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VISITA "AD LIMINA APOSTOLORUM" DEI PRESULI DELLA CONFERENZA EPISCOPALE DEGLI STATI UNITI D'AMERICA (REGIONE XIII)

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Pubblichiamo di seguito il discorso che il Santo Padre Giovanni Paolo II ha rivolto al gruppo degli Ecc.mi Presuli della Conferenza Episcopale degli Stati Uniti d'America (Regione XIII), incontrati questa mattina e ricevuti nei giorni scorsi, in separate udienze, in occasione della Visita "ad Limina Apostolorum":

• DISCORSO DEL SANTO PADRE

Dear Brother Bishops,

1. "We also thank God that when you received the word of God you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God at work in you" (1 Th 2:13). With this passage from Saint Paul I warmly welcome you, the Bishops of the Church in Colorado, Wyoming, Utah, Arizona, New Mexico and western Texas on the occasion of your visit *ad limina Apostolorum*. Developing my reflection on the *munus propheticum* of the Bishop, I wish to reflect today on the pressing task you face of the evangelization of culture.

2. The Church, sure of her competence as the bearer of the Revelation of Jesus Christ (cf. *Fides et Ratio*, 6), has since Pentecost made her pilgrim way proclaiming: Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is "the way, and the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6). Her confidence is based on the knowledge that this message has its origin in God himself. In his goodness and wisdom God has entered our human history so that through his Son – the sum total of Revelation – we might be drawn into his own divine life (cf. *Dei Verbum*, 2). Thus the fundamental dynamic of the Church's prophetic mission is to mediate the content of faith to different cultures enabling people to be transformed by the power of the Gospel which permeates their way of thinking, standards of judgement, and norms of behaviour (cf. *Sapientia Christiana*, Foreword I)

The observation of my predecessor, Pope Paul VI, that "the split between the Gospel and culture is undoubtedly the drama of our time" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 20), is manifest today as a "crisis of meaning" (cf. *Fides et Ratio*, 81). Ambiguous moral positions, the distortion of reason by particular interest groups, and the absolutization of the subjective, are just some examples of a perspective of life which fails to seek truth itself and abandons the

search for the ultimate goal and meaning of human existence (cf. *ibid.*, 47). Against the darkness of this confusion the light of the truth which you openly proclaim (cf. 2 Cor 4:2) will shine forth as a *diakonia* of hope, guiding men and women to understand the mystery of their own life in a coherent manner (cf. *ibid.*, 15).

3. As ministers of truth, with a courage imparted by the Holy Spirit, (cf. *Pastores Gregis*, 26), your preached and lived testimony to God's extraordinary "yes" to humanity (cf. 2 Cor 1:20) appears as a sign of strength and trust in the Lord and begets new life in the Spirit. Some today view Christianity as weighed down by structures and failing to respond to people's spiritual needs. Yet, far from being something merely institutional, the living center of your preaching of the Gospel is the encounter with our Lord himself. In fact, it is only by knowing, loving and imitating Christ that, with him, we can transform history by bringing Gospel values to bear in society and culture.

It is clear then that all your activities must be directed towards the proclamation of Christ. Indeed, your duty of personal integrity renders contradictory any separation between mission and life. Sent in Christ's name as pastors for the care of particular portions of the People of God, you must grow with them as one mind and body in the Holy Spirit (cf. *Pastores Gregis*, 43). I urge you therefore to be close to your priests and people: imitate the Good Shepherd who knows his sheep and calls each by name. Inspired by the great Pastors who have gone before us, like Saint Charles Borromeo, your visiting and careful listening to your brother priests and the faithful, and your direct contact with the marginalized, will be *quasi anima episcopalis regiminis*. In this way you prolong your teaching through the concrete example of humble faith and service, encouraging in others the desire to live a life of authentic discipleship.

4. Central to the new impetus in Christian living, to which I have called the whole Church (cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 29), is the unequivocal prophetic witness on the part of consecrated men and women to the fullness of Christ's truth. Stemming from the radical nature of their following of Christ, this prophetic witness of Religious is marked by their profound conviction of the primacy with which God and the truths of the Gospel shape Christian life and by their dedication to assisting the Christian community in uplifting all sectors of civic society with those truths.

In the wake of increasing secularism and fragmentation of knowledge (cf. *Fides et Ratio*, 81), "new forms of poverty" have arisen, particularly in cultures which enjoy material well-being, that reflect a "despair at the lack of meaning in life" (Instruction *Starting Afresh From Christ: A Renewed Commitment to Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium*, 35). Distrust of the human being's great capacity for knowledge, the acceptance of "partial and provisional truths" (*Fides et Ratio*, 5), and the senseless pursuit of novelty, all point to the ever more difficult task of conveying to people – especially the young – an understanding of the very foundation and purpose of human life. Faced with these tragic flaws in social development, the wondrous array of charisms proper to each Religious Institute must be placed at the service of the complete knowledge and realization of the Gospel of Jesus Christ which alone "fully discloses humankind to itself and unfolds its noble calling" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 22). Particularly important in cultures undermined by secularism is the commitment by Religious to the apostolate of 'intellectual charity'. Charity "in the service of intelligence" – through promotion of excellence in schools, commitment to scholarship, and articulation of the relationship between faith and culture – will "ensure that the fundamental principles, upon which a civil society worthy of the human person is built, are everywhere respected" (Instruction, *op. cit.*, 38) including the political, juridical and educational arenas.

5. The rise of the prophetic mission of the laity is one of the great treasures unfolding in the Church of the third millennium. The Second Vatican Council rightly considered in detail the duty of the laity to "seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God's will" (*Lumen Gentium*, 31). It is also true however that over the last forty or so years, while political attention to human subjectivity has focused on individual rights, in the public domain there has been a growing reluctance to acknowledge that all men and women receive their essential and common dignity from God and with it the capacity to move towards truth and goodness (cf. *Centesimus Annus*, 38). Detached from this vision of the fundamental unity and purpose of the whole human family, rights are at times reduced to self-centred demands: the growth of prostitution and pornography in the name of adult choice, the acceptance of abortion in the name of women's rights, the approval of same sex unions in the name of homosexual rights.

In the face of such erroneous yet pervasive thinking you must do everything possible to encourage the laity in their "special responsibility" for "evangelizing culture ... and promoting Christian values in society and public life" (*Pastores Gregis*, 51). False secularistic forms of "humanism" which exalt the individual in such a manner that they become a veritable idolatry (cf. *Christifideles Laici*, 5) can be countered only by the rediscovery of the genuine inviolable dignity of every person. This sublime dignity is manifested in all its radiance when the person's origin and destiny are considered — created by God and redeemed by Christ, we are all called to be "children in the Son" (cf. *ibid.*, 37). So, again I say to the people of the United States, it is the Paschal Mystery of Christ that is the only sure point of reference for all of humanity on its pilgrimage in search of authentic unity and true peace! (cf. *Ecclesia in America*, 70).

6. Dear Brothers, with affection and fraternal gratitude I offer these reflections to you and encourage you in the sharing of the fruits of the charism of truth which the Spirit has bestowed upon you. United in your proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ and guided by the example of the Saints, go forward in hope! Invoking upon you the intercession of Mary, "Star of the New Evangelization", I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing to you and the priests, Religious, and lay faithful of your dioceses.

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