



ASIA/LEBANON - A Christian and Muslim vigil, waiting for the Pope

Beirut (Agenzia Fides) - A Muslim-Christian vigil to invoke the protection of God and the Virgin Mary on the visit of Benedict XVI. On the evening of September 12, the eve of the Pope's arrival in Lebanon, four processions of young people will depart from four points of Beirut to converge in the so-called "garden of Mary", in the Museum Square area, carrying candles and flags of Lebanon. There, around eight o'clock in the evening, the meeting will begin, with a program including songs, Muslim-Christian readings and prayers to ask God and the Mother of Jesus that the papal visit is welcomed by all and lived as a blessing for the Country of the cedars. "The title of the initiative is 'together in peace, love, freedom and security'. It will be a national and popular holiday, to show to the world that Lebanon can be in this moment in history the Country of coexistence between Christians and Muslims," explains to Fides father Antoine Daou, Secretary of the Commission of the Lebanese episcopal Conference for dialogue with Islam. The meeting will be attended by representatives and authorities of all religious communities in the Country, along with thousands of faithful. Among the main sponsors of the initiative there are also several organizations of Muslim-Christian dialogue, from Ensemble Autour de Marie, which in recent years has given rise to joint Muslim-Christian celebrations on the feast of the Annunciation. Since 2010, this feast has been proclaimed a national holiday, with the declared intention to find in the devotion to Maria - shared also among Muslims - a point of convergence among the different religious communities.

The wake on September 12 – explains Father Daou - is not an isolated event: in these days there are hundreds, in every Lebanese diocese, initiatives of prayer and reflection with which the faithful of the various Christian communities prepare themselves to meet the successor of Peter: "All the Lebanese, all the political and religious leaders - including the Hezbollah, Druze, Sunni political leaders – are waiting for the Pope's visit as a grace for Lebanon, which can favor a moment of true national unity, beyond division, and show the whole Middle East world that Lebanon can be a model of coexistence." (GV). (Agenzia Fides 07/09/12)