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Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Francis in Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste, and Singapore (2 to 13 September 2024) – Meeting with bishops, priests, deacons, consecrated men and women, seminarians and catechists in the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Dili, and Private Meeting with members of the Society of Jesus

At 09.30 (02.30 in Rome), the Holy Father Francis met with bishops, priests, deacons, consecrated men and women, seminarians and catechists in the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Dili.

Upon arrival the Pope was received in the courtyard adjacent to the Cathedral by His Eminence Cardinal Virgílio do Carmo da Silva, S.D.B., archbishop of Dili, Bishop Norberto do Amaral of Maliana, president of the Episcopal Conference, and the parish priest. After a welcome dance, two children offered him flowers. Then the parish priest, at the main entrance of the Cathedral, gave him the cross and the holy water for aspersion. The Pope entered the Cathedral and proceeded along the central nave up to the altar while the choir sang a hymn. Before approaching the altar, he greeted a group of disabled people.

After the welcome greeting from the president of the Episcopal Conference, a religious sister, a priest and a catechist gave their testimonies. The Holy Father delivered his address and, after the blessing and the final hymn, blessed some of the first stones from the three dioceses of Timor-Leste. Before entering the car, Pope Francis paused briefly at the side exit of the Cathedral to greet a group of sick people, and finally returned by car to the Apostolic Nunciature, where he met privately with some members of the Society of Jesus present in the country.

The following is the address delivered by the Holy Father Francis during the meeting with bishops, priests, deacons, consecrated men and women, seminarians and catechists in the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brother Bishops,

*Dear priests, deacons, consecrated persons and seminarians,
Dear catechists, brothers and sisters, good morning!*

Many of the youngest – seminarians, young religious – remained outside. And now, when I saw the bishop, I told him that he has to enlarge the cathedral because it is a grace to have so many vocations! Let us thank the Lord and let us also thank the missionaries who came before us. When we saw this man [Florentino de Jesús Martins, 89 years old, to whom the Pope said that he “had competed with the apostle Paul”], who was a catechist his whole life, we can understand the grace of the mission entrusted to him. Let us thank the Lord for this blessing to this Church.

I am happy to be with you during this journey in which I am a pilgrim in the lands of the East. I thank Bishop Norberto de Amaral for his words, and for reminding me that Timor-Leste is a country “at the edge of the world”. I also come from the ends of the world, but you more than me. And I like to say it – precisely because it is at the edge of the world, it is at the centre of the Gospel! This is a paradox that we have to learn: in the Gospel, the peripheries are the centre and a Church that has no capacity for peripheries and that hides in the centre is a very ill Church. Instead, when a Church thinks beyond, sends out missionaries, it goes into those peripheries that are the centre, the Church’s centre. Thank you for being at the peripheries, for we know well that in the heart of Christ the “existential peripheries” are the centre. Indeed, the Gospel is full of people, figures and stories that are on the margins, on the borders, but are called by Jesus to become protagonists of the hope that he came to bring us.

I rejoice with you and for you, for you are the Lord’s disciples in this land. Thinking of your efforts and the challenges you are called to face, I was reminded of a very evocative passage from John’s Gospel, which tells us of a tender and intimate event that happened in the home of Jesus’ friends, Lazarus, Martha and Mary (cf. *Jn* 12:1-11). At a certain point during dinner, Mary “took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus’ feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume” (v. 3).

Mary anoints the feet of Jesus with nard, and the whole house is filled with that fragrance. I would like to reflect with you on this fragrance, the fragrance of Christ, the fragrance of his Gospel. This is a gift that you have, a gift that was given to you freely, but which you have to preserve and which all of us together are called upon to spread. *Preserving the fragrance*, this gift of the Gospel that the Lord has given to the land of Timor-Leste, and *spreading the fragrance*.

