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◆ VISITA "AD LIMINA APOSTOLORUM" DEGLI ECC.MI PRESULI DELLA CONFERENZA EPISCOPALE DELLE FILIPPINE (III GRUPPO)

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Alle ore 11.30 di oggi, nella Sala del Concistoro del Palazzo Apostolico, il Santo Padre Benedetto XVI incontra i Presuli della Conferenza Episcopale delle Filippine, ricevuti in questi giorni, in separate udienze, in occasione della Visita "ad Limina Apostolorum".

Pubblichiamo di seguito il discorso che il Papa rivolge ai Vescovi presenti:

● **DISCORSO DEL SANTO PADRE**

My dear Brother Bishops,

It is with joy that I welcome you as you make your visit *ad Limina Apostolorum*. I extend my cordial greetings through you to the priests, religious, and faithful of your various dioceses. Our meeting today affords me the opportunity to thank you collectively for the pastoral work you carry out with love for Christ and for his people. As Saint Paul says, "Let us not grow weary of doing good; if we do not relax our efforts, in due time we shall reap our harvest" (*Gal 6:9*). With these words, the Apostle encourages his readers to do good to all, but especially to those of the household of the faith. He presents us with a double imperative, one which is most appropriate to your ministry as bishops in the central and southern islands of the Philippine archipelago. You must labor in doing good among Christians and non-Christians alike.

Regarding "those of the household of the faith" who require your apostolic care, the Church in your respective regions naturally shares many of the pastoral challenges confronting the rest of the country. Among them, one of the most important is the task of ongoing catechetical formation. The deep personal piety of your people needs to be nourished and supported by a profound understanding of and appreciation for the teachings of the Church in matters of faith and morals. Indeed, these elements are required in order for the human heart to give its full and proper response to God. As you continue to strengthen catechesis in your dioceses, do not fail to include in it an outreach to families, with particular care for parents in their role as the first educators of their children in the faith. This work is already evident in your support of the family in the face of influences which would diminish or destroy its rights and integrity. I appreciate that providing this kind of catechetical formation is no small task, and I take the opportunity to salute the many religious sisters and lay catechists who assist you in this important work.

Indeed, as diocesan bishops you never face any challenge alone, being assisted first and foremost by your clergy. Along with you, they have devoted their lives to the service of God and his people, and require in their turn your fatherly care. As you are aware, you and your fellow bishops have a particular duty to know your priests well and to guide them with sincere concern, while priests are always to be prepared to fulfill humbly and faithfully the tasks entrusted to them. In such a spirit of mutual cooperation for the sake of the Kingdom of God, surely "in due time we shall reap our harvest" of faith.

Many of your dioceses already have in place programs of continuing formation for young priests, assisting them in their transition from the structured schedule of the seminary to the more independent setting of parish life. Along these lines, it is also helpful for them to be assigned mentors from among those older priests who have proven themselves to be faithful servants of the Lord. These men can guide their younger confrères along the path toward a mature and well-balanced way of priestly living.

Moreover, priests of all ages require ongoing care. Regular days of recollection, yearly retreats and convocations, as well as programs for continuing education and assistance for priests who may be facing difficulties, are to be promoted. I am confident that you will also find ways to support those priests whose assignments leave them isolated. It is gratifying to note how the Second National Congress for the Clergy, held during the Year for Priests, was just such an occasion for renewal and fraternal support. In order to build upon this momentum, I encourage you to profit from the yearly celebration of Holy Thursday, during which the Church commemorates the priesthood in a special way. In accordance with their solemn promises at ordination, remind your priests of their commitment to celibacy, obedience, and an ever greater dedication to pastoral service. In living out their promises, these men will become true spiritual fathers with a personal and psychological maturity that will grow to mirror the paternity of God.

With respect to Saint Paul's command to do good to those not of the household of the faith, dialogue with other religions remains a high priority, especially in the southern areas of your country. While the Church proclaims without fail that Christ is the way, the truth, and the life (cf. *Jn* 14:6), nevertheless she respects all that is true and good in other religions, and she seeks, with prudence and charity, to enter into an honest and amicable dialogue with the followers of those religions whenever possible (cf. *Nostra Aetate*, 2). In doing so, the Church works toward mutual understanding and the advancement of the common good of humanity. I commend you for the work you have already done and I encourage you, by means of the dialogue that has been established, to continue to promote the path to true and lasting peace with all of your neighbors, never failing to treat each person, no matter his or her beliefs, as created in the image of God.

Finally, as we strive not to "grow weary of doing good," we are reminded that the greatest good that we can offer those whom we serve is given to us in the Eucharist. In the Holy Mass, the faithful receive the grace needed to be transformed in Jesus Christ. It is heartening that many Filipinos attend Sunday Mass, but this does not leave room for complacency on your part as shepherds. It is your task, and that of your priests, never to grow weary in pursuing the lost sheep, making sure that all the faithful draw life from the great gift given to us in the Sacred Mysteries.

Dear Brother Bishops, I thank the Lord for these days of your visit to the City of Peter and Paul, during which

God has strengthened our bonds of communion. Through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, may the good Lord bring your work to completion. I assure you of a remembrance in my prayers and willingly impart to you and to the faithful entrusted to your care my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of grace and peace.

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