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ASIA/PAKISTAN - The Church : "The massacre of Peshawar is strengthening our faith. Yes to dialogue with the Taliban"

Faisalabad (Agenzia Fides) - The tragic massacre of Peshawar, which according to official figures, has caused 126 deaths and injured 166, "is strengthening the faith of Christians in Pakistan. That attack, in the church, against innocent people who were just praying, has had an opposite effect: people flock to the churches more than before, there is no fear but there is the strong conviction that we should be closer to Christ, the way, truth and life": says in an interview with Fides Fr. Bonnie Mendes, a Pakistani priest, former Director of "Caritas Asia", who is currently a collaborator of the Commission for Caritas and the Commission "Justice and Peace" of the Pakistani Bishops.
Fr. Mendes recalls that, after the massacre of Peshawar "Christians lived days of mourning and they protested loudly across the country. They also prayed in an ecumenical manner, with the presence of other civil society organizations and many Muslim leaders". "Faith - explains Fr. Mendes – has greatly strengthened. Christians have forgiven the murderers and the Pope's message was prescious: we felt he was close to us more than ever. Also yesterday, during the General Audience, Pope Francis asked to strengthen brotherhood with Muslims: This appeal calls into question a lot of us Christian Pakistanis, who live immersed in a Muslim reality".
The priest is opposed to a "persecution vision against Christians" and says: "As Christians we are not being targeted more today than in the past. Terrorism strikes all: the Shiites, the army, the Ahmadis, the police, moderate Muslim intellectuals. There is no persecution: terrorism is a challenge for the whole country".
"The Pakistani Taliban have their own agenda, they do not want democracy and they want to impose the Islamic law", he continues. But even in this situation, the Christians in Pakistan "support the efforts of the government to enter into negotiations with the Pakistani Taliban", explains Fr. Mendes. "Despite the recent attack, claimed by Taliban groups, there is no alternative: every effort of dialogue is welcomed", and is "an act of courage for the good of the country", which has strong need to "defuse terrorism and find internal harmony, the basis of economic and social welfare". "There are no other options except negotiation. A compromise is difficult, it is a winding road, but one has to follow it, taking also into consideration the full respect for the rule of law", he concludes.
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