
Apostolic Vicariate of Anatolia. Father Ilgit: "Our hope is to be able to serve as a bridge of fraternity"

"To serve the entire Church of Turkey, joining those who have already been serving that Church for many years with humble dedication, to promote peace together, to console the suffering, especially the survivors of the earthquake, to give hope to young people and to serve refugees in a spirit of Christian love," said Father Antuan Ilgit. Yesterday, Monday 28 August, Pope Francis appointed him Auxiliary Bishop of the Apostolic Vicariate of Anatolia (Turkey). Antuan Ilgit was born on June 22, 1972 in Hersbruck, the son of Turkish parents. He grew up in Turkey, in Mersin, in the province of Cilicia, a few kilometres from Tarsus. He is the first and only Jesuit of Turkish nationality. Turkey can count on a Bishop from this country for the first time in its recent history.

"I was on a spiritual retreat in Malta," he recalls, "when I was contacted by someone who said: 'The Holy Father has appointed you Auxiliary Bishop for the Vicariate of Anatolia. Will you accept this post?"

"I am grateful to the Lord for this appointment, even though I feel totally unworthy," he told SIR. "I am also grateful to the Holy Father, because with this appointment he has expressed not only his faith in me, but above all his faith in the Church of Turkey and in its young people, whom he met recently in Lisbon." The reference is to Pope Francis' meeting in Lisbon with young Turks attending the World Youth Day. "He said to them: 'Now you have to rebuild your lives. You are young and strong, be courageous,'" recalls Father Ilgit. The Holy Father's concern for young people "gives me all the more responsibility", the priest explains, because "young people are the living stones to rebuild what the earthquake has destroyed."

Describing the small yet thriving Catholic Church of Turkey and its community, Father Ilgit recalled a catechesis he had listened to in Barcelona on his way to Lisbon, given by one of his Jesuit confreres, Father Jean-Paul Hernandez. "He had pointed out to us an aphorism by Antonio Gaudí, which recalled the image of 'shards of broken vases that Holy Wisdom put together to form a magnificent mosaic'. Today, when I think of the Church in Turkey, which I love so much, this magnificent mosaic comes to life before my eyes. Not least because the Church in Turkey, with all its faithful, from indigenous Christians to African students and Christian refugees, is made up of so many broken shards that, as a whole, it shines". "Being a native of this country does not in itself make me special," he continued. "My mandate will only be fulfilled by the tasks that we will carry out together, and that bishops, priests, nuns, consecrated lay people of all nationalities are already carrying out in silence and with great dedication. Together we form this magnificent mosaic." Father Ilgit's thoughts go to his Bishop, Monsignor Paolo Bizzeti, and all his brothers in the episcopate, who "welcomed my election as auxiliary bishop with great enthusiasm." Years ago, Monsignor Luigi Padovese - the Italian bishop who was stabbed to death by his driver in 2010 - had written to him: "You are a gift for our Church in Turkey, you are a precious gift. Now you are giving what you have received: peace, consolation, hope and Christian love." Father Ilgit recalled his ministry so far, working alongside Bishop Bizzetti and in full collaboration with the civil authorities and the public administration. Speaking in his capacity as a "Turkish citizen", he concluded:

"This gives me great hope that I can serve as a bridge, also because the Church here has always worked to promote fraternity, coexistence and human and social development. We will continue to be open with humble and sincere steps. Turkey has always been the cradle of so many civilisations. It

has always had the potential to promote the richness of unity in diversity, peace and living together.”

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