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ASIA/PAKISTAN - "He was a man who did the will of God," said the Archbishop of Islamabad at the Memorial Mass of Minister Bhatti

Islamabad (Agenzia Fides) – "Shahbaz Bhatti was a man who followed God's plan in his life. He was a man who did the will of God, with faith, obedience, hope and certainty in the Kingdom": with these words the Archbishop of Islamabad, Archbishop Anthony Rufin, spoke of Minister Shabhaz Bhatti at his Memorial Mass which was celebrated this morning in the church of Our Lady of Fatima in Islamabad. "He is a man who gave his life for the faith. I am sure that the Church, in her own time, may proclaim him a martyr," the Archbishop stated to Fides straight after the Mass.
The celebration – which came before the funeral, as anticipated with an ecumenical ceremony in the village in which the Minister was born, Kushphur in the diocese of Faisalabad - was held under tight security, in the presence of the Minister's family, many politicians and diplomats, and the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Yousaf Raza Gilani. The atmosphere, sources present at the ceremony told Fides, was of intense prayer and emotion: thousands of faithful came together in prayer to make their farewell to Bhatti.
In his homily, Archbishop Rufin described the character of the Minister, recalling his birth in Kushphur, a Catholic village founded by the Dominicans in which "Bhatti received a very strong spiritual formation." The coexistence in the village with the Muslim faithful (who are in the minority there) is "in perfect harmony, a sign of the dialogue of life, and Bhatti took that example with him through life as a model for all his social and political engagements."
As he left the village, the Archbishop continued: Bhatti clashed "with the harsh reality of the conditions of Christian life in Pakistan, marked by suffering, discrimination and destitution. He was shocked and saddened" and this was "the impetus for his social and political work, always lived out in serving the common good and as a testimony of faith in Christ."
"In this service, Bhatti did the will of God, he adhered to the project of life that the Lord had for him," remarked Archbishop Rufin. "He always asked me to pray for him, because he was aware that the work in the world, without help from above, is incomplete and can not bear fruit. Even service in politics, without reference to the faith, remains empty and exposed to the Evil One," the Archbishop concluded, urging all lay Christians to take on the example of Bhatti in their lives, for their mission in the world. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 4/3/2011)

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