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VISITA "AD LIMINA APOSTOLORUM" DEI PRESULI DELLA CONFERENZA EPISCOPALE DELLE FILIPPINE

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Pubblichiamo di seguito il discorso che il Santo Padre Giovanni Paolo II ha rivolto agli Ecc.mi Presuli della Conferenza Episcopale delle Filippine, incontrati questa mattina e ricevuti nei giorni scorsi, in separate udienze, in occasione della Visita "ad Limina Apostolorum":

• DISCORSO DEL SANTO PADRE

My Dear Brothers in the Episcopacy,

1. It is with great joy that I welcome you, the third group of Filipino Bishops, as we come to the end of this series of *Ad Limina* visits. I am especially pleased to greet Archbishop Diosdado Talamayan, and I thank him for the good wishes he has expressed on behalf of the Ecclesiastical Provinces of Manila, Lingayen-Dagupan, Nueva Segovia, San Fernando, Tuguegarao and the Military Ordinariate. I give thanks to Almighty God that during the last few months I have had the pleasure of meeting almost every Bishop from your country, which is home to the largest Catholic presence in Asia and is one of the most vibrant Catholic communities in the world. Not only have these visits reinforced the bond between us, but they have also offered a unique opportunity for us to look more closely at the accomplishments achieved and the challenges still facing the Church in the Philippines. In this regard, I wish to commend all of you for your successful work on the National Pastoral Consultation. You are well aware that implementing a plan of such breadth is not an easy task, but you also realize that you are not alone in this undertaking. In fact, as "Shepherds of the Lord's flock", you know that you can count on a special divine grace as you carry out your ministry as Bishops (cf. *Pastores Gregis*, 1).

Having already discussed themes related to the Church of the poor and the community of disciples of the Lord, I wish to reflect on the commitment to engage in "renewed integral evangelization".

2. Christ left those he loved with the command to spread the Gospel to all people in all places (cf. Mk 16:15). The pledge of the Church in the Philippines to engage in renewed integral evangelization demonstrates her desire to ensure that Christian faith and values permeate every aspect of society. Your *Vision-Mission Statement* describes evangelization in this way: "We shall embark on a new integral evangelization and witness to Jesus

Christ's Gospel of salvation and liberation through our words, deeds and lives". This description of the "new evangelization" clearly recognizes that an essential element of this process is witness. Today's world is one that is constantly bombarded with words and information. For this reason and possibly more than at any time in recent history, the things Christians do speak louder than the things they say. Perhaps this is the reason that the life of Mother Teresa of Calcutta speaks to so many hearts. She put what she heard into action, spreading Christ's love to all those she encountered, always recognizing that "it is not how much we do, but how much love we put into what we do" that matters. Indeed, "people today put more trust in witnesses than in teachers, in experience than in teaching and in life and action than in theories". Therefore a loving witness of the Christian life will always remain "the first and irreplaceable form of mission" (*Redemptoris Missio*, 42).

3. Men and women of today desire role models of authentic witness to the Gospel. They have a longing to be more like Christ and this is apparent in the many ways Filipino Catholics express their faith. An example of the effort to bring Christ to others is found in the Church's development of social welfare programs for the poor and outcast, at both national and local levels. This dedication to the proclamation of the Good News is also evident in your effective use of the mass media to heighten moral sensitivity and stimulate greater concern for social issues. Notwithstanding these notable achievements, there still remain various obstacles, such as the participation of some Catholics in sects which witness only to the superstitious; the lack of familiarity with the teachings of the Church; the endorsement by some of anti-life attitudes which include the active promotion of birth control, abortion and the death penalty; and, as I discussed in my last address to the Filipino Bishops, the persistent dichotomy between faith and life (cf. *Proceedings and Addresses of the NPCCR*, January 2001, p. 146).

