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Pubblichiamo di seguito il discorso che il Santo Padre Benedetto XVI ha rivolto agli Ecc.mi Presuli della Conferenza Episcopale del Canada Atlantico, incontrati questa mattina alle ore 12.30 e ricevuti nei giorni scorsi, in separate udienze, in occasione della Visita "ad Limina Apostolorum":

• DISCORSO DEL SANTO PADRE

Dear Brother Bishops,

1. "Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord" (1 Tim 1:2). With fraternal affection I cordially welcome you, the Bishops of New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. I thank Bishop Lahey for the kind sentiments expressed on your behalf. I warmly reciprocate them and assure you and those entrusted to your pastoral care of my prayers. Your visit *ad Limina Apostolorum* is an opportunity to give thanks to God for the work of those who have tirelessly preached the Gospel throughout the length and breadth of your country. It is also an occasion to strengthen in faith, hope and charity your bonds of communion with the Bishop of Rome, and to affirm your commitment to make the face of Christ increasingly more visible within the Church and society, through consistent witness to the Gospel that is Jesus Christ himself.

2. Canada enjoys a proud heritage steeped in rich social diversity. Central to the cultural soul of the nation is Christ's immeasurable gift of faith which has been received and celebrated over the centuries with deep rejoicing by the peoples of your land. Like many countries, however, Canada is today suffering from the pervasive effects of secularism. The attempt to promote a vision of humanity apart from God's transcendent order and indifferent to Christ's beckoning light, removes from the reach of ordinary men and women the experience of genuine hope. One of the more dramatic symptoms of this mentality, clearly evident in your own region, is the plummeting birth rate. This disturbing testimony to uncertainty and fear, even if not always conscious, is in stark contrast with the definitive experience of true love which by its nature is marked by trust, seeks the good of the beloved, and looks to the eternal (cf. *Deus Caritas Est*, 6).

Faced with the many social ills and moral ambiguities which follow in the wake of a secularist ideology, Canadians look to you to be men of hope, preaching and teaching with passion the splendour of the truth of Christ who dispels the darkness and illuminates the way to renew ecclesial and civic life, educating consciences and teaching the authentic dignity of the person and human society. Particularly in districts which also suffer from the painful consequences of economic decline, such as unemployment and unwanted emigration, ecclesial leadership bears much fruit when, in its concern for the common good, it generously seeks to support civil authorities in their task of promoting regeneration in the community. In this regard, I note with satisfaction the success of the anniversary events celebrated last year in the Archdiocese of Saint John's, marked by a spirit of cooperation with various civic authorities. Such initiatives manifest a recognition of the need for spiritual strength at the heart of society. In fact, "it is quite impossible to separate the response to people's material and social needs from the fulfilment of the profound desires of their hearts" (*Papal Message for Lent* 2006).

3. Dear Brothers, your reports clearly indicate the seriousness with which you are responding to the need for pastoral renewal. I understand that with aging clergy and many isolated communities the challenges are great. Yet, if the Church is going to satisfy the thirst of men and women for truth and authentic values upon which to build their lives no effort can be spared in finding effective pastoral initiatives to make Jesus Christ known. Thus it is of great importance that the catechetical and religious education programmes which you are implementing continue to deepen the faithful's understanding and love of our Lord and his Church, and reawaken in them the zeal for Christian witness which has its root in the sacrament of Baptism. In this regard, particular care must be taken to ensure that the intrinsic relationship between the Church's Magisterium, individuals' faith, and testimony in public life is preserved and promoted. Only in this way can we hope to overcome the debilitating split between the Gospel and culture (cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 20).

Of notable importance are your Catechists. They have embraced with great courage the burning desire that was Saint Paul's: "deliver ... as of primary importance what I also received" (1 Cor 15:3). Teaching the faith cannot be reduced to a mere transmission of 'things' or words or even a body of abstract truths. The Church's Tradition is alive! It is the permanent actualization of the active presence of the Lord Jesus among his people, brought about by the Holy Spirit and expressed in the Church in every generation. In this sense it is like a living river that links us to the origins which are ever present and which leads us to the gates of eternity (cf. *Catechesis of the General Audience*, 26 April 2006). Through you, I acknowledge the fine service of the Catechists in your Dioceses and encourage them in their duty and privilege of making known to others the extraordinary "yes" of God to humanity (cf. 2 Cor 1:20). Further, I directly appeal in a special way to the young adults of your dioceses to take up the rewarding challenge of catechetical service and share in the satisfaction of handing on the faith. Their example of Christian witness to those younger than themselves will strengthen their own faith, while bringing to others the happiness that flows from the sense of purpose and meaning in life which the Lord reveals.

