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AFRICA/BENIN - "The Virgin Mary is the sign of Catholicism in Benin"

Cotonou (Agenzia Fides) - "Here, thank God, there is a Catholic instinct of openness to the Madonna", says Fr. Juan Diego M. Gay, Franciscan Missionary of the Immaculate in an interview sent to Fides Agency on the initiative "A Day with Mary", a form of Marian pastoral focused on the message of Fatima.
Fr. Juan Diego was the promoter in Benin, as superior of the mission with the rectory and direction respectively of the Marian sanctuary and Radio Maria, the national Catholic radio station.
"Of course this Country has a predilection towards the Madonna," says the missionary. "She was consecrated several times, especially after the communist revolution when there was a gathering of all the living forces of the Nation under the leadership of Msg. Isidore de Souza, then Archbishop of Cotonou. He wanted to create a diocesan pilgrimage center, a center where all the parishes can come together on a pilgrimage at least once a year to pray and thank the Virgin, to realize, almost materialize this union with Mary".
"We must not also forget the presence of a radio totally consecrated to the Virgin Mary in this Archdiocese, in Allada, which has been broadcasting its programs almost all over the country since 1998.
Fr. Juan Diego describes the Marian fervor of Catholics in Benin: "people realize that with the Madonna, in evangelization, we can have easier access to Jesus. There is great happiness, it can be seen here in the popular preaching, talking to people, with the Confraternity of the Rosary, prayer groups ..., in shops ... you will see many Marian names in the streets and a certain pride and satisfaction of being Catholic".
"The Virgin Mary is like a fortress, as a distinguishing mark, because here there is also a Protestant presence, of evangelicals; therefore Our Lady has become precisely the sign of Catholicism in Benin" says the missionary.
(L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 12/07/2013)

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