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◆ VISITA "AD LIMINA APOSTOLORUM" DEI PRESULI DELLA CONFERENZA EPISCOPALE DI COREA

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Questa mattina, alle ore 12.30, il Santo Padre Benedetto XVI incontra i Vescovi della Conferenza episcopale della Corea, ricevuti in questi giorni, in separate udienze, in occasione della Visita "*ad Limina Apostolorum*". Con i Presuli coreani, è presente anche S.E. Mons. Wenceslao Padilla, Vescovo tit. di Tharros, Prefetto Apostolico di Ulaanbaatar (Mongolia).

Pubblichiamo di seguito il discorso che il Papa pronuncia nel corso dell'incontro:

• DISCORSO DEL SANTO PADRE

Dear Brother Bishops,

"God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him" (1 Jn 4:16). With fraternal greetings I welcome you, the Bishops of Korea and the Apostolic Prefect of Ulaanbaatar, and I thank the Most Reverend John Chang Yik, President of the Episcopal Conference, for the kind sentiments expressed on your behalf. I warmly reciprocate them and assure you, and those entrusted to your pastoral care, of my prayers and solicitude. As servants of the Gospel, you have come to see Peter (cf. Gal 1:18) and to strengthen the bonds of collegiality which express the Church's unity in diversity and safeguard the tradition handed down by the Apostles (cf. *Pastores Gregis*, 57).

The Church in your countries has made remarkable progress since the arrival of missionaries in the region over

four hundred years ago, and their return to Mongolia just fifteen years ago. This growth is due in no small part to the outstanding witness of the Korean Martyrs and others throughout Asia who remained steadfastly faithful to Christ and his Church. The endurance of their testimony speaks eloquently of the fundamental concept of *communio* that unifies and vivifies ecclesial life in all its dimensions.

The Evangelist John's numerous exhortations to abide in the love and truth of Christ evoke the image of a sure and safe dwelling place. God first loves us and we, drawn towards his gift of living water, "constantly drink anew from the original source, which is Jesus Christ, from whose pierced heart flows the love of God" (*Deus Caritas Est*, 7). Yet Saint John also had to urge his communities to remain in that love, for already some had been enticed by the distractions which lead to interior weakness and eventual detachment from the *communio* of believers.

This admonition to remain in Christ's love also has a particular significance for you today. Your reports attest to the lure of materialism and the negative effects of a secularist mentality. When men and women are drawn away from the Lord's dwelling place they inevitably wander in a wilderness of individual isolation and social fragmentation, for "it is only in the Word made flesh that the mystery of man truly becomes clear" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 22).

Dear Brothers, from this perspective it is evident that to be effective shepherds of hope you must strive to ensure that the bond of communion which unites Christ to all the baptized is safeguarded and experienced as the heart of the mystery of the Church (cf. *Ecclesia in Asia*, 24). With their eyes fixed on the Lord, the faithful must echo anew the Martyrs' cry of faith: "we know and believe the love God has for us" (1 Jn 4:16). Such faith is sustained and nurtured by an ongoing encounter with Jesus Christ who comes to men and women through the Church: the sign and sacrament of communion with God and of unity among all people (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 1). The gateway to this mystery of communion with God is of course Baptism. This sacrament of initiation, far more than a social ritual or welcome into a particular community, is the initiative of God (cf. *Rite of Baptism*, 98). Those reborn through the waters of new life enter the door of the universal Church and are drawn into the dynamism of the life of faith. Indeed, the profound importance of this sacrament underscores your growing concern that not a few of the numerous adults received into the Church in your region every year fail to maintain a commitment to "the full participation in liturgical celebrations which is ... a right and obligation by reason of ... Baptism" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 14). I encourage you to ensure, especially through a joyous mystagogia, that the "flame of faith" is kept "alive in the hearts" (*Rite of Baptism*, 100) of the newly baptized.

The word *communio* also refers of course to the Eucharistic centre of the Church as Saint Paul eloquently teaches (cf. 1 Cor 10:16-17). The Eucharist roots our understanding of the Church in the intimate encounter between Jesus and humanity and reveals the source of ecclesial unity: Christ's act of giving himself to us makes us his body. The commemoration of Christ's death and resurrection in the Eucharist is the "supreme sacramental manifestation of *communio* in the Church" (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 38) whereby local Churches allow themselves to be drawn into the open arms of the Lord and strengthened in unity within the one Body (cf. *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 15).

Your programmes designed to highlight the importance of Sunday Mass should be infused with a sound and stimulating catechesis on the Eucharist. This will foster a renewed understanding of the authentic dynamism of Christian life among your faithful. I join you in urging the laity – and in a special way the young people in your region – to explore the depth and breadth of our Eucharistic communion. Gathered every Sunday in the Lord's House, we are consumed by Christ's love and truth and empowered to bring hope to the world.

Dear Brothers, consecrated men and women are rightly recognized as "witnesses and artisans of that plan of communion which stands at the centre of history according to God" (*Vita Consecrata*, 39). Please assure the men and women Religious in your territories of my appreciation of the prophetic contribution they are making to ecclesial life in your nations. I am confident that, faithful to their essential nature and respective charisms, they will bear bold witness to the specifically Christian "gift of self for love of the Lord Jesus and, in him, of every member of the human family" (*ibid.*, 3).

For your own part, I encourage you to ensure that Religious are welcomed and supported in their efforts to contribute to the common task of spreading God's Kingdom. One of the most beautiful aspects of the Church's history is surely her schools of spirituality. By articulating and sharing these living treasures with the laity, Religious will do much to enhance the vibrancy of ecclesial life within your jurisdictions. They will help to dispel the notion that communion means mere uniformity as they witness to the vitality of the Holy Spirit enlivening the Church in every generation.

I wish to conclude by briefly reiterating the importance of the promotion of marriage and family life in your region. Your efforts in this field stand at the heart of the evangelization of culture and contribute much to the well-being of society as a whole. This vital apostolate, in which many priests and Religious are already engaged, rightly belongs also to the laity. The growing complexity of matters regarding the family – including the advances in biomedical science about which I spoke recently to Korea's Ambassador to the Holy See – raises the question of providing appropriate training for those committed to working in this area. In this regard, I wish to draw your attention to the valuable contribution made by the Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family Life now present in many parts of the world.

Lastly, dear Brothers, I ask you to convey to your people my particular gratitude for their generosity to the universal Church. Both the growing number of missionaries and the contributions offered by the laity are an eloquent sign of their selfless spirit. I am also aware of the practical gestures of reconciliation undertaken for the well-being of those in North Korea. I encourage these initiatives and invoke Almighty God's providential care upon all North Koreans. Throughout the ages, Asia has given the Church and the world a host of heroes of the faith who are commemorated in the great song of praise: *Te martyrum candidatus laudat exercitus*. May they stand as perennial witnesses to the truth and love which all Christians are called to proclaim. With fraternal affection I commend you to the intercession of Mary, model of all disciples, and I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing to you and the priests, Religious, and lay faithful of your Dioceses and Prefecture.

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