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AFRICA/TUNISIA - The challenge of an ecclesial community that is renewed every 4 years

Tunis (Agenzia Fides) - "Ours is an apostolate of life: we present Christ simply trying to live according to his teachings", says to Fides Agency His Exc. Mgr. Ilario Antoniazzi, Archbishop of Tunis. "We cannot in fact carry out the apostolate of the word, because the so-called Modus Vivendi, a sort of concordat pact signed with the Tunisian State after national independence, does not allow it", explains Mgr. Antoniazzi. "Among other things, in 1964, of the more than 100 churches that until then the Catholic community of Tunisia owned were expropriated by the State. Currently we have only 5 churches and 8 Catholic schools", added the Archbishop.
"We cannot even buy or lease buildings or receive donations. Let me give an example: if a religious congregation decides to close a convent in Tunisia it cannot sell it to the Archbishopric but is nationalized".
"But this does not prevent us from living in harmony with the Tunisian people", stressed Mgr. Antoniazzi". "Our church community is composed mainly of foreigners, most of whom are students and workers from sub -Saharan Africa. It is a pastoral challenge because we have calculated that every year we lose about a quarter of the faithful, who go back to their countries of origin because they have completed their studies or because their job contract has expired. This loss is compensated by a quarter of newcomers. In practice, our community renews itself completely in a matter of four years", said Mgr. Antoniazzi.
"So it is not easy to make a pastoral planning over such a limited period of time.
To the faithful who return to their countries I always say not to forget the good that Tunisia has done to them even at a spiritual level".
Given that Tunisia celebrates today January 14, the third anniversary of the so-called Jasmine Revolution that led to the deposition of President Ben Ali, we ask Mgr. Antoniazzi a comment on the situation in the Country. "The transition process is still long, we will see when the new Constitution is approved, after which new elections are scheduled. But we must have faith in Tunisians", he concludes. (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 14/01/2014)

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