
Turkey earthquake. "Father Antuan Ilgit (Iskenderun): "We are staying here with the people as captains of a ship"

"We will be needing your constant presence also in the coming months, because this emergency is bound to continue for a long time. The state of emergency and precariousness will be over in a year or maybe two. What worries me is when media attention shifts elsewhere, because **we need your unwavering support, everything here has been reduced to rubble, thousands of buildings have been damaged, road and other infrastructures were destroyed by the quake, people have been left homeless. Over 3,000 children in**



Turkey were orphaned. I cannot imagine how we will resume normal life. We will manage only with the help of God and the help of all people." Father Antuan Ilgit, Vicar General of the Apostolic Vicariate of Anatolia, is speaking from Iskenderun, one of the most severely earthquake-hit cities in Turkey. "We have electricity at the moment - he says to SIR - and thus all wireless communications are in place. But we have no gas and no running water." He then goes on to add: "There is one good thing that the earthquake has shown us: a positive cooperation between countries has emerged from this tragedy. That is the way forward. World powers should embrace peace and cooperation rather than war and division. If we succeed in this, we can make it. This tragedy has shown that it can be done."



"I rushed out of my room immediately after the quake and we went to check the cathedral, which had crumbled down entirely. The first thing I did was to save the Blessed Sacrament, because the apse was still standing. As we started to realise what had happened, I saw our parishioners arrive in tears. 'We lost our homes,' they said. I assumed they were referring to their own home, but they were actually referring to the cathedral that is the seat of the Apostolic Vicariate of Anatolia, the only Roman Catholic church in this city, thus an important centre for the life and history of this Christian community. We offered shelter to residents straight away." There are no distinctions: there are parishioners, as well as Syriacs, Orthodox and some Muslim families. While the cathedral was a heap of rubble, the bishop's residence was accessible. The refectory has a wooden roof, and it became a shelter for over one hundred people left without a home. Here people sleep, eat, celebrate Holy Mass. "It has become our cathedral, the place where our daily life takes place," says Father Antuan.



Food, water and blankets first arrived through the Spanish Navy. "We used those aids both for the people who were sheltering with us and for the people outside." Caritas Anatolia, which had been working for the poor and refugees even before the earthquake, took immediate action and is now successfully providing food for the people housed in the refectory, it is also distributing 1,000 meals a day to people outside the premises. "We are working as a team with our bishop and Father John Farhad Sadredin, director of Caritas Anatolia. We are receiving plenty of help and we thank everyone for this. It gives me great hope. The image of the living stones accompanies me since day one. The cathedral collapsed but the living stones remained. Residents have lost everything - their homes, relatives and friends - but nonetheless, they don't think of themselves but cooperate in helping others in need of assistance. These living stones that are left will become the path for rebuilding our future."

