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Sommario:

◆ VISITA "AD LIMINA APOSTOLORUM" DEGLI ECC.MI PRESULI DELLA CONFERENZA EPISCOPALE DELLE FILIPPINE (II GRUPPO)

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Alle ore 11.45 di oggi, nella Sala del Concistoro del Palazzo Apostolico, il Santo Padre Benedetto XVI incontra i Presuli 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 ai Vescovi presenti:

● DISCORSO DEL SANTO PADRE

My dear Brother Bishops,

I am pleased to receive you today on the occasion of your *ad Limina* visit, and I offer my sincere good wishes and prayers for yourselves and for all those entrusted to your pastoral care. Your presence at the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul strengthens the profound unity that already exists between the Church in the Philippines and the Holy See. As the deep links which Catholics enjoy with the Successor of Peter have always been a significant characteristic of faith in your country, I pray that this communion will continue to grow and flourish as you consider the present challenges of your apostolate.

While the Philippines continues to face many challenges in the area of economic development, we must recognize that these obstacles to a life of happiness and fulfilment are not the only stumbling blocks that must be

addressed by the Church. Filipino culture is also confronted with the more subtle questions inherent to the secularism, materialism, and consumerism of our times. When self-sufficiency and freedom are severed from their dependence upon and completion in God, the human person creates for himself a false destiny and loses sight of the eternal joy for which he has been made. The path to rediscovering humanity's true destiny can only be found in the re-establishment of the priority of God in the heart and mind of every person.

Above all, to keep God at the center of the life of the faithful, the preaching of you and your clergy must be personal in its focus so that each Catholic will grasp in his or her innermost depths the life-transforming fact that God exists, that he loves us, and that in Christ he answers the deepest questions of our lives. Your great task in evangelization is therefore to propose a personal relationship with Christ as key to complete fulfillment. In this context, the second Plenary Council of the Philippines continues to have beneficial effects, the result being that many dioceses have formed pastoral programs focused on conveying the good news of salvation. At the same time, it must be recognized that new initiatives in evangelization will only be fruitful if, by the grace of God, those proposing them are people who truly believe and live the message of the Gospel themselves.

This is surely one of the reasons why basic ecclesial communities have had such a positive impact throughout the country. When formed and guided by people whose motivating force is the love of Christ, these communities have proven themselves to be worthy tools of evangelization as they work in conjunction with local parishes. Similarly, the Church in the Philippines is fortunate to have a number of lay organizations which continue to draw people to the Lord. In order to confront the questions of our times, the laity need to hear the Gospel message in its fullness, to understand its implications for their personal lives and for society in general, and thus be constantly converted to the Lord. I therefore urge you to take special care in shepherding such groups, so that the primacy of God may remain in the forefront.

This primacy is of particular importance when it comes to the evangelization of youth. I am happy to note that, in your country, the faith plays a very important role in the lives of many young people, a fact that is due in large part to the patient work of the local Church to reach out to the youth at all levels. I encourage you to continue to remind young people that the glamour of this world will not satisfy their natural desire for happiness. Only true friendship with God will break the bonds of loneliness from which our fragile humanity suffers and will establish a true and lasting communion with others, a spiritual bond that will readily prompt within us the wish to serve the needs of those we love in Christ. Care must also be given to showing young people the importance of the sacraments as instruments of God's grace and assistance. This is particularly true of the sacrament of matrimony, which sanctifies married life from its very beginning, so that God's presence may sustain young couples in their struggles.

The pastoral care of young people which aims to establish the primacy of God in their hearts, tends inherently to result not only in vocations to Christian marriage but also in plentiful callings of all kinds. I am pleased to note the success of local initiatives in fostering numerous vocations to the priesthood and the religious life. However, the need for ever more dedicated servants of Christ both at home and abroad is still pressing. From your quinquennial reports, it appears that in many dioceses the number of priests and the corresponding number of parishes is not yet sufficient to meet the spiritual needs of the large and growing Catholic population. With you, I therefore pray that young Filipinos who feel called to the priesthood and the religious life will respond generously to the promptings of the Spirit. May the Church's mission of evangelization be sustained by the wonderful gifts which the Lord offers to those whom he calls! In your turn, as Pastors you will wish to offer these young vocations a well-developed and carefully applied plan of integral formation so that their initial inclination towards a life of service to Christ and his faithful may come to full spiritual and human maturity.

Dear brothers in the episcopate, with these thoughts I assure you of my prayers and commend you to the intercession of Saint Lorenzo Ruiz. May his example of steadfast faithfulness to Christ be an encouragement to you in your apostolic labors. To you, to the clergy and religious, and to all the faithful entrusted to your care, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of grace and peace.

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