4. Dans votre plan de renouveau pastoral, vous êtes affrontés à la tâche délicate de la réorganisation des paroisses et même des diocèses. Cela ne peut jamais être réalisé de manière appropriée par les simples modèles sociaux de restructuration. Sans le Christ, nous ne pouvons rien faire (cf. Jn 15: 5). La prière nous enracine dans la vérité, nous rappelant sans cesse la primauté du Christ et, en union avec lui, le primat de la vie intérieure et de la sainteté. Les paroisses sont donc, à juste titre, considérées avant tout comme des maisons et des écoles de communion. Par conséquent, la réorganisation des paroisses est essentiellement un exercice de renouveau spirituel. Cela exige une promotion pastorale de la sainteté, afin que les fidèles demeurent attentifs à la volonté de Dieu, dont nous partageons la vie véritable, devenant participants de la nature divine (cf. *Dei*

Verbum, 2). Une telle sainteté, ou une telle communion intime par le Christ et dans l'Esprit, est affermie entre autres par une pédagogie authentique de la prière, par une introduction à la vie des Saints et aux multiples formes de spiritualité qui embellissent et stimulent la vie de l'Église, par une participation régulière au Sacrement de la Réconciliation, et par une catéchèse convaincante sur le dimanche comme "le jour de la foi", "le jour auquel on ne peut renoncer", "le jour de l'espérance chrétienne" (cf. *Dies Domini*, 29-30; 38).

J'ai la certitude qu'une redécouverte de Jésus Christ, Verbe fait chair, notre Sauveur, conduira à une redécouverte de l'identité personnelle, sociale et culturelle des fidèles. Loin de confondre la diversité et la complémentarité des charismes et des fonctions des ministres ordonnés et des fidèles laïcs, une identité catholique renforcée ravivera la passion pour l'évangélisation, qui est le propre de la vocation de tout croyant et de la nature de l'Église (cf. Instruction *Le prêtre, pasteur et guide de la communauté paroissiale*, 23-24).

5. Within the universal call to holiness (cf. *1 Th* 4:3) is found the particular vocation to which God summons every individual. In this regard, I encourage you to remain vigilant in your duty to promote a culture of vocation. Your reports attest to the admiration you have of your priests who labour with great generosity for the Church's mission and the good of those whom they serve. I pray that their daily journey of conversion and self-giving love will awaken in young men the desire to respond to God's call to humble priestly ministry in his Church.

Additionally you have with good reason underlined the fine contribution of Religious Sisters and Brothers to the mission of the Church. This deep appreciation of consecrated life is rightly accompanied by your concern for the decline in Religious vocations in your country. A renewed clarity is needed to articulate the particular contribution of Religious to the life of the Church: a mission to make the love of Christ present in the midst of humanity (cf. Instruction *Starting Afresh From Christ: A Renewed Commitment to Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium*, 5). Such clarity will give rise to a new *kairos*, with Religious confidently reaffirming their calling and, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, proposing afresh to young people the ideal of consecration and mission. I again assure Religious Priests, Brothers and Sisters of the vital witness they provide by placing themselves without reserve in the hands of Christ and of the Church, as a strong and clear proclamation of God's presence in a way understandable to our contemporaries (*Homily for the World Day of Consecrated Life*, 2 February 2006).

6. Dear Brothers, with affection and fraternal gratitude I offer these reflections to you and assure you of my prayers as you seek to shepherd the flocks entrusted to you. United in your proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ, go forward now in hope! With these sentiments I commend you to the protection of Mary, Mother of the Church, and to the intercession of Saint Joseph, her most chaste spouse. To you and to the priests, deacons, Religious and lay faithful of your Dioceses, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.

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