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VISITA "AD LIMINA APOSTOLORUM" DEI PRESULI DELLA CONFERENZA EPISCOPALE DELLA SCOZIA

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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 della Scozia, incontrati questa mattina e ricevuti ieri, in separate udienze, in occasione della Visita "ad Limina Apostolorum":

• **DISCORSO DEL SANTO PADRE**

Dear Brother Bishops,

1. "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (*Rom 1:7*). With fraternal affection I warmly welcome you, the Bishops of Scotland, on the occasion of your first visit *ad Limina Apostolorum* in this new millennium. Our meetings give us the opportunity to affirm once again our collegial communion and to deepen the bonds of love and peace which support and encourage us in our service of the Church of Christ. I join you in thanking God for the faith and dedication of the priests, deacons, Religious and laity whom you have been called to shepherd in love and truth. In your local communities we see the marvellous power of the Holy Spirit, "who down the centuries has drawn from the treasures of the Redemption achieved by Christ and given new life to human beings, sanctifying them so that they can repeat with Saint Paul: 'We have received.... the Spirit which is from God' (*1 Cor 2:12*)" (*Dominum et Vivificantem*, 53). It is this same Spirit who guides us into all truth (cf. *Jn 16:13*) and who impels us in this new millennium to start out anew, sustained by the hope which "does not disappoint" (*Rom 5:5*).

2. The reports you have brought from your various Dioceses attest to the new and demanding situations which represent pastoral challenges for the Church today. In fact, we may observe that in Scotland, as in many lands evangelized centuries ago and steeped in Christianity, there no longer exists the reality of a "Christian society", that is, a society which, despite human weaknesses and failings, takes the Gospel as the explicit measure of its life and values. Rather, modern civilization, although highly developed from the standpoint of technology, is often stunted in its inner depths by a tendency to exclude God or keep him at a distance. This is what I referred to in my Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* as "the crisis of civilization", a crisis which must be countered by "the civilization of love, founded on the universal values of peace, solidarity, justice and liberty, which find their

full attainment in Christ" (No. 52). The new evangelization to which I have summoned the whole Church (cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 40) can prove a particularly effective instrument for helping to usher in this civilization of love.

Of course, the new evangelization, as all authentic Christian evangelization, must be marked by hope. For it is Christian hope that sustains the proclamation of the liberating truth of Christ, enlivens faith communities and enriches society with the values of the Gospel of life, which always upholds the dignity of the human person and enhances the common good. In this way, Christian life itself is revitalized and pastoral initiatives are more readily directed towards their one true end: holiness. In fact, holiness is an intrinsic and essential aspect of the Church: it is by holiness that both individuals and communities are configured to Christ. Through baptism, the believer enters into the holiness of God himself, being incorporated into Christ and made a dwelling place of his Spirit. Thus, holiness is a gift, but a gift which in turn becomes a task, a duty "which must shape the whole of Christian life" (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 30). It is a mark of authentic Christian discipleship, attainable by all who truly desire to follow Jesus with all their heart and all their mind and all their soul (cf. *Mt 22:37*).

3. The concept of holiness should not be thought of as something extraordinary, as something outside the bounds of normal everyday life. For God calls his people to lead holy lives within the ordinary circumstances in which they find themselves: at home, in the parish, in the workplace, at school, on the playing field. There is much in society that lures people away — sometimes intentionally — from the difficult yet profoundly satisfying quest for holiness. As shepherds of souls, you should never let yourselves become discouraged in your efforts to direct the whole of Christian life and the entire Christian community ever further along the path of holiness. Formation for all your flock in practical and joyous holiness, within the context of sound, theologically informed spirituality, must therefore be a primary pastoral concern (cf. Congregation for the Clergy, Instruction *The Priest, Pastor and Leader of the Parish Community*, 28). It calls for the committed participation of all sectors of diocesan life. The work done by priests, deacons, Religious and laity in parishes and schools, and in the fields of health care and social service, makes an invaluable contribution to attaining the holiness of life to which all the faithful are called. It could prove particularly beneficial to enlist the active involvement of monastic communities and other communities of Consecrated Life, within the proper scope of their particular charism and apostolate, especially in projects aimed at the formation of young people in the school of holiness.

4. An important aspect of the new evangelization is the deeply felt need for an evangelization of culture. Human cultures themselves are not static but are constantly changing through the contacts that people have with one another and through the new experiences which they share. The communication of values is what enables a culture to survive and flourish. Cultural context itself permeates the living out of the Christian faith, which in turn contributes to the shaping of that context. Christians are called, therefore, to bring the unchanging truth of God to every culture. And since "the community of the baptized is marked by a universality which can embrace everything", the faithful are to be helped to foster whatever is implicit in different cultures "to the point where it will be fully explicit in the light of the truth" (*Fides et Ratio*, 71).

In societies where faith and religion are seen as something that should be restricted to the private sphere, and therefore as having no place in public or political debate, it is of even greater importance that the Christian message should be clearly understood for what it is: the Good News of truth and love which sets men and women free. When the foundations of a specific culture rest on Christianity, the voice of Christianity cannot be silenced without seriously impoverishing that culture. Moreover, if culture is the context in which the individual transcends himself, then removing the Absolute from that context, or pushing it off to one side as irrelevant, results in a dangerous fragmentation of reality and gives rise to crises, as culture will no longer be able to present to the younger generation the source of meaning and wisdom which it ultimately seeks. For this reason, Christians should be united in *diakonia* to society: in a true spirit of ecumenical cooperation, with your active participation, Christ's disciples must never cease to make present in all areas of life — public and private — the light which the Lord's teaching sheds upon the dignity of the human person.

