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Alle 12 di questa mattina, il Santo Padre Benedetto XVI incontra i Presuli della Conferenza Episcopale delle Antille, ricevuti in questi giorni, in separate udienze, in occasione della Visita "ad Limina Apostolorum".

Pubblichiamo di seguito il discorso che il Papa pronuncia nel corso dell'incontro:

● DISCORSO DEL SANTO PADRE

Dear Brother Bishops,

"What we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord with ourselves as servants" (2 Cor 4:5). With these stirring words of Saint Paul I cordially welcome you, the Bishops of the Antilles. I thank Archbishop Burke for the kind sentiments expressed on your behalf and I warmly reciprocate them and assure you of my prayers for yourselves and those entrusted to your pastoral care. Your visit *ad Limina Apostolorum* is an occasion to strengthen your commitment to make the face of Jesus increasingly visible within the Church and society through consistent witness to the Gospel.

The great 'drama' of Holy Week and the joyful liturgical season of Easter express the very essence of the hope which defines us as Christians. Jesus, who indicates to us the way beyond even death, is the one who shows us how to overcome trials and fear. He is the true teacher of life (cf. *Spe Salvi*, 6). Indeed, filled with the light of

Christ we too illuminate the way which dispels all evil, casts out hatred, brings us peace and humbles earthly pride (cf. *Exsultet*).

The image of the paschal light I trust, dear Brothers, will draw you forward as you engage with the considerable challenges you face. Your own reports articulate with frankness both the light and the shadows cast upon your Dioceses. Undoubtedly the religious soul of the peoples of your region is capable of great things! Generosity of heart and openness of mind attest to a spirit willing to be shaped by the truth and love of our Lord. Yet there is also much that seeks to quench the dimly burning wick (cf. *Is 42:3*). To varying degrees, your shores have been battered by negative aspects of the entertainment industry, exploitative tourism and the scourge of the arms and drugs trade; influences which not only undermine family life and unsettle the foundations of traditional cultural values, but tend to affect negatively local politics.

Brothers, against this disturbing backdrop, stand tall as heralds of hope! Be audacious witnesses to the light of Christ, which gives families direction and purpose, and be bold preachers of the power of the Gospel, which must permeate their way of thinking, standards of judgement, and norms of behaviour. I am confident that your lived testimony to God's extraordinary "yes" to humanity (cf. *2 Cor 1:20*) will encourage your peoples to reject destructive social trends and to seek 'faith in action', embracing all that begets the new life of Pentecost!

Pastoral renewal is an indispensable task for each of your Dioceses. Already there are examples where this challenge has been embraced with enthusiasm; it must include priests, Religious and the lay faithful. Of vital importance is the tireless promotion of vocations together with the guidance and ongoing formation of priests. You are the primary formators of your priests and, supported by the laity, you bear the responsibility for assiduous and prudent encouragement of vocations. Your solicitude for the human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral formation of your seminarians and priests is a sure expression of your care and concern for the constant deepening of their pastoral commitment (cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 2). I encourage you to support attentively Saint John Vianney and the Ugandan Martyrs Seminary, to supervise in a fatherly way especially your young priests and to offer regular programmes of ongoing formation necessary for building priestly identity (cf. *ibid.*, 71). In turn, your priests will surely nurture their parish communities with growing maturity and spiritual wisdom. The establishment of a francophone seminary in the region is a welcome sign of hope; please convey to its staff and seminarians the assurance of my prayers.

The contribution of Religious Brothers, Priests and Sisters to the mission of the Church and the building up of civil society has been of immeasurable worth to your countries. Innumerable boys, girls and families have benefited from the selfless commitment of Religious to spiritual guidance, education, and social and medical work. Of special value and beauty is the life of prayer found in the contemplative communities of the region. Your pastoral concern for the decline in Religious vocations exemplifies your deep appreciation of consecrated life. I too appeal to your Religious communities, encouraging them to reaffirm their calling with confidence and, guided by the Holy Spirit, to propose afresh to young people the ideal of consecration and mission; the spiritual treasures of their respective charisms splendidly illuminate the paths by which the Lord calls young people to the adventure of the life of love offered to him for every member of the human family (cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 3).

Chers Frères, chacun d'entre vous ressent la grande responsabilité qui est la sienne de faire tout ce qui est possible afin de soutenir le mariage et la vie familiale, source première de cohésion à l'intérieur des communautés et donc d'une importance capitale aux yeux des autorités civiles. À cet égard, le large réseau d'écoles catholiques dans toute votre région peut apporter beaucoup. Les valeurs qui s'enracinent dans le chemin de vérité offert par le Christ éclairent l'esprit et le cœur des jeunes et les entraînent à suivre la voie de la fidélité, de la responsabilité et de la liberté véritable. De bons jeunes chrétiens font de bons citoyens! Je suis sûr que tout sera fait pour encourager la spécificité catholique de vos écoles qui, au long des générations passées, ont rendu des services remarquables à vos peuples. De cette manière, je ne doute pas que les jeunes adultes de vos diocèses sauront discerner qu'il leur revient, de manière urgente, de contribuer au développement économique et social de la région, car il s'agit là d'une dimension essentielle de leur témoignage chrétien.

With fraternal affection I offer these reflections wishing to affirm you in your desire to intensify the summons to witness and evangelization which ensue from the encounter with Christ. United in your proclamation of the Good

News of Jesus Christ, go forward in hope! Please assure all your seminarians and priests, Religious, and lay faithful - including in a special way the considerable immigrant communities - of my prayers and spiritual communion. To you all, I gladly impart my Apostolic Blessing.

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