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ASIA/PAKISTAN - On a mission in the land of the Taliban with Pope Francis

Quetta (Agenzia Fides) - The mission in Quetta in the Baluchistan region, inaccessible land where Taliban militants groups are hiding, continues "in the company of Pope Francis". This is what Fr. Renald Lawrence, of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI), Attorney of the Apostolic Vicariate of Quetta says to Fides Agency. A year after his election, the missionary explains: "The encouragement pronounced by the Pope: go, do not be afraid and serve thy neighbor, has touched us deeply. Today they work with zeal and courage in this land, to share the same mission of the Pope and witness Christ". "Pope Francis - he explains - is a man of God and his vision is to give Christ to the world. As missionaries in this borderland, and as workers in God's vineyard, we share with him, in often difficult circumstances, the mission of bringing Christ in this part of the world".
The Oblate missionaries think that "Pope Francis appears to be a true bridge between God and the people, between the Church and today's humanity". What strikes Fr. Lawrence is, in particular, the first encyclical, "Lumen fidei", written by Benedict XVI. A text that "invites us to shine the light of faith in our lives and in our land. It teaches us that faith is not arrogant, it strengthens the ties between the people and is at the service of justice and peace", he remarks.
In Pakistan, the Pope's speeches and actions are much appreciated said the missionary, such as the fact of "basing a reform of the Curia with the criteria of simplification and transparency". Pope Francis also strikes for his simplicity and essentiality. Fr. Inayat Bernard, a priest of the Diocese of Lahore, told Fides that "his choice to stay in a simple place, not in the papal apartment is an example". Struck by this witness, Fr. Bernard says "he refused a smartphone as a birthday gift from his friends", and donated that amount of money for the poor. The Executive Secretary of the Biblical Commission of Pakistan, Fr. Emmanuel Asi, in an interview with Fides, believes that "Pope Francis' election was good news for the universal Church". And said that the Commission has decided to translate the papal encyclical "Evangelii Gaudium" in Urdu, "so as to spread the text among the common people". He shares the Pope's lifestyle and his ecumenical and interfaith approach". According to Fr. Bonnie Mendes, a priest in Faisalabad, "the Holy Father's gesture of the washing of the feet of children and disabled prisoners earned him respect in the hearts and minds of people of all religions in the world". While Fr. Francis Nadeem OFM Cap, the national coordinator of the "Interreligious Council" in Lahore, told Fides that Muslim leaders also expressed their appreciation for Pope Francis and identify him with Pope John Paul II, who visited Pakistan in 1981, hoping that "he will visit Pakistan to encourage and strengthen interreligious dialogue". (PA-IB) (Agenzia Fides 12/03/2014)

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