



ASIA/SYRIA - To die or leave? The Maronite Archbishop of Damascus talks about the unanswered dilemma of Syrian Christians

Damascus (Agenzia Fides) - Christians in Syria "must choose between two bitter chalices: to die or leave." A dilemma that involves the whole ecclesial reality in this battered Country, and is told by the Maronite archbishop of Damascus Samir Nassar in a vibrant testimony to Fides Agency.

The Catholic archbishop of the Eastern rite outlines the many ways in which death seizes the lives of millions of defenseless civilians, Christians and Muslims, in the war-ravaged Syria: bombs, car bombs, snipers, lack of medical care (223 hospitals were closed and all doctors are fleeing, explains Msg. Nassar), malnutrition, and lack of adequate food for diabetics, heart patients and nursing. Before this disaster, everyone thinks of going away, even if the escape somehow "is another way of dying," more slowly. The local Church, despite its fragility, "becomes a wall of tears", to which all are turning everyday "for protection and help in finding a visa to leave." The Syrian Christians – underlines the Maronite Archbishop - "have seen the UN organize since 2005 the systematic departure of Iraqi refugees towards the West," and now feel anguish for "the world's indifference and silence in front of their long- sad ordeal ... they are abandoned, destined to die without being able to escape ... consulates have been closed for a year and a half."

Archbishop Nassar describes heartbroken pastors who witness the plight of the poor Christians "who do not find any reason to have to die in this senseless war": they have seen their wealthier brethren leave Syria, and now look to the Church as the only reality to ask for help in the shipwreck. "Pope Francis' appeal in favor of the beloved Syria resonates in their hearts The sister Churches in the whole world pray and show their affection for this little flock, without being able to appease the storm." This situation also poses in front of the pastors problems of conscience: "To advise them to stay could lead to death like a lamb dumb before the butcher. Our martyrology simply gets longer ... Helping them leave means emptying the Biblical Land of its last Christians. " A dilemma that can only be resolved by relying on the "heart of God", offering the faithful pastoral closeness that helps them perceive the reality of Jesus' words Those who – notes Msg. Nassar 'never disappoint: "Do not be afraid ... I am with you ... ". (GV) Agenzia Fides 13/04/2013).