



AFRICA / LIBYA - "War cannot solve a social crisis, but only worsen it", said Bishop Martinelli

Tripoli (Agenzia Fides) - "This morning we are doing the Consecration of the Oils, instead of doing it tomorrow, when we will be celebrating the Mass of Coena Domini instead. Our priestly community is therefore gathered to begin the Easter celebrations. There are three Filipino priests, an Egyptian, a Maltese and myself, who is Italian but is three-quarters Libyan" Says Archbishop Giovanni Innocenzo Martinelli, Apostolic Vicar of Tripoli to Fides.

"Yesterday, I met some journalists and NGOs operators from London, who wanted to know the needs of the population", says the Apostolic Vicar. "One thing struck me about this meeting: I was asked me to tell the truth about the situation in Libya, because it is believed that many lies have been told about Libya in this period. I replied - continues Bishop Martinelli - I can only report on things that I have personally experienced in recent weeks. What the international media say, I cannot certify because I have not experienced it directly. Certainly there has been prejudice against the Libyan leadership and decisions have been made rashly. But above all, war began without any attempt to try diplomatic channels, while there were margins and space to do so. This is what upset me most".

"In 40 years service in Libya, I can say that we have had no problems to serve the Catholic communities around the country. I have had no difficulty in assisting the sick and the people who have taken care of them. The doctors and nurses working in Libya are mostly Christians, have had no particular difficulties. So I cannot deny the experience I have lived here in 40 years with my flock, who serve the Libyan society with dedication" says the Apostolic Vicar.

"The Libyans are Muslim observants, not fanatics, and very open to others, particularly to Christians. We have got to know each other through service to individuals, social service that we have offered to the Libyan population. Much of the Christians who have remained in Libya have done so because they believe in the service they do and are convinced that the Libyans appreciate this service. War cannot destroy this relationship".

"Certainly the crisis could have been avoided if more attention had been given to the needs of young people. But the war certainly does not solve a social crisis such as this. In fact, it risks in creating a destructive spiral from which it is difficult to escape" says Bishop Martinelli. "I thank the Holy Father for his words and his closeness in prayer" says the Apostolic Vicar. (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 20/04/2011)