

HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE
OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE



BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIEGE
PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLS

BOLLETTINO

SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE

N. 0380

Venerdì 06.06.2008

Pubblicazione: Immediata

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Questa mattina, alle ore 12.15, il Santo Padre Benedetto XVI incontra i Presuli della Conferenza Episcopale di Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei, ricevuti in questi giorni, in separate udienze, per la Visita "ad Limina Apostolorum" e rivolge loro il discorso che pubblichiamo di seguito:

• DISCORSO DEL SANTO PADRE

Dear Brother Bishops,

I am pleased to welcome you on your *ad Limina* visit, as you renew the bonds of communion in faith and love between yourselves as Pastors of God's people in Malaysia, Brunei and Singapore, and the Successor of Peter in the See of Rome. I thank you for the kind words that Archbishop Pakiam has addressed to me on your behalf, and I offer you the assurance of my prayers and good wishes for all of you and for those entrusted to your pastoral care.

By a happy coincidence, your visit to the city of the Apostles Peter and Paul comes at a time when the Church all over the world is preparing to celebrate a year dedicated to Saint Paul, the great Apostle of the Gentiles, on the two-thousandth anniversary of his birth. I pray that you will draw inspiration from the example of this zealous

apostle, outstanding teacher, and courageous witness to the truth of the Gospel. Through his intercession, may you experience renewed fervour in the great missionary task for which you, like Saint Paul, have been set apart and called (cf. *Gal* 1:15-16) – that of preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ in Malaysia, Brunei and Singapore. Echoing the words addressed by Saint Paul to the elders at Ephesus, I urge you to "take heed to yourselves and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the Church of God which he obtained with the blood of his own Son" (*Acts* 20:28).

"The Church's faith in Jesus is a gift received and a gift to be shared; it is the greatest gift which the Church can offer to Asia" (*Ecclesia in Asia*, 10). Happily, the peoples of Asia display an intense yearning for God (cf. *ibid.*, 9). In handing on to them the message that you also received (cf. *1 Cor* 15:3), you are sowing the seeds of evangelization in fertile ground. If the faith is to flourish, however, it needs to strike deep roots in Asian soil, lest it be perceived as a foreign import, alien to the culture and traditions of your people. Mindful of the manner in which Saint Paul preached the Good News to the Athenians (cf. *Acts* 17:22-34), you are called to present the Christian faith in ways that resonate with the "innate spiritual insight and moral wisdom in the Asian soul" (*Ecclesia in Asia*, 6), so that people will welcome it and make it their own.

In particular, you need to ensure that the Christian Gospel is in no way confused in their minds with secular principles associated with the Enlightenment. On the contrary, by "speaking the truth in love" (*Eph* 4:15) you can help your fellow citizens to distinguish the wheat of the Gospel from the chaff of materialism and relativism. You can help them to respond to the urgent challenges posed by the Enlightenment, familiar to Western Christianity for over two centuries, but only now beginning to have a significant impact upon other parts of the world. While resisting the "dictatorship of positivist reason" that tries to exclude God from public discourse, we should welcome the "true conquests of the Enlightenment" – especially the stress on human rights and the freedom of religion and its practice (cf. *Address to the Members of the Roman Curia at the Traditional Exchange of Christmas Greetings*, 22 December 2006). By stressing the universal character of human rights, grounded in the dignity of the human person created in God's image, you carry out an important task of evangelization, since this teaching forms an essential aspect of the Gospel. In so doing, you are following in the footsteps of Saint Paul, who knew how to express the essentials of Christian faith and practice in a way that could be assimilated by the Gentile communities to which he was sent.

This Pauline apostolate requires a commitment to interreligious dialogue, and I encourage you to carry forward this important work, exploring every avenue open to you. I realize that not all the territories you represent offer the same degree of religious liberty, and many of you, for example, encounter serious difficulties in promoting Christian religious instruction in schools. Do not become disheartened, but continue to proclaim with conviction the "unsearchable riches of Christ" (*Eph* 3:8), so that all may come to hear of the love of God made manifest in Jesus. In the context of open and honest dialogue with Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and the followers of other religions present in your respective countries, you assist your fellow citizens to recognize and observe the law "written on their hearts" (*Rom* 2:15) by clearly articulating the truth of the Gospel. In this way, your teaching can reach a wide audience and help to promote a unified vision of the common good. This in turn should help to foster growth in religious freedom and greater social cohesion between members of different ethnic groups, which can only be conducive to the peace and well-being of the entire community.

In terms of the pastoral care that you offer to your people, I would encourage you to show particular concern for your priests. Using the image evoked by Saint Paul in writing to the young Timothy, urge them to rekindle the gift of God that is within them through the laying on of hands (cf. *2 Tim* 1:6). Be a father, brother and friend to them, as Paul was to Timothy and to Titus. Lead them by example, showing them the way to imitate Christ, the Good Shepherd. Saint Paul famously proclaimed "it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (*Gal* 2:20). By modelling your whole life and conduct upon Christ, let your priests see what it is to live as *alter Christus* in the midst of your people. In this way, not only will you inspire them to offer their whole lives "as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God" (*Rom* 12:1), but more young people will aspire to this sublime life of priestly service.

I am aware that in the territories you represent there are some regions where it is rare for the people to see a priest and others where the people have not yet heard the Gospel. They too have a particular claim on your pastoral solicitude and your prayers. For "how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher?" (*Rom* 10:14). Here the formation of the laity takes on added

importance, so that through sound catechesis the scattered children of God can know the hope to which they have been called, "the riches of his glorious inheritance" (*Eph 1:18*). In this way they can be prepared to welcome the priest when he comes among them. Tell your catechists, both lay and religious, that I remember them in my prayers, and that I appreciate the enormous contribution they make to the life of the Christian communities in Malaysia, Brunei and Singapore. Through their vital work, countless men, women and children are enabled "to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge" and so come to be "filled with all the fullness of God" (*Eph 3:19*).

Dear brother Bishops, I pray that, as you return to your respective countries, you will "rejoice always, pray constantly, and give thanks in all circumstances: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (*1 Thess 5:16*). Commending all of you and your priests, religious and lay faithful to the intercession of Mary, Mother of the Church, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of joy and peace in the Lord.

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