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Mourners attend the funeral of Fr. Pierre al-Rahi, a priest who died of injuries he sustained fro

Mourners attend the funeral of Fr. Pierre al-Rahi, a priest who died of injuries he sustained from Israeli fire, according to medics and first responders, in Qlayaa, southern Lebanon, March 11. (OSV News/Reuters/Karamallah Daher)



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Vatican City — March 11, 2026
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Pope Leo XIV praised the memory of a Lebanese Maronite priest killed by Israeli tank fire while rushing to assist a wounded parishioner in southern Lebanon.

Fr. Pierre Al-Rahi, who died March 9 during an Israeli attack on a house in Qlayaa, "was a true shepherd who always stayed beside his people, with the love and sacrifice of Jesus the Good Shepherd," the pope said at the close of his March 11 general audience.

"As soon as he heard that some parishioners had been wounded in a bombing, he rushed to help them without hesitation," Leo said. "May the Lord grant that the blood he shed be a seed of peace for beloved Lebanon."

People carry the coffin of Fr. Pierre al-Rahi during his funeral in Qlayaa in southern Lebanon M

People carry the coffin of Fr. Pierre al-Rahi during his funeral in Qlayaa in southern Lebanon March 11. The Lebanese Maronite Catholic priest died March 9 after injuries from Israeli tank fire on a house in Qlayaa. (OSV News/Reuters/Karamallah Daher)

Franciscan Fr. Toufic Bou Merhi, based in Lebanon, told Vatican News that Al-Rahi hurried to assist a parishioner wounded in a strike on a house; upon his arrival a second strike on the same building inflicted the fatal wounds which killed the priest before he reached the hospital.

The pope noted that Al-Rahi's funeral was scheduled to be celebrated March 11.

Leo also renewed his call for peace in the region. After not mentioning the war in Iran during the previous week's general audience, he urged Christians to continue "to pray for peace in Iran and throughout the Middle East, especially for the many civilian victims, among them many innocent children."

"May our prayer be a source of comfort to those who suffer and a seed of hope for the future," he said. "I am close to all the Lebanese people at this time of grave trial."

On other recent occasions, Leo warned of a "tragedy of enormous proportions" if diplomacy were not pursued to end the war and expressed concern that the conflict would widen across the Middle East, particularly in Lebanon. The Lebanese government estimates 570 people have been killed and more than 1,400 injured since Israel renewed attacks on the country on March 2.

Leo visited Lebanon in December during his first international trip and prayed that the wounded nation become a place "where peace and justice reign."

After the March 11 audience, the pope also met with Cardinal Dominique Mathieu of Tehran-Isfaha, Iran's first cardinal, who evacuated the country with Italian diplomats and has since surfaced in Rome.

The cardinal's departure was part of the evacuation of the Italian Embassy in Tehran, which houses the archdiocese's cathedral.

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