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◆ **VISITA "AD LIMINA APOSTOLORUM" DEGLI ECC.MI PRESULI DELLA CONFERENZA EPISCOPALE DELL'INDIA (IV GRUPPO)**

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Alle ore 11.30 di questa mattina, nella Sala del Concistoro del Palazzo Apostolico Vaticano, il Santo Padre Benedetto XVI incontra i Presuli della Conferenza Episcopale dell'India (IV gruppo), 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,

I am pleased to welcome all of you on the occasion of your visit *ad Limina Apostolorum*, a privileged time in which to deepen the bonds of fraternity and communion between the See of Peter and the particular Churches that you lead. I wish to thank Archbishop Malayappan Chinnappa for the cordial sentiments that he expressed on your behalf and in the name of those whom you shepherd. My warm greetings go to the priests, the men and women religious, and all the lay faithful entrusted to your pastoral care. Please assure them of my solicitude and my prayers.

Continuing these reflections on the life of the Church in India, I would like to address a word to you, dear brother Bishops, concerning your responsibilities towards the clergy and the men and women religious of the country. By the laying on of hands and the invocation of the Holy Spirit, you are set over God's people as Pastors, and you

are called to teach, sanctify and govern the local Churches. You do this through your preaching of the Gospel, your celebration of the Sacraments, and your care for the sanctity and effective pastoral action of the clergy. Through them you are able to reach out more effectively to the religious and lay people in your care. You are also called to govern in charity by means of a prudent vigilance in your legislative, executive and judicial capacities (cf. *Code of Canon Law*, cc. 384-394). In this delicate and demanding role, the Bishop, as pastor and father, should so unite and mould his flock into one family that all, conscious of their duties, will wish to live and act as one in charity (cf. *Christus Dominus*, 16). Promoting the charism of unity, which is a powerful testimony to the oneness of God and a mark of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, is among the most important responsibilities of the Bishop. In the many tasks which require your prayerful attention, dear Bishops, you recognize the presence of the Spirit of the Lord who is active in the Church. The Spirit, promised to all in Baptism and poured out upon God's people to guide and sanctify them in Confirmation, longs to unite all Christians in bonds of faith, hope and charity. By your ministry, you are called to strengthen the people whom God has chosen to be his own, to serve them and to build them into a unified temple, a worthy dwelling-place for the Spirit, whether they be young or old, male or female, rich or poor. The Lord, by shedding his blood, has ransomed people of every tribe and tongue, of every people and nation (cf. *Rev* 5:9). Therefore, I encourage you to continue to be at the service of unity and, leading by example, to draw the people that you shepherd into deeper communion, fraternity and peace.

One of the ways in which the communion of the Church is most clearly manifested is in the particularly important relationship that exists between you and your priests, whether diocesan or religious, who share and exercise with you the one priesthood of Christ. Together in your Dioceses, you form one priestly body and one family, of which you are the father (cf. *Christus Dominus*, 29). Thus, you are to be supportive of your priests, your closest collaborators, and to be attentive to their needs and aspirations, showing solicitude for their spiritual, intellectual and material well-being. They, as sons and co-workers, are called in turn to respect your authority, working cheerfully, humbly and with complete dedication to the good of the Church, but always under your direction. The bonds of fraternal love and mutual concern which you foster with your priests will become the basis for overcoming any tensions that may arise, and will promote those conditions which are most propitious for the service of the people of God, edifying them spiritually, leading them to know their worth and to assume the dignity which is theirs as children of God. Moreover, the witness of the reciprocal love and service between you and your priests – without regard for caste or ethnicity but focussed upon the love of God, the spread of the Gospel and the sanctification of the Church – is earnestly desired by the people you serve. They look to you and your priests for a model of holiness, friendship and harmony that speaks to their hearts and teaches by example how to live the new commandment of love.

Religious men and women also look to you for guidance and support. The witness of your own deep love for Jesus Christ and his Church will serve to inspire them as they devote themselves with perfect poverty, chastity and obedience to the life to which they have been called. They will be confirmed in their selfless dedication by your faith, example and trust in God. In this way, in union with them, you will bear ever greater witness before the men and women of our day to the fact that, while the form of this world is passing away (cf. *1 Cor* 7:31), whoever does the will of God abides forever (cf. *1 Jn* 2:17).

The radiant witness of consecrated life is of course a treasure not only for those graced with a vocation to it, but also for the entire Church. Through close cooperation with religious Superiors, continue to ensure that the members of Religious Institutes in your Dioceses live their particular charisms in their fullness and in harmony with the priests and lay faithful. In addition to ensuring that they receive a solid human, spiritual and theological foundation, see that they are provided with a thorough ongoing formation that will help them mature in all aspects of consecrated life. Because of the unique contribution made by all Religious, women and men, contemplative and active, to the mission of the Church, and because of their role as protagonists of evangelization through prayer and supplication, education, health care, charity and other apostolates, their charisms will surely continue to strengthen the entire ecclesial community and enrich wider society. In a particular way, I wish to express the Church's appreciation of the many women Religious of the Church in India. They bear witness to its holiness, vitality and hope. They offer countless prayers and perform innumerable good works, often hidden, but nevertheless of great value to the up-building of God's kingdom. I ask you to encourage them in their vocation, and to invite young women to consider a similar life of fulfilment through love of God and service to others.

With these thoughts, dear Brother Bishops, I express my fraternal affection and esteem. Invoking upon all of you the maternal intercession of Mary, Mother of the Church, and assuring you of my prayers for you and for those entrusted to your pastoral care, I gladly impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of grace and peace in the Lord.

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