



AFRICA/NIGER - The first Bishop from Niger in Niamey

Niamey (Agenzia Fides) - Fr. Mauro Armanino, SMA Missionary sent to Fides Agency the following testimony on the taking-possession of Msg. Djalwana Laurent Lompo, Auxiliary Bishop of Niamey held yesterday, Sunday June 9.

"Translating it as "pumpkin" makes it lose its charm. Yet this is what we are talking about. The pumpkin/calabash divided in half is a welcoming sign. It is filled with water and is offered to the traveler and to anyone who visits the house. It is the symbol that Mgr. Laurent Lompo, new Auxiliary Bishop of Niamey, has chosen as his episcopal emblem. A calabash held by two hands, an open Bible and the yellow background of the Sahel. "There is more joy in giving than receiving". He asked the gift of simplicity, just like the meaning of pumpkin/calabash. There were fears something could happen on this feast of the Catholic Church in Niger. There was good service order around and inside the sports hall where the ceremony took place in the presence of about 3,500 faithful. The Archbishop of Niamey, Msg. Michel Cartatéguy presided over the ceremony which was attended by most of the bishops of Burkina Faso. The songs, the dances, the symbols and especially the atmosphere of unity turned the event into a celebration of life for all.

Msg. Laurent Lompo is from the Gourmanché population and is also the first Catholic Bishop of Niger. Most of the Gourmanché people, divided between Burkina Faso and Niger, but also Zerma / Sonhrai, the Houssa, and immigrants from Benin, Togo, Ivory Coast and other countries of the Atlantic coast. Even some Liberian immigrants took part in the celebration.

The event is noteworthy in a country like Niger where out of approximately 19 million people about 25 000 are Catholics. The Nigeriens are about 5000. The others are from neighboring Countries. The presence of the Catholic Church is the "natte", ie mat, a sober, humble presence. Another way of celebrating the Gospel.

Two white doves were released, as a symbol of peace. Unleashing the peace is one of the challenges of Niger and Sahel. (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 10/06/2013)