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VISITA "AD LIMINA APOSTOLORUM" DEI PRESULI DELLA CONFERENZA EPISCOPALE DELLO ZIMBABWE

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

• DISCORSO DEL SANTO PADRE

My Brother Bishops,

"Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!" (*Eph* 1:2). I offer a warm welcome to you, the Bishops of Zimbabwe, on the occasion of your quinquennial visit *ad Limina Apostolorum*. May your pilgrimage to the Tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul, and this meeting with Peter's Successor, be for all of you an incentive to ever greater unity in the cause of the Gospel and the service of Christ's Kingdom. May these days also grant you a precious opportunity to withdraw from your pressing pastoral cares in order to spend time with the Lord (cf. *Mk* 6:31) in prayer and spiritual discernment, so that you may take up with renewed zeal your ministry as heralds of God's word and shepherds of his people in your native land.

The recent elections in Zimbabwe have laid the basis for what I trust will be a new beginning in the process of national reconciliation and the moral rebuilding of society. I appreciate the significant contribution to the electoral process which you offered to the Catholic faithful and to all your fellow-citizens in your Joint Pastoral Statement published last year. As you rightly noted in that Statement, responsibility for the common good demands that all members of the body politic work together in laying firm moral and spiritual foundations for the future of the nation. Through the publication of the Statement and your most recent Pastoral Letter *The Cry of the Poor*, you yourselves have brought the wisdom of the Gospel and the rich heritage of the Church's social doctrine to bear upon the thinking and practical judgements of the faithful both in their daily lives and in their efforts to act as upright members of the community. In the exercise of your episcopal ministry of teaching and governance, I encourage you to continue to provide clear and united leadership, grounded in an unwavering faith in Jesus Christ and obedience to "the word of truth, the Gospel of salvation" (*Eph* 1:13). In your preaching and teaching

the faithful should be able to hear the voice of the Lord himself, a voice that speaks with authority of what is right and true, of peace and justice, of love and reconciliation, a voice that can console them in the midst of their troubles and show them the way forward in hope.

Amid the difficulties of the present moment, the Church in Zimbabwe can rejoice in the presence of so many communities vibrant in faith, a significant number of vocations to the priesthood and religious life, and the presence of a committed laity devoted to various works of the apostolate. These gifts of God's grace are at once a consolation and a challenge to an ever more profound and integrated catechesis aimed at training the faithful to live fully their Christian vocation. "In all areas of Church life, formation is of primary importance" for the future of the Church in Africa (*Ecclesia in Africa*, 75). For this reason, I encourage you to work together to ensure suitable and comprehensive catechetical preparation for all the faithful, and to take whatever steps may be necessary to provide for a more systematic education of catechists. Future priests, for their part, should be helped to present the fullness of the Catholic faith in a way which truly addresses and responds to people's difficulties, questions and problems. The national seminaries require practical support in their challenging task of providing seminarians with an adequate human, spiritual, doctrinal and pastoral formation, while the younger clergy would greatly benefit, in the first years of their priestly ministry, from a programme of spiritual, pastoral and human accompaniment guided by experienced and exemplary priests. Your concern for sound catechesis and an integral religious education must also extend to the system of Catholic schools, whose religious identity needs to be strengthened, for the good not only of their students, but of the entire Catholic community in your country.

Dear Brother Bishops, in union with the Successor of Peter and the College of Bishops, you have been sent forth as witnesses to the hope held out by the Gospel of Jesus Christ (cf. *Pastores Gregis*, 5). As you return to your native land strengthened in faith and in the bond of ecclesial communion, I ask you to cooperate generously in the service of the Gospel, so that the light of God's word will shine ever more brightly in the minds and hearts of Zimbabwe's Catholics, inspiring in them a deeper love of Christ and a more firm commitment to the spread of his Kingdom of holiness, justice and truth. With great affection I commend you and the clergy, religious and laity of your Dioceses to the loving intercession of Mary, Mother of the Church, and cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of joy and peace in the Lord.

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