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Sommario:

## ◆ VISITA "AD LIMINA APOSTOLORUM" DEGLI ECC.MI PRESULI DELLA CHIESA SIRO-MALANKARESE DELL'INDIA

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Alle ore 11.30 di questa mattina il Santo Padre Benedetto XVI incontra il gruppo di Vescovi della Chiesa Siro-Malankarese, 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 welcome all of you here today on the occasion of your pilgrimage *ad Limina Apostolorum*. I thank His Beatitude Baselios Cleemis for the devoted sentiments which he has addressed to me in your name. Through you, I extend greetings to all the priests, religious and lay faithful of your eparchies, and I wish to assure them of my prayers for their spiritual and material well-being. This time together is a privileged occasion to deepen the bonds of fraternity and communion between the See of Peter and the Syro-Malankara Church, happily promoted to Major Archiepiscopal Church by the Venerable John Paul II in 2005.

The apostolic traditions which you maintain enjoy their full spiritual fruitfulness when they are lived in union with the Church universal. In this sense, you rightly follow in the footsteps of the Servant of God Mar Ivanios, who led your predecessors and their faithful into full communion with the Catholic Church. Like your forefathers, you too are called, within the one household of God, to continue in firm fidelity to that which has been passed down to

you. All Catholic Bishops share a proper concern for faithfulness to Jesus Christ and are desirous of that unity which he willed for his disciples (cf. *Jn 17:11*), while preserving their legitimate diversity. So it is that "the Catholic Church wishes the traditions of each particular Church or rite to remain whole and entire, and she likewise wishes to adapt her own way of life to the various needs of time and place" (*Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, 2). Each generation must confront the challenges to the Church in accordance with its capacities and in harmony with the rest of the Mystical Body of Christ. I encourage you, therefore, to foster an affection among your priests and people for the liturgical and spiritual heritage that has come down to you, while steadfastly building upon your communion with the See of Peter.

The deposit of faith handed down from the Apostles and faithfully transmitted to our times is a precious gift from the Lord. It is that message of salvation which has been revealed in the person of Jesus whose Spirit unites believers of every time and place, giving us fellowship with the Father and with his Son so that our joy may be complete (cf. *1 Jn 1:1-4*). You and your priests are called to promote this fellowship through word and sacrament, and to strengthen it by a sound catechesis, so that the Word of Life, Jesus Christ, and the gift of divine life - communion with him - may be known throughout the world (cf. *Verbum Domini*, 2). Due to its ancient roots and distinguished history, Christianity in India has long made its proper contribution to culture and society, and to its religious and spiritual expressions. It is through a determination to live the Gospel, "the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith" (*Rom 1:16*), that those whom you serve will make a more effective contribution to the entire body of Christ and to Indian society, to the benefit of all. May your people continue to flourish by the preaching of God's word and by the promotion of a fellowship based on the love of God.

I note the particular challenges to many of your parishes in providing proper pastoral care and mutual support, especially when there is not always a parish priest at hand. And yet, smaller parishes, bearing in mind the social reality Christians face in the broader cultural context, present their own opportunities for truly fraternal upbuilding and assistance. Small Christian communities have often, as you know, given outstanding witness in the history of the Church. Just as in apostolic times, the Church in our age will surely thrive in the presence of the living Christ, who has promised to be with us always (cf. *Mt 28:20*) and to sustain us (cf. *1 Cor 1:8*). It is this divine presence which must remain at the centre of your people's life, faith and witness, and which you their Pastors are called to watch over so that, even if they must live far from their community, they will not live far from Christ. Indeed, it is important to remember that Christian communities are "the proper setting where a personal and communal journey based on the word of God can occur and truly serve as the basis for our spiritual life" (*Verbum Domini*, 72).

One of the ways in which you exercise your role as teachers of the faith to the Christian community is through the catechetical and faith formation programmes taking place under your direction. Since "instruction should be based on holy scripture, tradition, liturgy, and on the teaching authority and life of the Church" (*Christus Dominus*, 14), I am pleased to note the variety and number of programmes that you currently employ. Along with the celebration of the sacraments, such programmes will help ensure that those in your care will always be able to give an account of the hope which is theirs in Christ. Indeed, catechesis and spiritual development are among the most important challenges which pastors of souls face, and so I warmly encourage you to persevere along the path you have chosen as you seek to form your people in a deeper knowledge and love of the faith, aided by God's grace and by your humble trust in his providence.

With these thoughts, I renew my sentiments of fraternal affection and esteem for you. Invoking the intercession of Saint Thomas the Apostle, India's great patron, I assure you of my prayers and willingly impart to you and to those entrusted to your care my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of grace and peace in the Lord Jesus Christ.

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