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Alle ore 11.30 di questa mattina, nella Sala del Concistoro del Palazzo Apostolico Vaticano, il Santo Padre Benedetto XVI incontra i Presuli della Conferenza Episcopale dell'India (III gruppo), 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 offer you a warm welcome on the occasion of your visit *ad Limina Apostolorum*, a particular moment of grace and a sign of the communion that exists between the Church in India and the See of Peter. I wish to thank Archbishop Maria Callist Soosa Pakiam for the devoted sentiments and the promise of prayers which he has voiced on your behalf and in the name of all those whom you serve. Please take with you my affectionate greeting to the priests, the men and women religious, and the laity entrusted to your pastoral care.

The Second Vatican Council reminds us that, among the more important responsibilities of Bishops, the proclamation of the Gospel is pre-eminent (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 25). For the Church, the Body of Christ, proclaims the word of God which is at work in the hearts of those who believe (cf. *1 Thess* 2:13) and she grows by constantly hearing, celebrating and studying that word (cf. *Verbum Domini*, 3). It is a source of satisfaction

that the proclamation of God's word is bearing rich spiritual fruit in your local Churches, especially through the spread of small Christian communities in which the faithful come together for prayer, reflection on the Scriptures and fraternal support. I encourage you, through your priests and with the help of qualified lay leaders, to ensure that the fullness of God's word, which comes to us in the sacred Scriptures and the Church's apostolic tradition, is made readily available to those who seek to deepen their knowledge and love of the Lord and their obedience to his will. Every effort should be made to stress that individual and group prayer is, by its very nature, born of, and leads back to, the wellspring of grace found in the Church's sacraments and her entire liturgical life. Nor can it be forgotten that the word of God not only consoles but also challenges believers, as individuals and in community, to advance in justice, reconciliation and peace among themselves and in society as a whole. Through your personal encouragement and oversight, may the seeds of God's word presently being sown in your local Churches bear abundant fruit for the salvation of souls and the growth of God's kingdom.

In fidelity to the new commandment to love one another as the Lord has loved us (cf. *Jn* 13:34), Christians of all times and places have striven to serve their fellow human beings selflessly and to love them with all their heart. After all, love is God's gift to humanity, it is his promise and it is our hope (cf. *Caritas in Veritate*, 2). This selfless love finds practical expression in service to others and to the wider community. In this light, I am pleased to note the impressive signs of the Church's charity in many fields of social activity, a service borne in a particular way by her priests and religious. Through their witness to Christian charity, the Church's schools prepare young people of all faiths and none to build a more just and peaceful society. Church agencies have been instrumental in the promotion of microcredit, helping the poor to help themselves. In addition, they promote the Church's healing and charitable mission through clinics, orphanages, hospitals and innumerable other projects aimed at promoting human dignity and well-being, assisting the poorest and the weakest, the lonely and the elderly, the abandoned and the suffering, helping all of them because of the dignity which is their due as human beings, and for no other motive than the love of Christ which impels us (cf. *2 Cor* 5:14). I encourage you to persevere in this positive and practical witness, in fidelity to the Lord's command and for the sake of the least of our brothers and sisters. May Christ's faithful in India continue to assist all those in need in the communities around them, regardless of race, ethnicity, religion or social status, out of the conviction that all have been created in God's image and all are due equal respect.

As that gift of God's "unconditional love" which gives ultimate meaning to our lives (cf. *Spe Salvi*, 26), charity is first experienced by most of us in the family home. The recent Synod on the Word of God recalled that the Church, by her proclamation of the Gospel, reveals to Christian families their true identity in accordance with God's plan (cf. *Verbum Domini*, 85). Families in your dioceses, which are "domestic churches", are to be examples of that mutual love, respect and support which ought to animate human relations at every level. Insofar as they are attentive to prayer, meditate on the Scriptures, and participate fully in the sacramental life of the Church, they will help nourish that "unconditional love" among themselves and in the life of their parishes, and will be a source of great good for the wider community. Many of you have spoken to me about the grave challenges which threaten to undermine the unity, harmony and sanctity of the family, and about the work which must be done to build a culture of respect for marriage and family life. A sound catechesis which appeals especially to those preparing for marriage will do much to nourish the faith of Christian families and will assist them in giving a vibrant, living witness to the Church's age-old wisdom regarding marriage, the family, and the responsible use of God's gift of sexuality.

With these thoughts, dear Brother Bishops, I commend all of you to the intercession of Mary, Mother of the Church, and the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul. Assuring you of my continued prayers for you and for those entrusted to your pastoral care, I impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of grace and peace in the Risen Lord.

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