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ASIA/TURKEY - The Feast of St. Anthony Istanbul, in the midst of the turmoil in Taksim Square

Istanbul (Agenzia Fides) - " Many young people who go to Taksim Square pass by our church, light a candle to St. Anthony, then they go to demonstrate. They are people of all social classes and religions. As Franciscans, in this delicate moment for the country we pray, through the intercession of St. Anthony, for the good and peace in the country ": This is what Fr. Anton Bulai, OFM Conv says, pastor of the St. Anthony Church in Istanbul, situated in the centre of the town, not far from Taksim Square. The local community of six Franciscan friars are preparing the feast of St. Anthony, on June 13, a celebration with ancient roots, and a feast that welcomes Christians of all denominations and many non Christians, devoted to the Saint.
"It is a feast that involves the whole local Church: we will be close to our Bishop, Mgr. Louis Pelatre who will celebrate Mass. But it is also an ecumenical feast, open to all: religious leaders and believers of all other communities come, " explains friar Anton. There will be a representative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and non Christian faithful. Anthony is a saint known and loved in Turkey especially for the initiative of the "Bread of the poor" where for over 60 years poor people benefit from, without distinction of religion or ethnicity. Fr. Bulai explains: "Every Tuesday, since the time of the Apostolic Delegate Angelo Roncalli, who went to our church, to our convent, one prays and distributes bread to the hungry or needy."
In recent years, "a special blessing and gifts for the children" have marked the feast of the 13th of June.
The feast today is in the midst of a wave of protest that, notes the pastor, "might somehow discourage the participation of the people," given the fear of disorder or violence. From the Church of St. Anthony "there will always be a word of peace, of good and reconciliation." "Our Church and our Franciscan witness in Turkey continues: we are a convent with the doors always open to welcome, we are always ready to pray, bless, and welcome anyone who approaches and comes to light a candle to the Saint: and there are many people who do it every day, of every social class and religion, "notes Fr. Bulai (PA) (Agenzia Fides 11/06/2013)

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