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Questa mattina, alle ore 12, il Santo Padre Benedetto XVI incontra i Presuli della Conferenza Episcopale del Pakistan, 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, the Bishops of Pakistan, as you make your quinquennial pilgrimage to the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul. Grateful to Archbishop Saldanha for his kind words, I convey warm greetings to the priests, religious and laity of your dioceses, assuring them of my prayers for their well-being. May they never tire in giving thanks for having received the "first fruits" of the Holy Spirit, who is always with them to strengthen them and to intercede on their behalf (cf. *Rom* 8:23-27).

The seeds of the Gospel, sown in your region by zealous missionaries in the sixteenth century, continue to grow despite conditions that sometimes hinder their capacity to take root. Your visit to the See of Peter not only provides me with an opportunity to rejoice with you over the fruits of your labours, but to listen to your account of the hardships which you and your flock must endure for the sake of the Lord's name. Whenever we courageously shoulder the burdens placed upon us in circumstances often beyond our control, we encounter

Jesus himself, who gives us a hope that surpasses the sufferings of the present because it transforms us from within (cf. *Spe Salvi*, 4).

Your priests, united by a special bond to Christ the Good Shepherd, are heralds of Christian hope as they proclaim that Jesus lives among his people to ease their anguish and strengthen them in their weakness (cf. *Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests*, 75). I would ask you to assure your clergy of my spiritual closeness to them as they carry out this task. Just as the Lord continually gave to his Apostles signs of his love and solicitude for them, so should you strive to create a climate of affection and trust with your clergy who are your principal and irreplaceable co-workers. By looking upon you as a father and brother (cf. *Pastores Gregis*, 47) and hearing your words of encouragement for their pastoral initiatives, they will be inspired to unite their will to yours and dedicate themselves more completely to the spiritual good of God's people (cf. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 14-15).

The centrality of the Eucharist, both through the worthy celebration of the Lord's Supper and in silent adoration of the Sacrament, should be especially apparent in the lives of priests and Bishops. This will lead the laity to follow your example and come to a deeper appreciation for the Lord's abiding presence among them. As Bishops, you are the chief stewards of the mysteries of God and the main promoters of the liturgical life of your local Churches (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 22). In this regard, I am pleased to note the various programmes you have initiated to raise awareness of the radical change that becomes possible when Christians allow their entire life to take on a "eucharistic form" (cf. *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 70-83). The source and summit of the Church's life radically reorients the way Christians think, speak and act in the world and makes present the salvific meaning of Christ's death and resurrection, thus renewing history and vivifying all creation. The breaking of the bread reminds us again and again that the absurdity of violence never has the last word, for Christ has conquered sin and death through his glorious resurrection. The holy Sacrifice assures us that his wounds are the remedy for our sins, his weakness the power of God within us, and his death our life (cf. *1 Pet* 2:24; *2 Cor* 13:4; *2 Cor* 4:10). I am confident that the daily offering of the Mass by you and your priests will lead your people to give constant thanks and praise to God the Father for the graces granted us in his Son, through whom we have received the Spirit of filial adoption (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1110).

Eucharistic spirituality embraces every aspect of the Christian life (cf. *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 77). This is evident in the emerging vitality of ecclesial movements within your Dioceses. The charisms of these associations both reflect and meet the particular needs of our time. By exhorting the members of these movements and all the faithful to listen attentively to the word of God and to cultivate a habit of daily prayer, may your people foster genuine fellowship and create ever expanding networks of charitable solicitude for their neighbours.

My dear brothers, I join you in thanking God who calls forth men to serve as priests in your local Churches. The theologate in Karachi, the programme of philosophy in Lahore and your minor seminaries are vital institutions for the future of the Church in Pakistan. Never doubt that your investment of human and material resources will ensure a solid formation for your candidates for the priesthood. Generous collaborators are also to be found among members of religious orders who can help to enhance programmes of priestly formation and strengthen bonds of cooperation between religious and diocesan clergy. Of particular urgency at the present time is the task of preparing these men – and indeed all catechists and lay leaders – to become effective promoters of interreligious dialogue. They share a responsibility with all Christians in Pakistan to foster understanding and trust with members of other religions by constructing peaceful forums for open conversation.

Likewise, other Catholic institutions continue to serve the common good of the Pakistani people. They demonstrate that the love of Christ is no mere abstraction, but reaches out to every man and woman as it passes through real persons working in the Church's charitable institutions. The Gospel teaches us that Jesus cannot be loved in the abstract (cf. *Mt* 25:31-37). Those who serve in Catholic hospitals, schools, social and charitable agencies respond to the concrete needs of others, knowing well that they are ministering to the Lord himself through their particular acts of charity (cf. *Mt* 25:40). I encourage you to build on the noble example of service to neighbour etched in the history of these institutions. Priests, religious and the lay faithful in your Dioceses, by caring for the sick, helping young people grow in knowledge and virtue, and meeting the needs of the poor, reveal the human face of God's love for each and every person. May their encounter with the living Christ awaken in their hearts a desire to share with others the joy of living in God's presence (cf. *Ps* 73:25, 28).

In imitation of Saint Paul, may they freely give to others what they themselves have received without cost (cf. *1 Cor* 4:7; *2 Cor* 11:7; *Mt* 10:8).

My brothers in the Episcopate, you exercise a special mission as preachers of the Gospel and as agents of love and peace in the Church and in society. May you support one another in prayer and effective collaboration as you face the difficult tasks that lie ahead. Invoking upon you and your priests, religious and lay faithful the maternal protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of joy and peace in the Lord Jesus.

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