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AFRICA/TUNISIA - Father Marek Rybinski's murderer convicted

Tunis (Agenzia Fides) - The judicial authorities in Tunisia have sentenced to life imprisonment Chokri Ben Mustapha Bel Sadek Mesteri, carpenter, 45, accused of murdering the Polish Salesian, Fr. Marek Rybinski. The priest was found slain on February 18, 2011 in a storage of the Salesian school of Manouba (see Fides 19/02/2011). The sentence was announced last Friday. The timing of the process lengthened because in past months, following the defensive strategy suggested to by his lawyers, the condemned man had tried to recant previous admissions of guilt, speaking of confessions extracted under pressure.
Father Marek Rybinski was killed over a simple matter of money.
The murderer had asked for a loan of two thousand Tunisian dinars (approximately one thousand euro) to purchase equipment for a job that he had been commissioned. Then he spent the money for other things. Father Marek had asked for the money of the school back. At that point, the carpenter attacked the priest repeatedly hitting him hard with a blunt object on the head and neck.
In those days, the outcome of the so-called "Jasmine Revolution" was still uncertain and Tunisia continued to be rocked by protests and clashes between police and protesters. In that climate the barbaric murder of the Polish priest had fueled concerns about the fate of Christians in the Arab world.
In a letter written in those days, the Bishop of Tunis, Maroun Lahham (today Patriarchal Vicar for Jordan of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem) had reported the sentences that father Marek had written in a book he had just published, dedicated to Tunisia: "During his stay in Tunisia, my attitude toward my Muslim brothers has changed a lot. This fear of terrorism and extremism has completely disappeared. The Tunisians are so welcoming, friendly and cordial. They teach me this attitude." (GV) (Agenzia Fides 08/01/2013).

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