



VATICAN - Cardinal Filoni to the Bishops of the Antilles , "only joyful, zealous and faithful priests will attract the young to the service of Christ"

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - The Caribbean "was the first area of the Americas to hear the Good News of Christ over 400 years ago, and it is the first time that the Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples is visiting the region": this is what Cardinal Fernando Filoni, Prefect of the Congregation said in his speech to the Episcopal Conference of the Antilles, which he met this morning in the Seminary dedicated to St. John M. Vianney and the Ugandan Martyrs in Port of Spain (Trinidad and Tobago).

The region has a great heterogeneity of nations, languages, cultures and socio-economic realities that have their roots in history and are obstacles to the pastoral work of the Church. There are three major challenges mentioned by the Cardinal: "a scarcity of priests and religious, falling numbers of Catholics engaged in the life of the Church, and a constant diminution of financial resources for the sustenance of the Dioceses". Although in some Dioceses active programs for the Permanent Diaconate have met with some success, of which we are still awaiting the fruits, the Cardinal urged not to be discouraged and stressed that "the Church cannot live and grow without priests". He then invited the Bishops to devote particular care to the permanent formation of priests, so that young people meet "joyful, zealous and faithful priests, because only these will attract young people to the service of Christ".

Also the decrease of Catholics has several causes: in some areas many people are emigrating in search of employment and for a better future, in other areas some Catholics stop practicing their faith because of a lack of priests or the poor quality of pastoral care, as a result, some Catholics have been attracted by aggressive Pentecostal type religious groups. This phenomenon has also touched the great Catholic educational institutions, which have seen an erosion of Catholic identity because of the departure of priests and religious involved in Catholic education. Thankfully there are dedicated lay people, "many of which give clear and bold witness to their faith". Although the Antilles count a number of religious movements and new local communities that are active in various areas, the Cardinal urged the Bishops to invite into their Dioceses some of the new movements and ecclesial realities to provide the needed support for lay people in the practice of the faith.

To respond to financial difficulties, despite the generosity of the faithful who support the Church, greater attention is required in the administration of economic resources, reducing costs and living more simply, following the example of Pope Francis, urged the Prefect of the CEP: in addition to finding new sources of financial support, it is necessary above all to "be absolutely transparent in the financial management of our Dioceses".

Therefore, Cardinal Filoni focused on the episcopal ministry, inviting the Bishops to courageously face the challenges that come without being discouraged, not to neglect the flock entrusted to them. Our priests and our lay faithful must never feel abandoned by their Pastor. It is necessary to maintain "positive, paternal and fraternal relationships with your clergy, being firm, when necessary, but always having at heart the priest's ongoing spiritual, cultural, and pastoral formation". In concluding his speech, Cardinal Filoni thanked the Bishops "for the generous pastoral care, for the unwavering communion with the Holy Father, and for all of the good that they do at the universal level to support the missions throughout the world". (SL) (Agenzia Fides 30/11/2013)

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Cardinal Filoni's full speech, in English: http://www.fides.org/eng/attachments/view/file/C.Fil_Antille_Vesc_INGL.doc: