



## **ASIA/SYRIA - The Maronite Archbishop of Damascus: questions, fears and prayers of the Christians of Syria after the massacre of Bab Touma**

Damascus (Agenzia Fides) - The mass murderer attack carried out on Sunday, October 21 in the area of Bab Touma, on the eve of a peace mission that will bring Cardinals and delegated Bishops of the Synod of Bishops in Syria, renews for the Syrian Christians anxieties and questions that only "the coming days will bring a response." But meanwhile, "many have taken the path of the exodus. Others are preparing for the possibility of a hasty departure." A church without her faithful is likely to become a "silent witness." So, in a note sent to Fides Agency, the Maronite Archbishop of Damascus, Samir Nassar stresses the first reactions recorded among the Christians of the Syrian capital after a car bomb exploded in the Christian area of the Old Town causing 13 deaths and dozens of wounded.

Archbishop Nassar describes scenes of panic he witnessed, with parents running distressed "to look for their children in schools," while the sirens of ambulances accentuate the unbearable feeling of living in an apocalyptic time. "Some of the faithful - he says - prayed the rosary, imploring Our Lady of Peace, before the Mass, which began with a 20 minute delay ... I celebrated Mass on Sunday at 6 pm, for 23 people only, praying for the victims and for Muslims who in Syria are preparing to celebrate the Eid al Adha, on 26 October, in pain and silence." The neighborhood of Bab-Touma is a symbolic place for the martyrs of Christianity in Syria. Here - recalls Archbishop Nassar - in the same streets that St. Paul had to walk at the time of his conversion and baptism received by Ananias, "11,000 martyrs in 1860 reddened with their blood every square inch."

So far Bab-Touma had been spared by the violence that has disrupted Syria since March 15, 2011. Now - asks Nassar - what is the message they wanted to give with a planned massacre on Sunday, right in the Old Town, where the Christian churches are concentrated? "Is it gratuitous violence that knocks on the door to terrorize the last Christians already devastated?"

Before the terror and violence - concludes the Maronite Archbishop - the Christian announcement manifests itself more than ever as the "Cross of redemption, love and forgiveness." And the Christians in Damascus and Syria need friendship and prayers on behalf of everyone to take charge of a condition marked by a "chaotic and bitter loneliness." (GV) (Agenzia Fides 22/10/2012).