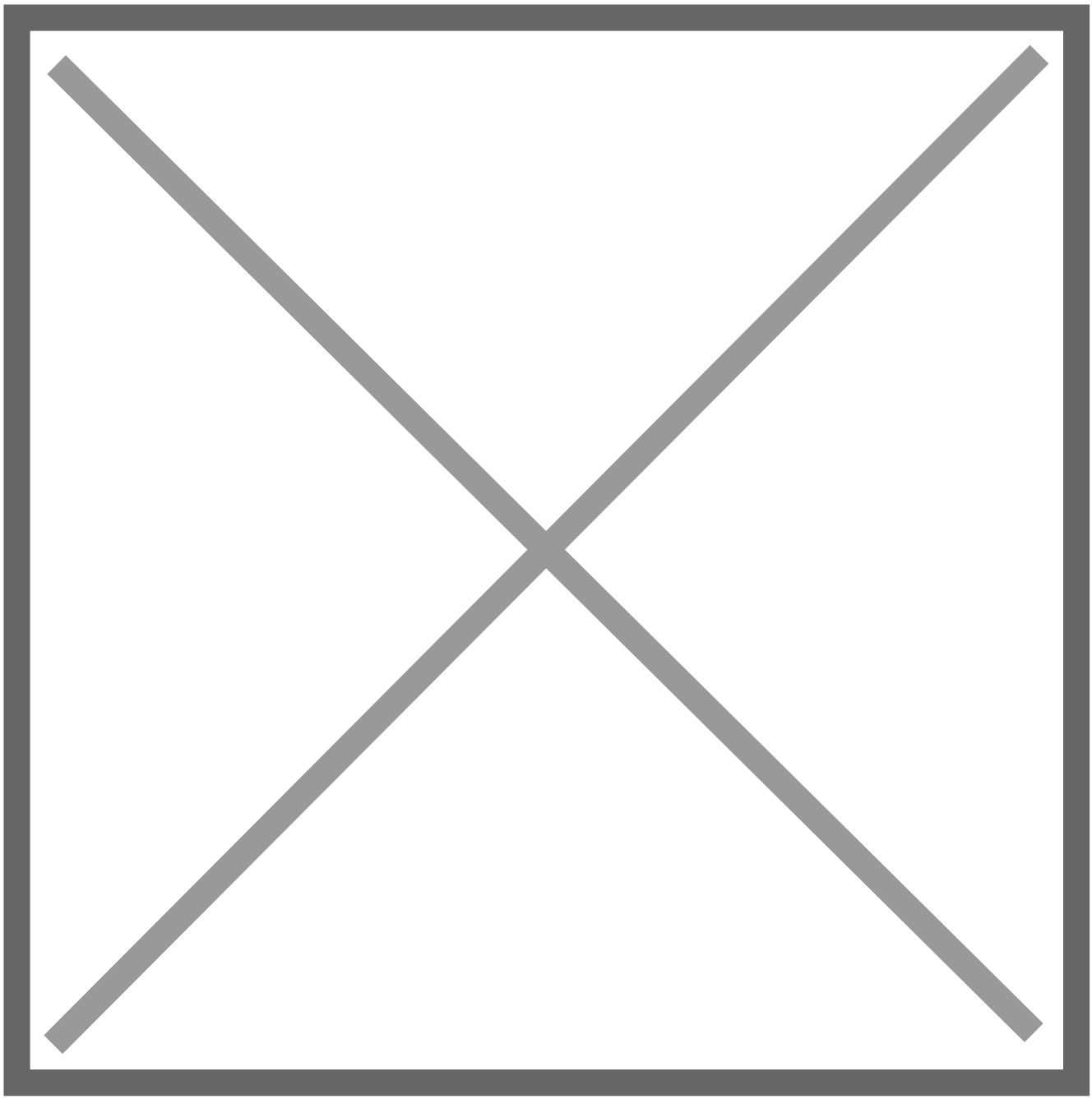
News



Lebanese Maronite Catholic priest Fr. Pierre al-Rahi, also known by his French name Pierre el-Raï, in vestments second from left, takes part in a Palm Sunday procession in Qlayaa, Lebanon, April 2, 2023. al-Rahi was killed in this village in southern Lebanon during an Israeli artillery tank fire on a house March 9, 2026, Catholic officials and media said — reports since confirmed by OSV News. al-Rahi had earlier refused, along with other priests, to obey an order by the Israeli military to evacuate the Christian village of Qlayaa, a Maronite village of some 8,000 inhabitants in the

Marjayoun district, a few miles from the Israeli border. (OSV News/Reuters/Aziz Taher)

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Beirut, Lebanon — March 9, 2026
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A Lebanese Maronite Catholic priest has been killed in southern Lebanon when an Israeli artillery tank fired on a house March 9, Catholic officials and media said reports that have since been confirmed by OSV News.

Fr. Pierre al-Rahi, also known by his French name Pierre el-Raï, had earlier refused, along with other priests, to obey an order by the Israeli military to evacuate the Christian village of Qlayaa, a Maronite village of some 8,000 inhabitants in the Marjayoun district, a few miles from the Israeli border.

