The Order offers a path of sanctification for everyone

Interview with Cardinal Anders Arborelius

Anders Arborelius, primo cardinale svedese della storia, saluta i suoi confratelli del Collegio cardinalizio. Copyright Gennari

Cardinal Anders Arborelius, Bishop of Stockholm, Knight Grand Cross of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre and Grand Prior of Honor of the then Lieutenancy for Sweden (today for Sweden-Denmark) answers some questions about the Church in Sweden, the role of the Order and female participation. The first Swedish cardinal in history, the Carmelite Cardinal Arborelius was elected in 2017 as "Sweden of the Year", and this appointment is also a record since in the traditionally Lutheran country it is the first time that such recognition was given to a Catholic priest.

What does it mean to serve the Church in a non-Catholic majority country? Do you think that the fact of being a minority Church invites one to perceive one's own Catholic identity in a particular way?

As member of a Catholic minority in a secular surrounding you have to live in a very deep personal relationship to Jesus and be well integrated into the local Church. There will be many circumstances when you can give witness of your faith and try to explain why you want to be a faithful Catholic. People are often more open and interested than we think. You have to rely on God's grace and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and have the courage to speak with an open heart also about difficult issues. Then people will listen and respect you, even if they cannot accept everything you say.

For many years you held the role of Grand Prior of the then Lieutenancy for Sweden (now Lieutenancy for Sweden-Denmark). What was your experience of this? How do you think the Order can support the call to holiness of Catholics in your country?

It is important to show the candidates who enter and become part of the Lieutenancy that it is their vocation to follow in the footsteps of Jesus in their everyday life, not some kind of privilege or high position. The notion of evangelical service to God and his Church in the Holy Land is essential to understand. We belong to the holy people of God and there are many ways to live a life of sanctification, but they who want to enter the Lieutenancy have to understand that they shall be open to the call to holiness in the Order.

Recently you spoke in favour of a broader involvement of women at various levels within the Church. As a lay institution, the Order already offers an example of collaboration between men and women thanks to the possibility for women to be nominated for any position within the Lieutenancy. Could you tell us something more about it? What would you suggest to bolster female participation in the Church?

Many women today have difficulties to enter the traditional apostolic congregations and still many of them want to follow Jesus on the path to holiness and service of the Church. A more contemporary charism for modern women is highly needed, when this model of life seems to lose its force of attraction. As you said the Order could offer women of today the possibility to give themselves for God and the Church in the Holy Land. Similar possibilities have to be found on various levels for women of today.

Interview by Elena Dini

(April 2018)