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AMERICA/PERU - "I work in a live, dynamic church, where there is everyone's participation," says Mgr. Miguel Olaortúa, Apostolic Vicar of Iquitos, in the Amazon rainforest

Rome (Agenzia Fides) - "It is a live, dynamic church, with a lot of participation and engagement in society: are values make you understand the consideration that the faithful have of their Pastors." This is how His Exc. Mgr. Miguel Olaortúa Laspra, OSA, Apostolic Vicar of Iquitos and Apostolic Administrator of San José del Amazonas, in Peru, describes to Fides the ecclesiastical district that has been entrusted to him, during the works of the Seminar organized by the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples for the newly appointed Bishops, which is ending in Rome (see Fides 01/09/2012).
"Iquitos is a city in the middle of the forest, in a very extensive area of the Peruvian Amazon - explains the Bishop -. First of all, I must say that I am immensily happy for the warmth of the people who speak my same language, Spanish. Although there are cultural differences, we are able to understand and above all to exchange a lot of things. People welcome you with warmth, warmth that is felt even in the weather: throughout the year there is the heat of the forest and the warmth of the people, especially in the manifestation of their faith, devotions. The locals think highly of their Pastor: I arrived a short while ago, but the people make you feel at home."
With regards to the difficulties to fulfill his mission in this new context, coming from Spain, where he used to work in the parishes, Mgr. Miguel Olaortúa Laspra says: "Here the situation is completely different: the culture, the people, the distances, communities which are far away from each other, the geography, climate, etc.. Everything is striking and surprising: in the forest there are no seasons, it is always summer. The culture revolves completely around nature and the way of dealing with life is completely different. People face everything calmly and with great patience, unlike us Europeans, always anxious, apprehensive of how to cope with things... So they manage to live life in a more essential, more human manner, without creating obstacles".
One of the most important problems that the Bishop noted is the lack of formation, at all levels: "There are pastoral workers with a lot of good will, but they lack in a complete and in-depth formation. This deficiency is also reflected in the way everyday life is dealt with: for example, one does not know what savings means, one lives day by day, with all the consequences."
Mgr. Miguel Olaortúa Laspra, OSA, was born in 1962 and since 1982 has been a religious of the order of St. Augustine; he was ordained a priest in Bilbao (Spain), his hometown, on October 4, 1987. On 2 February 2011 he was appointed Apostolic Vicar of Iquitos, in Peru, and on August 8, 2011 Apostolic Administrator of San José del Amazonas, also in Peru. (CE) (Agenzia Fides 15/09/2012)

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