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VISITA "AD LIMINA APOSTOLORUM" DEI PRESULI DELLA CONFERENZA EPISCOPALE DI TAIWAN

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Pubblichiamo di seguito il discorso che il Santo Padre Giovanni Paolo II ha rivolto agli Ecc.mi Presuli della Conferenza Episcopale di Taiwan, incontrati questa mattina e ricevuti in questi giorni, in separate udienze, in occasione della Visita "ad Limina Apostolorum":

• DISCORSO DEL SANTO PADRE

Dear Cardinal Shan,

Dear Brother Bishops,

1. It gives me great joy to welcome you, the Bishops of Taiwan, on the occasion of your visit *ad Limina Apostolorum*, a visit which expresses and strengthens the bonds of ecclesial communion linking the Pastors of the particular Churches with the Successor of Peter in the service of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As you pray at the tombs of the Apostles and reflect on your own ministry in the light of their teaching and example, it is my fervent prayer that you will find fresh inspiration and strength for your work in the building up of Christ's body, the Church, in your Dioceses. I think with affection of the Catholic faithful of Taiwan and I ask our heavenly Father to lead them to know ever more perfectly "the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe" (*Eph 1:19*).

2. The Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 was a joyful event for the whole Church, as we pondered with fresh wonder the workings of God's grace and its power to accomplish far more than we could ever ask or imagine (cf. *Eph 3:21-22*). During the Jubilee great numbers of people came on pilgrimage to Rome or to other holy places in order to renew their commitment to Christ through prayer and the Sacraments, and in particular to obtain his mercy, especially in the Sacrament of Penance. At the closing of the Holy Door, I stated that "Christianity is born, and continually draws new life from ... contemplation of the glory of God shining on the face of Christ" (*Homily at the Closing of the Holy Door*, January 6, 2001, No. 6). I expressed the hope that the whole Christian community would set out from this contemplation of Christ with fresh enthusiasm and a new commitment to the search for holiness, in order to testify to his love "by living a Christian life marked by communion, charity and witness before the world" (*ibid.*, No. 8). This is the task which I entrusted to the attention of the particular Churches in the

Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, as a way of building on what the Jubilee achieved in the lives of individuals and communities.

Over the past year, the Catholic community in Taiwan has taken up this mission by reflecting on the theme "*New Century, New Evangelization*", with the aim of contributing with concrete initiatives to the renewal of Church life in your Dioceses. Now is the time to set out with confidence in the Lord and put these proposals into practice in order to respond to the challenges of the new millennium.

3. Your initiatives will bear fruit provided that they reflect the two dimensions necessary in all the Church's activities: the dimension *ad intra* and the dimension *ad extra*. *Ad intra*: a spirit of prayer and contemplation, vital to the Christian life, must be the hallmark of all we say and do: "Nothing is equal to prayer, for what is impossible it makes possible, what is difficult, easy" (St John Chrysostom, *De Anna*, 4, 5). *Ad extra*: the duty to proclaim Christ, convinced that the spreading of the Gospel is "the primary service which the Church can render to every individual and to all humanity in the modern world" (*Redemptoris Missio*, 2). The two are inseparable, for spirituality shows its authenticity in proclaiming and witnessing to Christ, while missionary activity can only produce positive results when it is rooted in an intimate communion with God: without prayer, our evangelization would be in vain; without mission, the Christian community would lose its savour and zest.

Faced with the difficulties affecting the life of faith today, it could be tempting for Pastors to adopt an attitude of resignation and say like the Apostle Peter: "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing" (*Lk* 5:5). But even when we do not see the results of our pastoral endeavors, we ought not to become discouraged: we plant and water, but it is God who gives the growth (cf. *1 Cor* 3:6). The Lord Jesus constantly invites us to overcome our fear and to "put out into the deep" (*Lk* 5:4). Convinced that Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life (cf. *Jn* 14:6), is the Good News for the men and women of every time and place in their search for the meaning of life and for the truth of their own humanity (cf. *Ecclesia in Asia*, 14), we should never be afraid of proclaiming the full truth about him, in all its challenging reality. The Good News has an intrinsic power of its own to draw people.

4. During the recent General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, the figure of Christ the Good Shepherd emerged as the "icon" of the episcopal ministry, the model to which we are to conform ourselves ever more closely. As Shepherds of the People of God in Taiwan, you represent Christ in your particular Churches, since from him you receive the mission and sacred power to act *in persona Christi capitis* and to teach and govern with authority in his name. This calls for deep and prayerful intimacy with the Lord, so that by taking on the form of Christ the servant (cf. *Phil* 2:7) you will be able work with humility, generosity and commitment for the good of the faithful entrusted to your pastoral care. In carrying out his first and primary duty, which is the care of souls, *cura animarum*, the Bishop needs to be close to his people and know them, in order to promote whatever is good and positive, sustain and guide those who are weak in faith (cf. *Rom* 14:1), and, where necessary, intervene to unmask falsehoods and correct abuses (cf. *Homily at the Close of the Tenth General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops*, October 27, 2001, No. 4). Yours is above all a mission of hope, for you know that the true solution to the complicated problems which burden humanity lies in the reception given to the saving message of the Gospel. For this reason, your pastoral planning for the opening years of the new millennium should be aimed above all at enabling the proclamation of Christ "to reach people, mould communities and have a deep and incisive influence in bringing Gospel values to bear in society and culture" (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 29).

