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

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● SALUTO DEL SANTO PADRE

● DISCORSO DEL SANTO PADRE

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

● SALUTO DEL SANTO PADRE

Dear Brother Bishops,

With great affection I greet you, the Bishops of the ecclesiastical region of Pennsylvania and New Jersey. Cardinal Rigali has mentioned that today marks the third anniversary of the terrorist attacks on the United States. I assure you of my closeness to the American people and I join you in praying for an end to the scourge of terrorism and the growth of the civilization of love.

Our thoughts today are centered on the Bishop's exercise of sacred power, which must always be rooted in the moral authority of a life shaped by his sharing in Christ's consecration and mission. This demands of us a pastoral style inspired by the example of Christ, the Good Shepherd, and aimed at fostering holiness, communion and mission in the ecclesial community.

Dear brothers, as you guide the Churches entrusted to your care, may you find wisdom and strength through the intercession of Mary Immaculate, Patroness of your country. To all of you I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of joy and peace in the Lord.

[01405-02.01] [Original text: English]

● DISCORSO DEL SANTO PADRE

Dear Brother Bishops,

1. With fraternal affection I welcome you, the Bishops of the ecclesiastical region of Pennsylvania and New Jersey, on the occasion of your quinquennial visit to the tombs of Saints Peter and Paul. During our *ad Limina* meetings this year I have invited you and your Brother Bishops from the United States to reflect with me on the significance of the ministry entrusted to us as "true and authentic teachers of the faith, pontiffs and pastors" (*Christus Dominus*, 2). Today our considerations turn to the *munus regendi*, the power of governance by which the successors of the Apostles have been set apart by the Holy Spirit as guardians of the flock and shepherds of the Church of God (cf. *Acts* 20:28). As the Church's constant Tradition attests, this apostolic authority is a form of service to the Body of Christ. As such, it can only be inspired by and modelled on the self-sacrificing love of the Lord who came among us as a servant (cf. *Mk* 10:45) and, after stooping to wash the feet of his disciples, commanded them to do as he had done (cf. *Jn* 13:15).

The existence of an unequivocal right and duty of governance entrusted to the successors of the Apostles is an essential part of the Church's divinely-willed constitution (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 18). As a ministerial power, given for building up the Body (cf. *2 Cor* 10:8), this *sacra potestas* must be seen as one of the hierarchical gifts (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 4) bestowed upon the Church by her divine Founder, and thus a constitutive element of that sacred Tradition which contains everything passed down from the Apostles as a means of preserving and fostering the holiness and faith of the People of God (cf. *Dei Verbum*, 8). History amply demonstrates that the firm and sage exercise of this apostolic authority, particularly in moments of crisis, has enabled the Church to preserve her integrity, independence and fidelity to the Gospel in the face of threats from within and without.

2. Building on the rich reflection on the episcopal *munus regendi* occasioned by the Council, and in light of the challenges of the new evangelization, the recent Synod of Bishops insisted on the urgent need to recover a fuller and more authentically "apostolic" understanding of the episcopal office. The Bishop is above all a witness, a teacher and model of holiness, as well as a prudent administrator of the Church's goods. The sacred power which he legitimately exercises should be rooted in the moral authority of a life completely shaped by his sacramental sharing in Christ's consecration and mission. Indeed, "all that the Bishop says and does must reveal the authority of Christ's word and his way of acting" (*Pastores Gregis*, 43). As a result, "a renewed appreciation of the Bishop's authority will not be expressed by external signs, but by an ever deeper understanding of the theological, spiritual and moral significance of this ministry, founded on the charism of apostolicity" (*ibid.*). Bishops need to be esteemed as successors of the Apostles not only in authority and sacred power, but above all by their apostolic life and witness.

In our meetings, many of you have expressed your concern about the crisis of confidence in the Church's leadership provoked by the recent sexual abuse scandals, the general call for accountability in the Church's governance on every level and the relations between Bishops, clergy and the lay faithful. I am convinced that today, as at every critical moment in her history, the Church will find the resources for an authentic self-renewal in the wisdom, vision and zeal of Bishops outstanding for their holiness. Saintly reformers like Gregory the Great, Charles Borromeo and Pius X understood that the Church is only authentically "re-formed" when she returns to her origins in a conscious reappropriation of the apostolic Tradition and a purifying re-evaluation of her institutions in the light of the Gospel. In the present circumstances of the Church in America, this will entail a spiritual discernment and critique of certain styles of governance which, even in the name of a legitimate concern for good "administration" and responsible oversight, can run the risk of distancing the pastor from the members of his flock, and obscuring his image as their father and brother in Christ.

3. In this regard, the Synod of Bishops acknowledged the need today for each Bishop to develop "a pastoral style which is ever more open to collaboration with all" (*Pastores Gregis*, 44), grounded in a clear understanding of the relationship between the ministerial priesthood and the common priesthood of the baptized (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 10). While the Bishop himself remains responsible for the authoritative decisions which he is called to make in the exercise of his pastoral governance, ecclesial communion also "presupposes the participation of

every category of the faithful, inasmuch as they share responsibility for the good of the particular Church which they themselves form" (*Pastores Gregis*, loc. cit.). Within a sound ecclesiology of communion, a commitment to creating better structures of participation, consultation and shared responsibility should not be misunderstood as a concession to a secular "democratic" model of governance, but as an intrinsic requirement of the exercise of episcopal authority and a necessary means of strengthening that authority.

4. The exercise of the *munus regendi* is directed both to gathering the flock in the visible unity of a single profession of faith lived in the sacramental communion of the Church and to guiding that flock, in the diversity of its gifts and callings, towards a common goal: the proclamation of the Gospel to the ends of the earth. Every act of ecclesiastical governance, consequently, must be aimed at fostering communion and mission. In view, then, of their common purpose and aim, the *three munera* of teaching, sanctifying and ruling are clearly inseparable and interpenetrating: "when the Bishop teaches, he also sanctifies and governs the People of God; when he sanctifies, he also teaches and governs; when he governs, he teaches and sanctifies" (*Pastores Gregis*, 9; cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 20, 27).

Experience shows that when priority is mainly given to outward stability, the impetus to personal conversion, ecclesial renewal and missionary zeal can be lost and a false sense of security can ensue. The painful period of self-examination provoked by the events of the past two years will bear spiritual fruit only if it leads the whole Catholic community in America to a deeper understanding of the Church's authentic nature and mission, and a more intense commitment to making the Church in your country reflect, in every aspect of her life, the light of Christ's grace and truth. Here I can only state once more my profound conviction that the documents of the Second Vatican Council need to be carefully studied and taken to heart by all the faithful, since these normative texts of the Magisterium offer the basis for a genuine ecclesial renewal in obedience to the will of Christ and in conformity with the Church's apostolic Tradition (cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 57).

5. Dear Brothers, as you guide the Churches entrusted to your pastoral care, may you daily find consolation, support and strength from the clergy, religious and lay faithful whom you serve. The ministry to which you have been called is demanding and even burdensome, yet it is also a source of immense spiritual joy and an indispensable service to the growth of Christ's disciples in faith, hope and love. With great affection I commend all of you to the prayers of Mary, Mother of the Church, and cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of joy and peace in the Lord.

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