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VISITA "AD LIMINA APOSTOLORUM" DEI PRESULI DELLA CONFERENZA EPISCOPALE DEL CANADA-ONTARIO

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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-Ontario, incontrati questa mattina e ricevuti in questi giorni, in separate udienze, in occasione della Visita "ad Limina Apostolorum":

• DISCORSO DEL SANTO PADRE

Your Eminence,

Dear Brother Bishops,

1. "God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him" (1 Jn 4:16). With fraternal affection I cordially welcome you, the Bishops of Ontario, and I thank Bishop Smith 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 and solicitude. Your visit *ad Limina Apostolorum*, and to the successor of Peter, is an occasion to affirm your commitment to make Christ increasingly more visible within the Church and society, through joyful witness to the Gospel that is Jesus Christ himself.

The Evangelist John's numerous exhortations to abide in the love and truth of Christ evoke an appealing image of a sure and safe dwelling place. God first loves us (1 Jn 4:10) and we, drawn towards this gift, find a resting place where we can "constantly drink anew from the original source, which is Jesus Christ, from whose pierced heart flows the love of God" (*Deus Caritas Est*, 7). Saint John was also compelled to urge his communities to remain in that love. Already some had been weakened by the disputes and distractions which eventually lead to division.

2. Dear Brothers, your own Diocesan communities are challenged to resonate with the living statement of faith: "we know and believe the love God has for us" (1 Jn 4:16). These words, which eloquently reveal faith as personal adherence to God and concurrent assent to the whole truth that God reveals (cf. *Dominus Iesus*, 7),

can be credibly proclaimed only in the wake of an encounter with Christ. Drawn by his love the believer entrusts his entire self to God and so becomes one with the Lord (cf. *1 Cor* 6:17). In the Eucharist this union is strengthened and renewed by entering into the very dynamic of Christ's self-giving so as to share in the divine life: "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him" (*Jn* 6:56; cf. *Deus Caritas Est*, 13).

L'avertissement de saint Jean demeure cependant toujours actuel. Dans les sociétés de plus en plus sécularisées, vous en faites vous-mêmes l'expérience, l'amour qui jaillit du cœur de Dieu en direction de l'humanité peut passer inaperçu ou même être repoussé. En imaginant que se soustraire à cette relation constitue, d'une manière ou d'une autre, une solution pour sa propre libération, l'homme devient en fait étranger à lui-même, parce qu' "en réalité, le mystère de l'homme ne s'éclaire vraiment que dans le mystère du Verbe incarné" (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 22). Par le peu d'intérêt qu'ils portent à l'amour qui révèle la plénitude de la vérité de l'homme, de nombreux hommes et femmes continuent de s'éloigner de la demeure de Dieu pour vivre dans le désert de l'isolement individuel, de la fracture sociale et de la perte d'identité culturelle.

3. Within this perspective, one sees that the fundamental task of the evangelization of culture is the challenge to make God visible in the human face of Jesus. In helping individuals to recognize and experience the love of Christ, you will awaken in them the desire to dwell in the house of the Lord, embracing the life of the Church. This is our mission. It expresses our ecclesial nature and ensures that every initiative of evangelization concurrently strengthens Christian identity. In this regard, we must acknowledge that any reduction of the core message of Jesus, that is, the 'Kingdom of God', to indefinite talk of 'kingdom values' weakens Christian identity and debilitates the Church's contribution to the regeneration of society. When believing is replaced by 'doing' and witness by talk of 'issues', there is an urgent need to recapture the profound joy and awe of the first disciples whose hearts, in the Lord's presence, "burned within them" impelling them to "tell their story" (cf. *Lk* 24:32; 35).

Today, the impediments to the spread of Christ's Kingdom are experienced most dramatically in the split between the Gospel and culture, with the exclusion of God from the public sphere. Canada has a well-earned reputation for a generous and practical commitment to justice and peace, and there is an enticing sense of vibrancy and opportunity in your multicultural cities. At the same time, however, certain values detached from their moral roots and full significance found in Christ have evolved in the most disturbing of ways. In the name of 'tolerance' your country has had to endure the folly of the redefinition of spouse, and in the name of 'freedom of choice' it is confronted with the daily destruction of unborn children. When the Creator's divine plan is ignored the truth of human nature is lost.

False dichotomies are not unknown within the Christian community itself. They are particularly damaging when Christian civic leaders sacrifice the unity of faith and sanction the disintegration of reason and the principles of natural ethics, by yielding to ephemeral social trends and the spurious demands of opinion polls. Democracy succeeds only to the extent that it is based on truth and a correct understanding of the human person. Catholic involvement in political life cannot compromise on this principle; otherwise Christian witness to the splendour of truth in the public sphere would be silenced and an autonomy from morality proclaimed (cf. Doctrinal Note *The Participation of Catholics in Political Life*, 2-3; 6). In your discussions with politicians and civic leaders I encourage you to demonstrate that our Christian faith, far from being an impediment to dialogue, is a bridge, precisely because it brings together reason and culture.

4. Within the context of the evangelization of culture, I wish to mention the fine network of Catholic schools at the heart of ecclesial life in your Province. Catechesis and religious education is a taxing apostolate. I thank and encourage those many lay men and women, together with Religious, who strive to ensure that your young people become daily more appreciative of the gift of faith which they have received. More than ever this demands that witness, nourished by prayer, be the all-encompassing milieu of every Catholic school. Teachers, as witnesses, account for the hope that nourishes their own lives (cf. *1 Pt* 3:15) by living the truth they propose to their pupils, always in reference to the one they have encountered and whose dependable goodness they have sampled with joy (cf. Address to Rome's Ecclesial Diocesan Convention, *Living the Truth that God Loves his People*, 6 June 2005). And so with Saint Augustine they say: "we who speak and you who listen acknowledge ourselves as fellow disciples of a single teacher" (St. Augustine, *Sermons*, 23:2).

A particularly insidious obstacle to education today, which your own reports attest, is the marked presence in society of that relativism which, recognizing nothing as definitive, leaves as the ultimate criterion only the self with its desires. Within such a relativistic horizon an eclipse of the sublime goals of life occurs with a lowering of the standards of excellence, a timidity before the category of the good, and a relentless but senseless pursuit of novelty parading as the realization of freedom. Such detrimental trends point to the particular urgency of the apostolate of 'intellectual charity' which upholds the essential unity of knowledge, guides the young towards the sublime satisfaction of exercising their freedom in relation to truth, and articulates the relationship between faith and all aspects of family and civic life. Introduced to a love of truth, I am confident that young Canadians will relish exploring the house of the Lord who "enlightens every person who comes into the world (*Jn* 1:9) and satisfies every desire of humanity.

5. Dear Brothers, with affection and fraternal gratitude I offer these reflections to you and encourage you in your proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ. Experience his love and in this way cause the light of God to enter into the world! (cf. *Deus Caritas Est*, 39). Invoking upon you the intercession of Mary, Seat of Wisdom, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing to you and the priests, Religious, and lay faithful of your dioceses.

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