Pope Leo XIV expressed "profound sorrow for all the victims of the bombings in the Middle East over the last few days — for the many innocent people, including many children, and for those who were providing them with aid, such as Fr. Pierre El-Rahi, a Maronite priest killed this afternoon in Qlayaa," the Vatican's Telegram channel said.

The message posted by Holy See Press on Telegram said Leo "is following the situation with concern and prays that all hostilities will cease as soon as possible."

The Israeli military has carried out an intensive campaign bombing on suspected Hezbollah strongholds in southern Lebanon, south Beirut and the Bekaa Valley to root out the Iran-backed militia and their weapons. Hezbollah militants have been known to hide in Christian and other villages in the south. Some news reports stated that armed militants had entered the area.

"We are forced to stay despite the danger, when we defend our land, and we do so peacefully. None of us carries weapons. All of us carry peace and goodness and love," al-Rahi told the France24 television channel on the steps of his church in Qlayaa March 8, a day before his death.

But tens of thousands of Lebanese civilians have already fled their homes fearing further violence in the Marjayoun district.

"Fr. Pierre al-Rahi was from my village, Dibeh, but he was the parish priest of Qlayaa in Marjayoun. Unfortunately, he passed away. God bless his soul," Lebanese Maronite Fr. Jean Younes, secretary general of the Assembly of Catholic Patriarchs and Bishops of Lebanon, told OSV News.

"Very disturbing reports that a parish priest in southern Lebanon has been killed in an Israeli strike," Aid to the Church in Need Ireland said in a statement on X, adding al-Rahi "was ministering to his distressed parishioners in the village" when the attack occurred.

ACN International called for prayers for the killed priest.

Lebanese news reports stated that an Israeli Merkava tank hit a house in Qlayaa twice. The first strike wounded the owner and his wife. al-Rahi and other neighbors rushed to the scene to help when the tank fired a second time. al-Rahi was wounded from the strike and later died from his injuries. Several other Lebanese civilians were also injured in the attack.

The French-language Lebanese daily L'Orient-Le Jour — which used the French version of the priests' name — reported the cleric died from wounds sustained from a shell, while four other people were injured.

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The French charity L'Oeuvre d'Orient, which supports Eastern Christians, issued a statement saying it "learned with horror and immense sadness" of the death of the Maronite priest.

"L'Oeuvre d'Orient condemns in the strongest possible terms these acts of war, which aim to destabilize all of Lebanon and kill innocent civilians. The death of a priest who refused to leave his parish is yet another escalation of senseless violence. L'Oeuvre d'Orient also denounces the risk of annexation and the disappearance of villages south of the Litani River, particularly historic Christian villages," it said.

ACN said that al-Rahi was known "for his commitment to local communities and for his pastoral service in a region particularly marked by instability and tension."

The organization added in a March 9 press release shared with OSV News that "Despite the growing insecurity in southern Lebanon, many priests and religious sisters have chosen to remain with their communities. Many Christian families have also stayed in their villages, unwilling to abandon their homes, land and livelihoods."

AsiaNews, an official press agency of the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions, also reported the death of Sami Ghafari, 70, a Maronite Catholic killed by an Israeli drone while he was in his garden. He was a brother of Fr. Maroun Ghafari, parish priest of Our Lady's Church in Alma Shaab.

Ghafari had also refused to evacuate and chose to defend the Christian village's neutrality in the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah.

"They say there were fighters in the house, but that's not true. These are lies," Qlayaa's Mayor Hanna Daher told AsiaNews. "Inside, there were only the residents of the house and people from the village who came to help the wounded."

The mayor said villagers in the area do not want to leave, despite the growing tension, to join the hundreds of thousands displaced Lebanese fleeing to Beirut and having difficulty finding safe shelter there.

"We are peaceful people and we don't harm anyone. Our village is safe. All we ask is to be able to stay in our homes in peace," Daher said. "We don't know if there's a plan to force us to leave our lands, but we will stay here and not leave."

He added that with Israeli forces hitting the same facility twice, as villagers were evacuating after the first shell exploded, they "narrowly avoided a massacre because there were so many of us on site."

The security situation in southern Lebanon has deteriorated significantly once again after Hezbollah's decision to join Iran in the war against Israel and the United States. Israeli bombings in the area have intensified in recent days, and residents there say civilian homes are increasingly targeted.

The leader of the Christian Lebanese Forces political party, Samir Geagea, called on the Lebanese army to protect the country's towns and villages.

"Elements of Hezbollah infiltrated the town, prompting Israeli strikes that resulted in destruction and devastation, as well as the death of the parish priest" said Geagea, as reported by L'Orient-Le Jour.

Geagea emphasized that "residents have repeatedly asked the Lebanese army not to allow illegal armed elements to enter their villages. Yet, to date, the army has failed in this mission, and the tragedy in Qlayaa today is the most blatant proof of this."

This story appears in the **War in Iran** feature series. View the full series.