First, *preserving the fragrance*. We always need to return to the origin, to the origin of the gift we have received, of our being Christians, priests, religious or catechists. We have received the very life of God through his Son Jesus, who died for us and gave us the Holy Spirit. We have been anointed with the oil of gladness, and the apostle Paul writes, “we are the aroma of Christ to God” (*2 Cor* 2:15).

Dear sisters and brothers, you are the fragrance of Christ! This metaphor is not foreign to you, for here in Timor sandalwood grows in abundance, with its fragrance that is highly valued and also sought after by other peoples and nations. The Bible itself praises its value when it recounts that the Queen of Sheba visited King Solomon and offered him a gift of sandalwood (cf. *1 Kings* 10:12). I do not know if the Queen of Sheba, before reaching Solomon, stopped in Timor-Leste and, perhaps, brought the sandalwood from here.

Brothers and sisters, you are the fragrance of Christ, a fragrance much more expensive than French perfumes! You are the fragrance of Christ, you are the fragrance of the Gospel in this country. Like a sandalwood tree, evergreen and ever strong, which grows and produces fruit, you are missionary disciples who bear the fragrance of the Holy Spirit in order to “intoxicate” the lives of the holy faithful people of God.

Yet, let us not forget that the fragrance received from the Lord *should be carefully preserved*, preserved very carefully, as Mary of Bethany had kept the nard aside precisely for Jesus. In the same way, we must preserve the love – do not forget this phrase, we must preserve the love with which the Lord has anointed us, so that it does not fade and lose its fragrance. What does this mean? It means being aware of the gift received –

everything we have is a gift, remember that – it means reminding ourselves that the fragrance is not for beautifying ourselves but for anointing the feet of Christ, proclaiming the Gospel and serving the poor. It means being vigilant about ourselves because a lukewarm spiritual mediocrity is always lurking. Something Cardinal De Lubac said about mediocrity and worldliness comes to mind: “The worst thing that can happen to women and men of the Church is to fall into worldliness, spiritual worldliness”. Be attentive; preserve that fragrance which gives us so much life.

Here, I would add one further thought. We rightly look back with gratitude on our preceding history, to the seed of faith sown here by missionaries. These three spoke to us about this: the nun who spent her entire consecrated life here; the priest who knew how to accompany his people in difficult times of foreign domination; and the deacon who never stopped proclaiming the Gospel and baptizing. Let us think of these three examples who are representatives of the history of our Church, and let us love our history, for it is the seed scattered here; as are the schools established for the training of pastoral workers and so many other things. But is this enough? In reality, we must always fan the flame of faith. That is why I wish to say to you: do not forget to deepen your knowledge of the Gospel’s doctrine; do not forget to mature in spiritual, catechetical and theological formation. All this serves to proclaim the Gospel in your culture and, at the same time, to purify it in the face of archaic and sometimes superstitious practices. The preaching of the faith must be inculturated in your culture and your culture must be evangelized. And this is the case for all peoples, not only for you. If a Church is incapable of enculturating the faith, then it is incapable of expressing the faith in the values proper to a land, it will be a Church that is moralistic and fruitless. There are many beautiful things in your culture. I think especially of the belief in the resurrection and in the presence of the souls of the dead. All of this, however, must always be purified in the light of the Gospel and the doctrine of the Church. Please, take up this responsibility since “each culture and group needs purification and growth”.

Now we come to the second point: *spreading the fragrance*. The Church exists to *evangelize*, and we are called to bring to others the sweet fragrance of life, of the new life of the Gospel. Mary of Bethany does not use the precious nard to beautify herself, but to anoint Jesus’ feet, and in this way she spreads the fragrance throughout the house. Indeed, Mark’s Gospel specifies that Mary, in order to anoint Jesus, breaks the alabaster jar containing the fragrant ointment (cf. 14:3). Evangelization occurs when we have the courage to “break” the jar containing the fragrance, breaking the “shell” that often closes us in on ourselves, of leaving behind a lazy and comfortable religiosity that only serves our personal needs. I very much liked the expression that Rosa used, when she said: a Church on the move, a Church that does not stand still, does not revolve around itself – no, it does not revolve around itself – but burns with passion to bring the joy of the Gospel to all.

