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Sommario:

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

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Alle ore 12 di questa mattina, nella Sala del Concistoro del Palazzo Apostolico Vaticano, il Santo Padre Benedetto XVI incontra i Vescovi della Conferenza Episcopale di Uganda, ricevuti in questi giorni, in separate udienze, in occasione della Visita "ad Limina Apostolorum".

Pubblichiamo di seguito il discorso che il Papa rivolge loro:

• DISCORSO DEL SANTO PADRE

Your Eminence,

Dear Brother Bishops,

I am pleased to greet you, the Bishops of Uganda, on your Ad Limina visit to the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul. I thank Bishop Ssekamanya for the gracious sentiments of communion with the Successor of Peter which he expressed on your behalf. I willingly reciprocate and assure you of my prayers and affection for you and for the People of God entrusted to your care. In a particular way my thoughts go to those who have been affected by the recent landslides in the Bududa region of your country. I offer prayers to Almighty God, the Father of all mercies, that he may grant eternal rest to the souls of the deceased, and give strength and hope to all who are suffering the consequences of this tragic event.

The recently celebrated Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops was memorable in its call for renewed efforts in the service of a more profound evangelization of your continent (cf. *Message to the People of God*, 15). The power of the word of God and the knowledge and love of Jesus cannot but transform people's lives by changing for the better the way they think and act. In the light of the Gospel message, you are aware of the need to encourage the Catholics of Uganda to appreciate fully the sacrament of marriage in its unity and indissolubility, and the sacred right to life. I urge you to help them, priests as well as the lay faithful, to resist the seduction of a materialistic culture of individualism which has taken root in so many countries. Continue to call for lasting peace based on justice, generosity towards those in need and a spirit of dialogue and reconciliation. While promoting true ecumenism, be especially close to those who are more vulnerable to the advances of sects. Guide them to reject superficial sentiments and a preaching that would empty the cross of Christ of its power (cf. *1 Cor 1:17*); in this way you will continue, as responsible Pastors, to keep them and their children faithful to the Church of Christ. In this regard I am pleased to learn that your people find spiritual consolation in popular forms of evangelization such as the organized pilgrimages to the Shrine of the Ugandan Martyrs at Namugongo, where the active pastoral presence of Bishops and numerous priests guides the piety of the pilgrims towards renewal as individuals and communities. Continue to sustain all who with generous hearts assist displaced persons and orphans from war-torn areas. Encourage those who care for people afflicted by poverty, Aids and other diseases, teaching them to see in those whom they serve the suffering face of Jesus (cf. *Mt 25:40*).

Renewed evangelization gives rise in turn to a deeper Catholic culture which takes root in the family. From your Quinquennial Reports I am aware that programmes of education in parishes, schools and associations, and your own interventions on topics of common interest, are indeed spreading a stronger Catholic culture. Great good can come from well-prepared lay people who are active in the media, in politics and culture. Courses for their adequate formation, especially in Catholic Social Doctrine, should be provided, taking advantage of resources at Uganda Martyrs University or other institutions. Encourage them to be active and outspoken in the service of what is just and noble. In this way, society as a whole will benefit from trained and zealous Christians who take up leadership roles in the service of the common good. Ecclesial movements also deserve your support for their positive contribution to the life of the Church in many sectors.

Bishops, as the first agents of evangelization, are called to bear clear witness to the practical solidarity born of our communion in Christ. In a spirit of Christian charity Dioceses that enjoy more resources, both materially and spiritually, should assist those that have less. At the same time, all communities have a duty to strive for self-sufficiency. It is important that your people develop a sense of responsibility towards themselves, their community and their Church, and become more deeply imbued with a Catholic spirit of sensitivity to the needs of the universal Church.

Your priests, as committed ministers of evangelization, already benefit greatly from your fatherly concern and guidance. In this Year for Priests offer them your assistance, your example and your clear teaching. Exhort them to prayer and vigilance, especially with regard to self-centred, worldly or political ambitions, or excessive attachment to family or ethnic group. Continue promoting vocations, providing for due discernment of candidates and for their proper motivation and formation, especially their spiritual formation. Priests must be men of God, capable of guiding others, through wise counsel and example, in the Lord's ways.

Religious men and women in Uganda are called to be an example and a source of encouragement to the whole Church. By your advice and prayers, assist them as they strive for the goal of perfect charity and bear witness to the Kingdom. Priests and religious require constant support in their lives of celibacy and consecrated virginity. By your own example, teach them of the beauty of this way of life, of the spiritual fatherhood and motherhood with which they can enrich and deepen the love of the faithful for the Creator and Giver of all good gifts. Your catechists likewise are a great resource. Continue to be attentive to their needs and formation, and place before them, for their encouragement, the example of martyrs such as Blessed Daudi Okello and Blessed Jildo Irwa.

Dear Brother Bishops, with the Apostle Paul, I exhort you: "always be steady, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfil your ministry" (*2 Tim 4:5*). In the Blessed Ugandan Martyrs you and your people have models of great courage and endurance in suffering. Count on their prayers and strive always to be worthy of their legacy. Commending you and those entrusted to your pastoral care to the loving protection of Mary, Mother of the

Church, I affectionately impart to all of you my Apostolic Blessing.

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