



ASIA/IRAQ - Father Dall'Oglio welcomed in the monastic community which began in Sulaymanya, in Iraqi Kurdistan

Sulaymanya (Agenzia Fides) - Father Paolo Dall'Oglio SJ, founder of the monastic community of Deir Mar Musa, after his expulsion from Syria was welcomed into the newly founded monastery of Deir Maryam el Adhra, which began a few months ago in Sulaymanya in Kurdistan Iraq. The Chaldean Archbishop of Kirkuk, His Exc. Mgr. Louis Sako, gave his consent to the entrance of the Jesuit scholar of Islam in the monastic community that found hospitality in a church in the second half of the nineteenth century, dedicated to the Virgin Mary and located in Sabunkaran historic district, the district of the "soap workers."

Father Dall'Oglio, after having publicly called for the end of the Assad regime, had left Syria - where he lived for over thirty years - in June, in obedience to the ecclesiastical authorities of the Country. On 20 September, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Damascus government had accused the Jesuit of conniving with terrorist groups, "al-Qaeda included." "Together with the brothers of the monastery of Deir Maryam" says the Jesuit to Fides Agency "I will pray for peace in Syria, in the hope and expectation to be able to come back."

The new monastic community settled in Sulaymanya constitutes a subsidiary of the Syrian monastery of Deir Mar Musa. In a report sent to Fides Agency, the monks confirm that Father Paolo "shall now be attached to this community," and talk about the context and the first steps of their new experience. They express gratitude for the invitation to found a community in the Eparchy of Kirkuk addressed to them by Archbishop Sako, a representative of the Chaldean Church "which, having never been a State Church, carries a rich memory of interaction with Islam and openness towards the East, from Iran to China."

Sulaymanya is described as a "Muslim Kurdish city, where a Christian community lives made of two groups: the Christians whose origins go back in time to the more or less distant mountain districts of the North (who speak Chaldean and a fluent Arabic and Kurdish) and those who fled Baghdad, Mosul and other cities in the South in recent years (and speak Arabic as their first language)." The monks of Sulaymanya give an account of the fact that the new generations will probably speak more and more Kurdish, "through social mixing, schools and the national dynamics of this region."

The monks' letter recognizes that "it is too early to define the identity of this monastery ... May it be what the Spirit inspires to make of it for the neighbors, the inhabitants, the monks and nuns, the visitors and the Muslims who sometimes come for a prayer in front of Mary's grotto." On 23 November, Archbishop Sako ordained father Jens, a member of the monastic community, who has become since then Abuna Yohanna. (GV) (Agenzia Fides 10/12/2012).