Your country, rooted in a long Christian history, also needs a renewed *impetus toward evangelization*, so that the Gospel’s fragrance may reach everyone, a fragrance of reconciliation and peace after suffering years of war; a fragrance of compassion, which will help the poor get back on their feet and inspire a renewed commitment to revive the economic and social wellbeing of the country; a fragrance of justice against corruption. Be vigilant, please! Corruption can so often enter our communities, our parishes. In particular, the fragrance of the Gospel must be spread in order to counter anything that humiliates, disfigures or even destroys human life; to counter those plagues that cause inner emptiness and suffering such as alcoholism, violence, and disrespect for women. The Gospel of Jesus has the power to transform these dark realities and generate a new society. The message that you consecrated women give in the face of the phenomenon of the lack of respect for women is that women are the most important part of the Church because they take care of the most needy: they heal them, they accompany them. I have just come from a visit to a beautiful welcoming house for the poorest, the most needy [Irmãs Alma school for children with disabilities]. Dear Sisters, be mothers of the people of God, be encouraged to “give birth” to communities, be mothers. That is what I ask of you.

Dear sisters, dear brothers, since this “spark” of the Gospel is needed, there is also need today for clergy, consecrated persons and catechists who are passionate, prepared and creative. Creativity is necessary for mission. In this regard, I am grateful for the uplifting testimony of Mr Florentino, a catechist who has dedicated a good part of his life to this beautiful ministry. To priests especially, I would like to say: I learned that the people address you with great affection by calling you *Amu*, which is the most important title here, meaning “lord”. However, this should not make you feel superior to the people. You come from the people, you are born from mothers of the people, you have grown up among the people, so do not forget the culture of the people that you

have received. You are not superior. Neither must you fall into the temptation of being prideful or feeling powerful. Do you know how the temptation to power begins? You understand, right? My grandmother used to tell me, "The devil always enters through our pockets". In this way the devil enters, always through our pockets. Please, do not think of your ministry as bringing social prestige. No, ministry is a service. And if any of you do not feel like you are a servant of the people, go and ask a wise priest to help you to have this important dimension. Let us remember that with fragrance we anoint the feet of Christ, which are the feet of our brothers and sisters in the faith, starting with the poorest. The most privileged are the poorest, and with this fragrance we have to care for them. The gesture that the faithful make here when they meet priests is meaningful: they take your consecrated hand and bring it close to their foreheads as a sign of blessing. It is beautiful to see in this gesture the affection of God's holy people, for the priest is an instrument of blessing. A priest should never, never take advantage of this role. You should always bless and console; always be a minister of compassion and a sign of God's mercy. And perhaps the sign of all of this is a poor priest. Love poverty as your spouse.

Dear friends, a Portuguese diplomat of the 1500s, Tomé Pires, wrote the following, "Malaysian merchants say that God created Timor for sandalwood" (*The Suma Oriental*, London 1944, 204). We, however, know that there is also another fragrance, in addition to sandalwood, there is another, which is the fragrance of Christ and the Gospel, a fragrance that enriches life and fills us with joy.

You, priests, deacons, religious sisters, do not be discouraged! As Father Sancho reminded us in his moving testimony, "God knows well how to take care of those he has called and sent on his mission". In times of great difficulty think of this: He accompanies us. Let us allow ourselves to be accompanied by the Lord in a spirit of poverty and in a spirit of service. I bless you from my heart. And I ask you, please, do not forget to pray for me; but please pray for me, and not against! Thank you.

And I would also like to end with a thank you, a big thank you for your elderly – elderly priests who have spent their lives here, elderly nuns who are here, who are extraordinary, who have spent their lives here. They are our model. Thank you!
