

Bishop Louis-Armel Pelâtre is an Assumptionist bishop. Since 1992, he has been Apostolic Vicar of Istanbul in Turkey. As such, he is a member of the Special Synod for the Near East, held in Rome from 10 to 24 of October. He kindly shared with us some of his impressions.

What has been your experience of this Synod?

It's wonderful to be able to experience the Church in all of its diversity and the many different ways in which the faith is lived. Yet despite this diversity it is possible to discover the unity of our Near Eastern experience, especially in contrast with the Church of the West. Having taken part in various Synods, I've been struck that this one has a very specific character. It is the entire episcopate of the Near East that has gathered around the Pope and not just a number of delegates. Together they are focusing on the theme: "Communion and Witness". This is Benedict XVI's first initiative of this kind; nothing like this has ever occurred. And that is particularly significant in the context of the situation today in the Near East: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, war in Iraq, and the emigration of Near Eastern Christians.

What results can we expect?

We can hope first of all that Christians in the Near East, who often feel like they have been abandoned, will be comforted by the fact that the Church at the highest level loves them and has shown this by focusing concretely on their joys and their suffering. The central concern of our discussions is to foster a dynamic of hope among people who are more and more vulnerable. In the very different communities that constitute its Near Eastern Mission, the Assumption experiences this each day. On the eve of a General Chapter, we cannot avoid the question that the Synod has made a central concern for the whole Church, for every Synod is in communion with the universal Church. What all of the communities of our Near Eastern mission share in common is the desire to support Christian communities living as minorities, and in

Turkey our religious constitute the only Assumptionist community living in a Muslim context.

Interview conducted by Bernard Le Léannec, AA