



ASIA/LEBANON - The Apostolic Nuncio, Mgr. Caccia: expectations and scenarios that will welcome Benedict XVI

Beirut (Agenzia Fides) - "Waiting for the Pope, Lebanon experiences the grandeur and beauty of its national vocation again: that of a country where different identities want to live together in mutual respect." Archbishop Gabriele Giordano Caccia, Apostolic Nuncio in Beirut, situates in this frame the growing positive signs triggered across the Country by Benedict XVI's forthcoming visit (14-16 September), even before it starts. The papal representative in the Country of the cedars traces for Fides the "great expectations" that Christians are living, but also that of all the other components of the diverse Lebanese society, documented in particular by the many "signs of appreciation from the Sunni, Shiite, Druze, Alawite". While the images of the Pope and the Lebanese and Vatican flags emerge everywhere, the slogan of the visit: "I give you my peace" dominates on the front pages of newspapers. An evangelical phrase that - said Monsignor Caccia - fully corresponds to the expectations of the people."

In addition to these external signs, the Archbishop gives account of the reality of prayer and invocation to God that rises throughout Lebanon: "A special novena to prepare for the Pope's visit is in progress in the churches in the Country. Five major Community vigils were carried out in five different areas of the country, along with many initiatives such as meetings and common reflections between Christians and Muslims. The vigil scheduled for Wednesday evening in Beirut will be added, when two processions will leave from Christian areas and other two from Muslim areas to converge in the park dedicated to the Virgin Mary."

The Pope's visit comes at a delicate moment in which the fragile political balance of the Country is challenged by what is happening in Syria and by social problems exacerbated by the economic crisis. Monsignor Caccia indicates the antidotes to any politically reductive interpretation concerning actions and words that will come from Benedict XVI: "It may perhaps be someone who will try to capture one aspect or another of the papal visit. But it will be beneficial for everyone to keep in mind the wide horizon of the Pope's visit, which looks at all the problems in the Middle East and not only the political situation in Lebanon. The Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation that the Pope will deliver to the Bishops of the Middle East will include suggestions and recommendations which will then be translated by the local churches in particular contexts in the educational, economic, social field, humanitarian relief, and even political. Among other things, since the time of the Synod on the Middle East to date, the global landscape of this area has seen and continues to see great changes, often jerky." Before the pressure of those who ask that the Church "takes a stand" about the Syrian conflict and the Middle East uprisings, Msgr. Caccia repeats the criteria of discernment that inspired the view of the Holy See before the evolution of events. According to the Nuncio in Lebanon one must "look at the interventions that Benedict XVI dedicated in recent years and to what is happening in the Middle East, to the words spoken after the Angelus last Sunday. The first fact to consider is the suffering endured by the people. It is important that all forces involved put a stop to the spiral of violence in order to make progress in other directions, involving all the protagonists through a clear initiative of the international community. The first initiative of mediation assigned to Kofi Annan unfortunately failed, but his reasons are all still on the table. One must also take into account that in the Syrian affair also an overall repositioning of the axes of regional forces is underway." Even looking at the global scenario, there are evidently wide accusations of lining authoritarian regimes addressed by many to the Christian minority in the Middle East. Bishop Caccia told Fides: "We must always be on the side of those seeking respect and the implementation of the principles of freedom and human dignity. But this support must always take into account the actual reality. As the Maronite Patriarch Bechara Boutros Raï said, Christians do not support authoritarian regimes, but fear the dissolution of States. There is the fear that all scenarios descend to Iraqis, with the total lack of any minimum-security in everyday life. All fear of there not being that order which guarantees minimum civil criteria of survival. For this, however difficult, it is necessary for the international community to

search for all possible paths so that the forces at work put an end to the arbitrary violence. The alternative is that of suffering and pain for everyone. Violence does not look at anybody in the face. This can be seen also from the sad story of the refugees who belong indiscriminately to all religious groups." (GV) (Agenzia Fides 12/09/2012)