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◆ VISITA "AD LIMINA APOSTOLORUM" DEGLI ECC.MI PRESULI DELLA CONFERENZA EPISCOPALE DI MYANMAR

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Alle ore 12.15 di questa mattina, il Santo Padre Benedetto XVI riceve in Udienza il Gruppo

degli Ecc.mi Presuli della Conferenza Episcopale di Myanmar, incontrati questa mattina e ricevuti in questi giorni, in separate udienze, in occasione della Visita "ad Limina Apostolorum".

Pubblichiamo di seguito il discorso che il Santo Padre rivolge loro:

● DISCORSO DEL SANTO PADRE

My dear brother Bishops,

I am pleased to welcome you, the Bishops of Myanmar, who have come to the City of Rome to venerate the tombs of the holy Apostles and to strengthen your communion with the Successor of Peter. Our encounter today bears witness to the unity, charity and peace that bind us together and animate our mission to teach, guide and sanctify the people of God (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 22). I am grateful for the kind greetings and the assurance of prayers which Archbishop Paul Grawng has expressed to me in your name and on behalf of the clergy, the Religious and laity of your respective Dioceses. I wish to reciprocate with my cordial greetings and sincere prayer that "the Lord may give you peace at all times and in all ways" (cf. *2 Thess* 3:16).

The Church in Myanmar is known and admired for its solidarity with the poor and needy. This has been especially evident in the concern you have shown in the aftermath of the cyclone Nargis. The numerous Catholic agencies and associations in your land show that the people under your care have heeded the Baptist's cry: "Let he who has two coats share with him who has none; let he who has food do likewise!" (*Lk* 3:11). I am confident that under your guidance, the faithful will continue to demonstrate the possibility of establishing "a fruitful link between evangelization and works of charity" (*Deus Caritas Est*, 30), so that others will "experience the richness of their humanity" and that "God may be glorified through Jesus Christ" (*ibid.*, 31; cf. *1 Pt* 4:8-11).

During these difficult days, I know how grateful the Burmese people are for the Church's efforts to provide shelter, food, water, and medicine to those still in distress. I am hopeful that, following the agreement recently reached on the provision of aid by the international community, all who are ready to help will be able to furnish the type of assistance required and enjoy effective access to the places where it is needed most. At this critical time, I render thanks to Almighty God that he has brought us together "face to face" (*1 Thess* 2:17), for it gives me the occasion to reassure you that the universal Church is joined spiritually with those who mourn the loss of loved ones (cf. *Rm* 12:15), as she holds out to them the Lord's promise of comfort and consolation (cf. *Mt* 5:4). May God open the hearts of all so that a concerted effort may be made to facilitate and coordinate the ongoing endeavour to bring relief to the suffering and rebuild the country's infrastructure.

The Church's mission of charity shines forth in a particular way through the Religious life, by which men and women devote themselves with "undivided" heart to the service of God and neighbour (cf. *1 Cor* 7:34; cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 3). I am pleased to note that an increasing number of women are responding to the call to consecrated life in your region. I pray that their free and radical acceptance of the evangelical counsels will inspire others to embrace the life of chastity, poverty and obedience for the sake of the Kingdom. Preparing candidates for this service of prayer and apostolic work requires an investment of time and resources. The formation courses offered by the Catholic Religious Conference of Myanmar attest to the cooperation possible between different religious communities with due respect for the particular charism of each, and point to the need for sound academic, spiritual and human formation.

Similar signs of hope are seen in the rising number of vocations to the priesthood. These men are both "called together" and "sent out to preach" (cf. *Lk* 9:1-2) to be examples of faithfulness and holiness for the People of God. Filled with the Holy Spirit and led by your fatherly care, may priests perform their sacred duties in humility, simplicity and obedience (cf. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 15). As you know, this requires a thorough formation that accords with the dignity of their priestly office. I therefore encourage you to continue making the necessary sacrifices to ensure that seminarians receive the integral formation that will enable them to become authentic heralds of the New Evangelization (cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 2).

My dear brothers, the Church's mission to spread the Good News depends on a generous and prompt response from the lay faithful to become labourers in the vineyard (cf. *Mt* 20:1-16; 9:37-38). They too are in need of a robust and dynamic Christian formation which will inspire them to carry the Gospel message to their workplaces, families, and to society at large (cf. *Ecclesia in Asia*, 22). Your reports allude to the enthusiasm with which the laity are organizing many new catechetical and spiritual initiatives, often involving great numbers of young people. As you foster and oversee these activities, I encourage you to remind those under your care to turn continually to the nourishment of the Eucharist through participation in the liturgy and silent contemplation (cf. *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 6). Effective programs of evangelization and catechesis also require clear planning and organization if they are to achieve the desired end of teaching Christian truth and drawing people into the love of Christ. It is desirable that they make use of appropriate aids, including booklets and audio-visual materials, to complement oral instruction and to provide common points of reference for authentic Catholic doctrine. I am certain that other local Churches throughout the world will do what they can to furnish materials whenever possible.

Your active participation in the First Asian Mission Congress has led to new initiatives for promoting goodwill with Buddhists in your country. In this regard, I encourage you as you develop ever better relations with Buddhists for the good of your individual communities and of the entire nation.

Finally, my dear brothers, I wish to express my sincere gratitude for your faithful ministry in the midst of difficult circumstances and setbacks often beyond your control. Next month, the Church inaugurates a special Jubilee year in honour of Saint Paul. This "Apostle to the Gentiles" has been admired through the centuries for his undaunted perseverance in trials and tribulations vividly recounted in his Epistles and in the Acts of the Apostles (cf. *2 Tim* 1:8-13; *Acts* 27:13-44). Paul exhorts us to keep our gaze fixed on the glory that awaits us so as never to despair in the pain and sufferings of today. The gift of hope which we have received—and in which we are saved (cf. *Rom* 8:24)—imparts grace and transforms our way of living (cf. *Spe Salvi*, 3). Enlightened by the Holy Spirit, I invite you to join Saint Paul in the sure confidence that nothing—neither distress, or persecution, or famine, nor things present, nor things to come—can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (cf. *Rom* 8:35-39).

Commending you to the intercession of Mary, Queen of the Apostles, I willingly impart my Apostolic Blessing to you and to your clergy, Religious and lay faithful.

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