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◆ VISITA "AD LIMINA APOSTOLORUM" DEGLI ECC.MI PRESULI DELLA CONFERENZA EPISCOPALE DEL BANGLADESH

Questa mattina, alle ore 11.45, il Santo Padre Benedetto XVI incontra i Presuli della Conferenza Episcopale del Bangladesh, ricevuti in questi giorni, in separate udienze, in occasione della Visita "ad Limina Apostolorum" e rivolge loro il discorso che pubblichiamo di seguito:

● DISCORSO DEL SANTO PADRE

Dear Brother Bishops,

It is with great joy that I welcome you, the Bishops of Bangladesh, on your quinquennial visit to the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul. I thank Archbishop Costa for the kind words he has addressed to me on your behalf. Your generous love of God, your solicitude for the people entrusted to your care by the Lord Jesus, and your bond of unity in the Holy Spirit are for me a cause of profound joy and thanksgiving.

Personal integrity and holiness of life are essential components of a Bishop's witness since "before becoming one who hands on the word, the Bishop must be a hearer of the word" (cf. *Pastores Gregis*, 15). Again and again our Christian experience demonstrates the Gospel paradox that joy and fulfilment are to be attained through the complete gift of self for the sake of Christ and his Kingdom (cf. *Mk* 8:35). Bishops are called to be patient, mild and gentle in the spirit of the beatitudes. In this way they lead others to see all human realities in the light of the Kingdom of Heaven (cf. *Mt* 5:1-12). Their personal witness of evangelical integrity is

complemented and strengthened by the many fruits of grace which the Spirit produces in the faithful as they tend to the perfection of charity (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 39). For this reason, I join you in giving thanks to Almighty God for the growth and fervour of the Catholic community in Bangladesh, especially amid the daily challenges it faces. Many of your people suffer from poverty, isolation or discrimination, and they look to you for spiritual guidance that will lead them to recognize in faith, and to experience in anticipation, that they are truly blessed by God (cf. *Lk* 6:22).

As successors of the Apostles, you are called in a special way to teach God's chosen people, availing yourselves of the many gifts God has granted his community for the effective transmission of the deposit of Faith. In this regard, I appreciate your efforts to ensure that your lay catechists are sufficient in number, well prepared and given due recognition by the faithful. I pray that their example and dedication will draw other lay men and women to a more active role in the Church's apostolates. As you know from your own pastoral experience, catechists play an integral role in preparing laypeople to receive the sacraments. This is especially true in the increasingly important work of preparing young men and women to recognize the Sacrament of Matrimony as a life-long covenant of faithful love and as a path to holiness. I have often mentioned my concern regarding the difficulty modern men and women have in making a lifelong commitment (cf. *Address to the Bishops of the United States of America*, 16 April 2008). There is an urgent need on the part of all Christians to reassert the joy of total self-giving in response to the radical call of the Gospel.

One clear sign of this radical commitment is seen in the many vocations to the priesthood and the consecrated life the Church in your country is currently experiencing. I encourage your efforts to offer these candidates suitable formation that will bring forth abundant fruits. In this regard, I also wish to express my heartfelt gratitude for the generous assistance offered by the Church in other countries, especially Korea, in the preparation of your seminarians and priests.

The Church is Catholic: a community embracing peoples of all races and languages, and not limited to any one culture or particular social, economic or political system (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 42). She is at the service of the entire human family, freely sharing her gifts for the well-being of all. This gives her a connatural ability to foster unity and peace. My dear brothers, you and your people, as promoters of harmony and peace, have much to offer the nation. In your love for your country you inspire tolerance, moderation and understanding. By encouraging people who share important values to cooperate for the common good, you help to consolidate your country's stability and to maintain it for the future. These efforts, however subtle, give effective support to the majority of your fellow citizens who uphold the country's noble tradition of mutual respect, tolerance and social harmony. May you likewise continue to sustain and counsel Catholic lay people and all who wish to offer their service for the good of society in public office, social communications, in education, healthcare and social assistance. May they always rejoice in the knowledge that Christ accepts as a gesture of personal love whatever good is done to the least of his brothers (cf. *Mt* 25:40).

I am aware of recent initiatives you have taken in the field of interreligious dialogue, and I exhort you to persevere with patient dedication to this essential component of the Church's mission *ad gentes* (*Ecclesia in Asia*, 31). Indeed, much good can be accomplished when it is conducted in a spirit of mutual understanding and collaboration in truth and freedom. All men and women have an obligation to seek the truth. When it is found, they are compelled to model their entire lives in accordance with its demands (cf. *Dignitatis Humanae*, 2). Consequently, the most important contribution we can bring to interreligious dialogue is our knowledge of Jesus of Nazareth, "the way, the truth and the life" (*Jn* 14:6). Dialogue, based on mutual respect and truth, cannot fail to have a positive influence on the social climate of your country. The delicacy of this task requires thorough preparation of clergy and lay people, first of all by offering them a deeper knowledge of their own faith and then by helping them to grow in their understanding of Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and the other religions present in your region.

At the end of this month, we will begin the celebration of the Pauline Year, which will be for the whole Church a renewed invitation to announce with unflinching courage the Good News of Christ Jesus. Saint Paul was not ashamed to preach the Gospel; he saw in it the power of God to save (cf. *Rom* 1:16). I am aware of the difficulties of this mission entrusted to you. Like the first Christians, you live as a small community among a large non-Christian population. Your presence is a sign that the preaching of the Gospel, which began in Jerusalem

and Judea, continues to spread to the ends of the earth in accordance with the universal destination the Lord willed for it (cf. *Acts* 1:8). My prayers accompany you as you lead your priests, men and women religious and lay faithful along the path marked out by so many dedicated missionaries, beginning with Saint Francis Xavier, who brought the Gospel to your country. The Church you represent "proclaims the Good News with loving respect and esteem for her listeners" (*Ecclesia in Asia*, 20). Continue this task with goodness and simplicity, and with "creativity in charity" (cf. *Pastores Gregis*, 73), according to your talents, your specific graces and the means at your disposal. Have confidence in the Lord who opens the hearts of listeners to heed what is announced in his name (cf. *Acts* 16:14).

Dear brother Bishops, I know that you find great courage and inspiration in the words of Christ who commissioned you, "Behold I am with you always, unto the end of time" (*Mt* 28:20). As you return to your homeland, please convey my prayerful encouragement and affectionate good wishes to your priests, men and women religious, your catechists and all your beloved people. To each of you, and to those entrusted to your pastoral care, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.

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