5. Of course, you do not work alone: the mission belongs to all of God's people. Your priests are your closest collaborators in the work of evangelization, and, if it is to be successful, you must do all you can to foster in your Dioceses close bonds of priestly brotherhood and a sense of common purpose. The devout and dedicated lives of priests, in direct contact with both Christians and non-Christians, in parishes and the various places where they exercise their pastoral ministry, is the measure of each community's vitality. The traditional respect for the things of the spirit characteristic of Asian culture is all the more reason for them to be men of prayer, truly expert in God's ways, eager to share with others the love of God which they have come to know in their own lives. In this way they will be able to respond to the hunger for God which marks modern society, and enter more deeply into the hopes and needs of those to whom they minister. You clearly recognize that fresh efforts have constantly to be made to present the ideal of the priestly life as a valid choice for all those young men who come to a deeper knowledge of the Lord. I am confident that your people will support you when you appeal for more intense prayer for vocations, and when you hold up to them the great grace and privilege that it is when God

calls a member of a family to the priesthood or consecrated life.

6. I wish to say a word of gratitude, appreciation and encouragement to the men and women who belong to Taiwan's numerous institutes of consecrated life. Consecrated men and women make a unique contribution to the work of evangelization by living out their consecration through prayer and the apostolate in accordance with the charism of each Institute. By their state of life, which involves the total giving of self to God loved above all else, and which calls for a more intimate consecration to his service, they signify and proclaim in the Church the glory of the world to come (cf. *Code of Canon Law*, Canon 573) and bear witness to the new creation inaugurated by Christ and made possible in us by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit. Through their generous dedication to social and charitable works, education and health care they have been and continue to be a great spiritual resource for the life of your particular Churches.

You will encourage consecrated men and women to be at the forefront of the apostolate of prayer, which is the secret of a truly vital Christianity (cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 32). There is a widespread demand today for authentic spirituality, which expresses itself in large part as a renewed need for prayer. This is particularly true in societies such as your own which on the one hand has a rich heritage of spiritual traditions and on the other is threatened by currents of materialism and individualism. For this reason, contemplative men and women should not only cultivate carefully the life of prayer to which they are called but should become true teachers of prayer for clergy and laity alike.

7. In the Church's mission the laity have their own specific responsibility and mission: they are called to be "salt of the earth" and "light of the world" (cf. *Mt* 5:13-14). By virtue of their Baptism and Confirmation all lay people are missionaries, and it is in the world that they are called to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In the local Church in Taiwan their role is all the more vital: though by comparison their number is small, they act as a leaven in society, transforming it according to the values of the Gospel. Through their faith, goodness and loving service, they can lead to the spread of an authentic Christian culture characterised by respect for life at every stage, a vibrant family life, dedicated care of the sick and the aged, harmony, cooperation and solidarity among all sectors of society, respect for those who think differently and commitment to promoting the common good. In living their Christian vocation the laity look to you for support, encouragement and guidance. They in fact have to face the challenges of contemporary society "not just with worldly wisdom and efficiency, but with hearts renewed and strengthened by the truth of Christ" (*Ecclesia in Asia*, 45). Your task is to teach and inspire them, by word and example, to lead fully Christian lives, so that they may be able to bear witness to Christ in their homes, in the workplace and in all their activities.

8. Since it belongs to the essence of each particular Church to live in communion with the universal Church, a Bishop cannot fail to be sensitive to the needs of the Church throughout the world. This is the *sollicitudo omnium Ecclesiarum* of which the Apostle Paul speaks (cf. *2 Cor* 11:28). In various ways the Church in Taiwan has responded to the needs and aspirations of Christians elsewhere, most especially at the regional level by providing educational opportunities and financial support for Church personnel from other parts of Asia, and in offering resources for missionary activity. Your concern is expressed particularly in the attention you give to your brothers and sisters on the Mainland who have in common with you so many cultural, spiritual and historical values. In this, your efforts are aimed at promoting mutual understanding, reconciliation and fraternal love among all the Catholics of the great Chinese family. I am confident that these efforts, carried out in communion with other particular Churches and the See of Peter, will help to overcome the difficulties of the past, so that ever new opportunities for dialogue and reciprocal human and spiritual enrichment may arise.

9. Dear Brother Bishops, every situation is an opportunity for Christians to show forth the power which the truth of Christ has become in their lives. Although increasing secularization may give the impression that modern society is closed to spiritual and transcendent values, many people are looking for meaning in their lives and for the happiness that only God can give. The conviction that has accompanied me throughout my Pontificate is this: "The absolute and yet sweet and gentle power of the Lord responds to the whole depths of the human person, to his loftiest aspirations of intellect, will and heart" (*Homily*, October 22, 1978, No. 4). This power, which has its source not in worldly power but in the mystery of the Cross and Resurrection, is the true source of our confidence in the exercise of our ministry. We know that the Lord will never abandon us in our pastoral mission, provided we place our trust in him and call upon him. Set out then with courage, with the assurance that Christ

who knows every human heart is with you.

Dear Brothers, with affection in the Lord for all who are in your pastoral care, I entrust the whole Church in Taiwan to the maternal protection of Mary, bright Star of Evangelization in every age, and to all of you I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.

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