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◆ VISITA "AD LIMINA APOSTOLORUM" DEGLI ECC.MI PRESULI DELLA CONFERENZA DEI VESCOVI CATTOLICI DEGLI STATI UNITI D'AMERICA (REGIONI I-II-III)

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Alle ore 11 di questa mattina, nella Sala del Concistoro del Palazzo Apostolico Vaticano, il Santo Padre Benedetto XVI incontra gli Ecc.mi Presuli della Conferenza dei Vescovi Cattolici degli Stati Uniti d'America (Regioni I-II-III), 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 greet you all with affection in the Lord and, through you, the Bishops from the United States who in the course of the coming year will make their visits *ad limina Apostolorum*.

Our meetings are the first since my 2008 Pastoral Visit to your country, which was intended to encourage the Catholics of America in the wake of the scandal and disorientation caused by the sexual abuse crisis of recent decades. I wished to acknowledge personally the suffering inflicted on the victims and the honest efforts made both to ensure the safety of our children and to deal appropriately and transparently with allegations as they arise. It is my hope that the Church's conscientious efforts to confront this reality will help the broader community to recognize the causes, true extent and devastating consequences of sexual abuse, and to respond effectively to this scourge which affects every level of society. By the same token, just as the Church is rightly held to

exacting standards in this regard, all other institutions, without exception, should be held to the same standards.

A second, equally important, purpose of my Pastoral Visit was to summon the Church in America to recognize, in the light of a dramatically changing social and religious landscape, the urgency and demands of a new evangelization. In continuity with this aim, I plan in the coming months to present for your consideration a number of reflections which I trust you will find helpful for the discernment you are called to make in your task of leading the Church into the future which Christ is opening up for us.

Many of you have shared with me your concern about the grave challenges to a consistent Christian witness presented by an increasingly secularized society. I consider it significant, however, that there is also an increased sense of concern on the part of many men and women, whatever their religious or political views, for the future of our democratic societies. They see a troubling breakdown in the intellectual, cultural and moral foundations of social life, and a growing sense of dislocation and insecurity, especially among the young, in the face of wide-ranging societal changes. Despite attempts to still the Church's voice in the public square, many people of good will continue to look to her for wisdom, insight and sound guidance in meeting this far-reaching crisis. The present moment can thus be seen, in positive terms, as a summons to exercise the prophetic dimension of your episcopal ministry by speaking out, humbly yet insistently, in defense of moral truth, and offering a word of hope, capable of opening hearts and minds to the truth that sets us free.

At the same time, the seriousness of the challenges which the Church in America, under your leadership, is called to confront in the near future cannot be underestimated. The obstacles to Christian faith and practice raised by a secularized culture also affect the lives of believers, leading at times to that "quiet attrition" from the Church which you raised with me during my Pastoral Visit. Immersed in this culture, believers are daily beset by the objections, the troubling questions and the cynicism of a society which seems to have lost its roots, by a world in which the love of God has grown cold in so many hearts. Evangelization thus appears not simply a task to be undertaken *ad extra*; we ourselves are the first to need re-evangelization. As with all spiritual crises, whether of individuals or communities, we know that the ultimate answer can only be born of a searching, critical and ongoing self-assessment and conversion in the light of Christ's truth. Only through such interior renewal will we be able to discern and meet the spiritual needs of our age with the ageless truth of the Gospel.

Here I cannot fail to express my appreciation of the real progress which the American Bishops have made, individually and as a Conference, in responding to these issues and in working together to articulate a common pastoral vision, the fruits of which can be seen, for example, in your recent documents on faithful citizenship and on the institution of marriage. The importance of these authoritative expressions of your shared concern for the authenticity of the Church's life and witness in your country should be evident to all.

In these days, the Church in the United States is implementing the revised translation of the Roman Missal. I am grateful for your efforts to ensure that this new translation will inspire an ongoing catechesis which emphasizes the true nature of the liturgy and, above all, the unique value of Christ's saving sacrifice for the redemption of the world. A weakened sense of the meaning and importance of Christian worship can only lead to a weakened sense of the specific and essential vocation of the laity to imbue the temporal order with the spirit of the Gospel. America has a proud tradition of respect for the sabbath; this legacy needs to be consolidated as a summons to the service of God's Kingdom and the renewal of the social fabric in accordance with its unchanging truth.

In the end, however, the renewal of the Church's witness to the Gospel in your country is essentially linked to the recovery of a shared vision and sense of mission by the entire Catholic community. I know that this is a concern close to your own heart, as reflected in your efforts to encourage communication, discussion and consistent witness at every level of the life of your local Churches. I think in particular of the importance of Catholic universities and the signs of a renewed sense of their ecclesial mission, as attested by the discussions marking the tenth anniversary of the Apostolic Constitution *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, and such initiatives as the symposium recently held at Catholic University of America on the intellectual tasks of the new evangelization. Young people have a right to hear clearly the Church's teaching and, most importantly, to be inspired by the coherence and beauty of the Christian message, so that they in turn can instill in their peers a deep love of Christ and his Church.

Dear Brother Bishops, I am conscious of the many pressing and at times apparently insoluble problems which you face daily in the exercise of your ministry. With the confidence born of faith, and with great affection, I offer you these words of encouragement and willingly commend you and the clergy, religious and lay faithful of your Dioceses to the intercession of Mary Immaculate, Patroness of the United States. To all of you I impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of wisdom, strength and peace in the Lord.

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