A solid way to address these concerns is found in your commitment to animating and developing the mission *ad gentes*. Jesus, the "chief evangelizer", appointed the Apostles to follow in his steps by becoming his personal "emissaries". As their successors it is your sacred duty to make certain that those who assist you in your pastoral ministry are ready to carry Christ's message to the world (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 858-859). You can ensure such readiness if you guarantee that Filipinos are given ample opportunity to hear the word of God, to pray and contemplate, to celebrate the mystery of Jesus in the Sacraments, especially in the Eucharist, and to see examples of "true communion of life and integrity of love" (*Ecclesia in Asia*, 23). Once again I affirm that "the more the Christian community is rooted in the experience of God which flows from a living faith, the more credibly it will be able to proclaim to others the fulfillment of God's Kingdom in Jesus Christ" (*ibid.*).

4. Events of recent years in the Philippines have illustrated the urgent need for integral evangelization in all sectors of society, especially in the spheres of government and public policy. As concerned Christians and citizens of the world, we can never ignore "the evil of corruption which is undermining the social and political development of so many peoples" (Message for the 1998 World Day of Peace, 5). In this regard, it must be made clear that no office of public service can ever be treated as private property or as a personal privilege. Considering public office as a benefice necessarily results in favoritism, which in turn leads to the abuse and misuse of public money, bribery, graft, influence peddling and corruption (cf. *Proceedings and Addresses of the NPCCR*, January 2001, p. 120).

The people of the Philippines are aware that to denounce corruption publicly requires great courage. To eliminate corruption calls for the committed support of all citizens, the resolute determination of the authorities and a firm moral conscience. The Church has a major role here inasmuch as she is the primary agent for properly forming people's conscience. Her function, as a rule, should not be that of direct intervention in matters that are strictly political, but rather that of converting individuals and evangelizing culture, so that society itself can take up the task of promoting social transformation and develop a keen sense of transparency in government and abhorrence of corruption (cf. *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 7 and the Message for the 1998 World Day of Peace, 5).

5. One way to ensure that a society engages actively and faithfully in integral evangelization is to give young people a proper formation early on in their faith and life journeys. My presence at the World Youth Day in Manila in 1995 allowed me to witness at first hand the enthusiasm that young people can have for Christ and his Church. This eagerness to know more about their faith is evidenced by the numbers of young people who are

involved in parish life. I compliment the Church in the Philippines for all it has done to offer suitable pastoral care to youth. Many of your dioceses provide summer camps, retreats, frequent youth Masses and youth formation offices. Most impressive is the manner in which your local communities listen to the concerns and suggestions of young people, allowing them to have an active voice in the Church (cf. *Ecclesia in Asia*, 47).

At the same time, obstacles still exist to evangelization among young people. In some families parents do not encourage their children to participate in Church-sponsored activities. Young people's potential is threatened by illiteracy, the desire for material goods, a casual attitude towards human sexuality and the temptation to abuse drugs and alcohol. You have mentioned your distress over the numbers of youth who have left the Catholic Church in favor of fundamentalist sects, many of which accentuate material riches over spiritual ones. In response to these concerns, I pray that you will continue to engage young people, especially those most at risk, by providing them access to affordable Catholic education and Church-sponsored youth activities, and by helping them to understand better that Christ alone has the words of everlasting life (cf. Jn 6:63).

6. Finally, I ask you, dear Brothers, to continue to encourage the clergy and religious who spend so much of their time and energy trying to develop creative and effective ways of spreading Christ's saving message. Assure them that their unique role as heralds of the Gospel is essential to the success of integral evangelization. In this regard, I wish to express my gratitude both to the missionaries and religious of the past who brought Jesus to the Filipino people and also to those who continue to make his presence known today. We thank God that, as the Second Vatican Council stated, "the Lord always calls from the number of his disciples those whom he wishes... so that he may send them to preach to the nations" (*Ad Gentes*, 23). It is my hope that all the faithful of the Church will continue to encourage young men and women to answer the call to this "special vocation" modeled on that of the Apostles (cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, 65).

7. My dear Brother Bishops, as you make your way back to your local Churches, I ask God to strengthen you in your commitment to a renewed integral evangelization, in your efforts to "present the One who inaugurates a new era of history and announce to the world the good news of a complete and universal salvation which contains in itself the pledge of a new world in which pain and injustice will give way to joy and beauty" (*Pastores Gregis*, 65). Commending you, the clergy, religious and lay faithful of the Philippines to the protection of Mary, Mother of the Church, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.

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