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Alle ore 12.15 di questa mattina, nella Sala del Concistoro del Palazzo Apostolico Vaticano, il Santo Padre Benedetto XVI incontra i Vescovi 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 loro:

● **DISCORSO DEL SANTO PADRE**

Dear Brother Bishops,

I am pleased to extend to all of you a warm welcome on the occasion of your visit *ad limina Apostolorum*. I thank Cardinal Gaudencio Rosales for the kind words that he has addressed to me on your behalf, and I assure you of my prayers and good wishes for yourselves and for all the faithful entrusted to your pastoral care. Your presence here in Rome strengthens the bonds of communion between the Catholic community in the Philippines and the See of Peter, a communion which stretches back over four centuries to the first offering of the Eucharistic Sacrifice upon your shores. As this communion of faith and sacrament has nourished your people for many generations, I pray that it may continue to serve as a leaven in the broader culture, so that current and future generations of Filipinos will continue to encounter the joyful message of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

To be such a leaven, the Church must always seek to find her proper voice, because it is by proclamation that the Gospel brings about its life-changing fruits (cf. *Mk 16:15-16*). This voice expresses itself in the moral and spiritual witness of the lives of believers. It also expresses itself in the public witness offered by the Bishops, as the Church's primary teachers, and by all who have a role in teaching the faith to others. Thanks to the Gospel's clear presentation of the truth about God and man, generations of zealous Filipino clergymen, religious and laity have promoted an ever more just social order. At times, this task of proclamation touches upon issues relevant to the political sphere. This is not surprising, since the political community and the Church, while rightly distinct, are nevertheless both at the service of the integral development of every human being and of society as a whole. For her part, the Church contributes most toward the building of a just and charitable social order when, "by preaching the truths of the Gospel, and bringing to bear on all fields of human endeavour the light of her doctrine and of a Christian witness, she respects and fosters the political freedom and responsibility of citizens" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 76).

At the same time, the Church's prophetic office demands that she be free "to preach the faith, to teach her social doctrine ... and also to pass moral judgments in those matters which regard public order whenever the fundamental human rights of a person or the salvation of souls requires it" (*ibid.*). In the light of this prophetic task, I commend the Church in the Philippines for seeking to play its part in support of human life from conception until natural death, and in defence of the integrity of marriage and the family. In these areas you are promoting truths about the human person and about society which arise not only from divine revelation but also from the natural law, an order which is accessible to human reason and thus provides a basis for dialogue and deeper discernment on the part of all people of good will. I also note with appreciation the Church's work to abolish the death penalty in your country.

A specific area in which the Church must always find her proper voice comes in the field of social communications and the media. The task set before the whole Catholic community is to convey a hope-filled vision of faith and virtue so that Filipinos may find encouragement and guidance on their path to a full life in Christ. A unified and positive voice needs to be presented to the public in forms of media both old and new, so that the Gospel message may have an ever more powerful impact on the people of the nation. It is important that the Catholic laity proficient in social communications take their proper place in proposing the Christian message in a convincing and attractive way. If the Gospel of Christ is to be a leaven in Filipino society, then the entire Catholic community must be attentive to the force of the truth proclaimed with love.

A third aspect of the Church's mission of proclaiming the life-giving word of God is in her commitment to economic and social concerns, in particular with respect to the poorest and the weakest in society. At the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines, the Church in your nation took a special interest in devoting herself more fully to care for the poor. It is heartening to see that this undertaking has borne fruit, with Catholic charitable institutions actively engaged throughout the country. Many of your fellow citizens, however, remain without employment, adequate education or basic services, and so your prophetic statements and your charitable action on behalf of the poor continue to be greatly appreciated. In addition to this effort, you are rightly concerned that there be an on-going commitment to the struggle against corruption, since the growth of a just and sustainable economy will only come about when there is a clear and consistent application of the rule of law throughout the land.

Dear Brother Bishops, as my predecessor Pope John Paul II rightly noted, "You are Pastors of a *people in love with Mary*" (14 January 1995). May her willingness to bear the Word who is Jesus Christ into the world be for you a continuing inspiration in your apostolic ministry. To all of you, and to the priests, religious and lay faithful of your dioceses, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of peace and joy.

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