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OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE



BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIEGE
PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLS

BOLLETTINO

SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE

N. 0076

Venerdì 05.02.2010

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

Alle ore 12.15 di questa mattina, il Santo Padre Benedetto XVI incontra gli Ecc.mi Presuli della Conferenza Episcopale di Scozia, ricevuti in questi giorni, in separate udienze, in occasione della Visita "ad Limina Apostolorum", e rivolge loro il discorso che pubblichiamo di seguito:

• DISCORSO DEL SANTO PADRE

Dear Brother Bishops,

I extend a warm welcome to all of you on your *ad Limina* visit to Rome. I thank you for the kind words that Cardinal Keith Patrick O'Brien has addressed to me on your behalf, and I assure you of my constant prayers for you and for the faithful entrusted to your care. Your presence here expresses a reality that lies at the heart of every Catholic diocese – its relationship of *communio* with the See of Peter, and hence with the universal Church. Pastoral initiatives that take due account of this essential dimension bring authentic renewal: when the bonds of communion with the universal Church, and in particular with Rome, are accepted joyfully and lived fully, the people's faith can grow freely and yield a harvest of good works.

It is a happy coincidence that the *Year for Priests*, which the whole Church is currently celebrating, marks the four hundredth anniversary of the priestly ordination of the great Scottish martyr Saint John Ogilvie. Rightly venerated as a faithful servant of the Gospel, he was truly outstanding in his dedication to a difficult and dangerous pastoral ministry, to the point of laying down his life. Hold him up as an example for your priests today. I am glad to know of the emphasis you place on continuing formation for your clergy, especially through the initiative "Priests for Scotland". The witness of priests who are genuinely committed to prayer and joyful in their ministry bears fruit not only in the spiritual lives of the faithful, but also in new vocations. Remember, though, that your commendable initiatives to promote vocations must be accompanied by sustained catechesis among the faithful about the true meaning of priesthood. Emphasize the indispensable role of the priest in the Church's life, above all in providing the Eucharist by which the Church herself receives life. And encourage those entrusted with the formation of seminarians to do all they can to prepare a new generation of committed and zealous priests, well equipped humanly, academically and spiritually for the task of ministry in the twenty-first century.

Hand in hand with a proper appreciation of the priest's role is a correct understanding of the specific vocation of the laity. Sometimes a tendency to confuse *lay apostolate* with *lay ministry* has led to an inward-looking concept of their ecclesial role. Yet the Second Vatican Council's vision is that wherever the lay faithful live out their baptismal vocation – in the family, at home, at work – they are actively participating in the Church's mission to sanctify the world. A renewed focus on *lay apostolate* will help to clarify the roles of clergy and laity and so give a strong impetus to the task of evangelizing society.

That task requires a readiness to grapple firmly with the challenges presented by the increasing tide of secularism in your country. Support for euthanasia strikes at the very heart of the Christian understanding of the dignity of human life. Recent developments in medical ethics and some of the practices advocated in the field of embryology give cause for great concern. If the Church's teaching is compromised, even slightly, in one such area, then it becomes hard to defend the fullness of Catholic doctrine in an integral manner. Pastors of the Church, therefore, must continually call the faithful to complete fidelity to the Church's Magisterium, while at the same time upholding and defending the Church's right to live freely in society according to her beliefs.

The Church offers the world a positive and inspiring vision of human life, the beauty of marriage and the joy of parenthood. It is rooted in God's infinite, transforming and ennobling love for all of us, which opens our eyes to recognize and love his image in our neighbour (cf. *Deus Caritas Est*, 10-11 *et passim*). Be sure to present this teaching in such a way that it is recognized for the message of hope that it is. All too often the Church's doctrine is perceived as a series of prohibitions and retrograde positions, whereas the reality, as we know, is that it is creative and life-giving, and it is directed towards the fullest possible realization of the great potential for good and for happiness that God has implanted within every one of us.

The Church in your country, like many in Northern Europe, has suffered the tragedy of division. It is sobering to recall the great rupture with Scotland's Catholic past that occurred four hundred and fifty years ago. I give thanks to God for the progress that has been made in healing the wounds that were the legacy of that period, especially the sectarianism that has continued to rear its head even in recent times. Through your participation in *Action of Churches Together in Scotland*, see that the work of rebuilding unity among the followers of Christ is carried forward with constancy and commitment. While resisting any pressure to dilute the Christian message, set your sights on the goal of full, visible unity, for nothing less can respond to the will of Christ.

You can be proud of the contribution made by Scotland's Catholic schools in overcoming sectarianism and building good relations between communities. Faith schools are a powerful force for social cohesion, and when the occasion arises, you do well to underline this point. As you encourage Catholic teachers in their work, place special emphasis on the quality and depth of religious education, so as to prepare an articulate and well-informed Catholic laity, able and willing to carry out its mission "by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God" (*Christifideles Laici*, 15). A strong Catholic presence in the media, local and national politics, the judiciary, the professions and the universities can only serve to enrich Scotland's national life, as people of faith bear witness to the truth, especially when that truth is called into question.

Later this year, I shall have the joy of being present with you and the Catholics of Scotland on your native soil. As you prepare for the Apostolic Visit, encourage your people to pray that it will be a time of grace for the whole Catholic community. Take the opportunity to deepen their faith and to rekindle their commitment to bear witness to the Gospel. Like the monks from Iona who spread the Christian message throughout the length and breadth of Scotland, let them be beacons of faith and holiness for the Scottish people today.

With these thoughts, I commend your apostolic labours to the intercession of Our Lady, Saint Andrew, Saint Margaret and all the saints of Scotland. To all of you, and to your clergy, religious and lay faithful I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of peace and joy in the Lord Jesus Christ.

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