This is the light of truth that dispels the darkness of selfish interests and social corruption, the light that illuminates the path of just economic development for all. And Christians are not alone in the task of making this light shine ever brighter in society. Together with men and women of other religious beliefs and with people of good will with whom they share common values and principles, your Catholic communities are called to work for

the advancement of society and for the peaceful coexistence of peoples and cultures. Thus inter-religious commitment and partnership is also an important vehicle for serving the human family. Indeed, when the light of truth is not allowed to shine forth in public debate, error and illusion are easily multiplied and often come to dominate in policy decisions. This situation becomes all the more critical when those who have lost or abandoned belief in God attack religion: a new strain of sectarianism can emerge which is as bitter as it is tragic, adding a further element of divisiveness within society.

5. In the task of the new evangelization, there is perhaps no group to which you will want to be more attentive and show more concern than your young people. They are the new generation of builders who will respond to humanity's aspiration for a civilization of love marked by true freedom and authentic peace. At the World Youth Day last year in Toronto, I confidently entrusted this very duty to them and I encourage you to do the same, giving them every available assistance in meeting this challenge. From your reports, I am pleased to see that the youth of Scotland are showing enthusiasm for their faith and a steadily increasing desire to meet and work with you, their Bishops. The Church, as both *mater et magistra*, must guide them towards an ever fuller knowledge and experience in faith of Jesus of Nazareth: for it is Christ alone who is the cornerstone and sure foundation of their lives; it is he alone who enables them to embrace fully the "mystery" of their lives (cf. *Fides et Ratio*, 15).

The powerful forces of the media and the entertainment industry are aimed largely at young people, who find themselves the target of competing ideologies which seek to condition and influence their attitudes and actions. Confusion is created as youth are beset by moral relativism and religious indifferentism. How can they come to grips with the question of truth and the requirements of consistency in moral behaviour when modern culture teaches them to live as though absolute values did not exist, or tells them to be content with a vague religiosity? The widespread loss of the transcendent sense of human existence leads to failure in moral and social life. Your task, dear Brothers, is to show the tremendous relevance for contemporary men and women — and for the younger generation — of Jesus Christ and his Gospel: for it is here that the deepest human aspirations and needs find fulfilment. The saving message of Jesus Christ needs to be heard anew in all its freshness and power, so that it can be fully experienced and savoured!

6. In speaking of the new evangelization, we are not presenting a "new programme" but taking up once more the call of the Gospel as embodied in the living Tradition of the Church. Nevertheless the revitalization of Christian life does require pastoral initiatives adapted to the actual circumstances of each community, built upon dialogue and shaped by the participation of the various sectors of God's holy people. Joint efforts on the part of Bishops, priests, deacons, Religious and laity are essential for addressing issues of grave concern not only for the Church but for the whole of Scottish society. Marriage and family life represent two areas where such cooperation is not only advisable but necessary: in this regard I am pleased to note the forthcoming gathering of the Bishops of Scotland with agencies involved in these very fields. Another matter which the combined energies of all the faithful will prove particularly valuable in addressing is the welcome which your communities can give to refugees and asylum-seekers, especially through programmes aimed at assistance, education and social integration. Similarly, the process of consultation and planning upon which you embarked in respect to the question of Scottish seminaries shows the importance of a collaborative approach in dealing with urgent matters relating to the Church at the national, diocesan or local level.

7. Priestly formation of course remains one of your highest priorities. It is essential that candidates to the priesthood should be firmly grounded in a relationship of deep communion and friendship with Jesus the Good Shepherd (cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 42). Without this personal relationship, through which we "talk heart to heart with the Lord" (Instruction *The Priest, Pastor and Leader of the Parish Community*, 27), the quest for holiness, which marks the priesthood as a life of intimacy with God, would be absent and not only the individual priest but the entire community would be impoverished. Today more than ever the Church needs holy priests whose daily journey of conversion inspires in others the desire to seek the holiness which the whole People of God is called to pursue (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 39). Men in formation for priesthood, as they prepare to be instruments and disciples of Christ the eternal priest, must therefore receive every assistance in striving for a life truly marked by poverty, chastity and humility, in imitation of Christ, the Eternal High Priest, of whom they are to become living icons (cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 33).

In this same context, we may note that the permanent formation of the clergy is rightly viewed as an integral part

of priestly life. In my Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, I have already commented on and further articulated the Second Vatican Council's call for post-seminary training (cf. *Optatam Totius*, 22). Without repeating everything said in that document, I would like to stress that "the ongoing formation of priests, whether diocesan or religious, is the natural and absolutely necessary continuation of the process of building priestly personality" (No. 71). I urge you always to look upon your priests as "sons and friends" (*Christus Dominus*, 16) and to take their welfare to heart in the human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral aspects of their priestly life: be close to them, listen to them and encourage fraternity and fellowship among them.

8. Dear Brothers, these are some of the thoughts which your visit to the tombs of the Apostles brings to mind. With thanksgiving and affection I share these reflections with you and encourage each of you in your role as "a true father" to your people, in the image of the Good Shepherd "who knows his sheep and whose sheep know him" (cf. *Jn* 10:14). I assure you of my prayers as you "preach the word in season and out of season, convincing, rebuking and exhorting, with unfailing patience and teaching" (cf. *2 Tim* 4:2). Yours is the sublime duty of proclaiming the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ: fulfil this duty in the confident knowledge that the Holy Spirit continues always to guide and enlighten you. The message of hope and life which you announce will not fail to evoke fresh fervour and a renewed commitment to Christian living in Scotland. In this Year of the Rosary, I commend you to Mary, "Star of the New Evangelization", that she may sustain you in pastoral wisdom, strengthen you in fortitude and enkindle in your hearts love and compassion. To you and the priests, deacons, Religious, and lay faithful of your Dioceses, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.

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