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

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Alle ore 11.45 di questa mattina, nella Sala del Concistoro del Palazzo Apostolico Vaticano, il Santo Padre Benedetto XVI incontra il Gruppo degli Ecc.mi Presuli della Conferenza Episcopale di Australia, 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 offer you a warm welcome on the occasion of your visit

ad Limina Apostolorum. This pilgrimage to the tombs of Saints Peter and Paul provides you with an important occasion to strengthen the bonds of communion in the one Church of Christ. This moment is therefore a privileged opportunity to reaffirm our unity and the fraternal affection which must always characterize relations in the College of Bishops, with and under the Successor of Peter. I wish to thank Archbishop Wilson for his kind words on your behalf. My cordial greetings go to the priests, the men and women religious, and lay faithful of Australia, and I ask you to assure them of my prayers for their peace, prosperity and spiritual well-being.

As His Grace pointed out in his address, the church in Australia has been marked by two special moments of

grace in recent years. Firstly, World Youth Day was blessed with great success and, together with you, I saw how the Holy Spirit moved the young people gathered on your home soil from all over the world. I have also learned from your reports of the continued impact of that celebration. Not just Sydney but Dioceses throughout the country welcomed the world's young Catholics as they came to deepen their faith in Jesus Christ along with their Australian sisters and brothers. Your clergy and faithful saw and experienced the youthful vitality of the Church to which we all belong and the perennial relevance of the Good News which must be proclaimed afresh to every generation. I understand that one of the outstanding consequences of the event is still to be seen in the numbers of young people who are discerning vocations to the priesthood and the religious life. The Holy Spirit never ceases to awaken in young hearts the desire for holiness and apostolic zeal. You should therefore continue to foster that radical attachment to the person of Jesus Christ, whose attraction inspires them to give their lives completely to him and to the service of the Gospel in the Church. By assisting them, you will help other young people to reflect seriously upon the possibility of a life in the priesthood or the religious life. In so doing, you will strengthen a similar love and single-minded fidelity among those men and women who have already embraced the Lord's call.

The canonization last year of Saint Mary of the Cross MacKillop is another great event in the life of the Church in Australia. Indeed, she is an example of holiness and dedication to Australians and to the Church throughout the world, especially to women religious and to all involved in the education of young people. In circumstances that were often very trying, Saint Mary remained steadfast, a loving spiritual mother to the women and children in her care, an innovative teacher of the young and an energetic role model for all concerned with excellence in education. She is rightly considered by her fellow Australians to be an example of personal goodness worthy of imitation. Saint Mary is now held up within the Church for her openness to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and for her zeal for the good of souls which drew many others to follow in her footsteps. Her vigorous faith, translated into dedicated and patient action, was her gift to Australia; her life of holiness is a wonderful gift of your country to the Church and to the world. May her example and prayers inspire the actions of parents, religious, teachers and others concerned with the good of children, with their protection from harm and with their sound education for a happy and prosperous future.

Saint Mary MacKillop's courageous response to the difficulties she faced throughout her life can also inspire today's Catholics as they confront the new evangelization and serious challenges to the spread of the Gospel in society as a whole. All the members of the Church need to be formed in their faith, from a sound catechesis for children, and religious education imparted in your Catholic schools, to much-needed catechetical programmes for adults. Clergy and religious must also be assisted and encouraged by an ongoing formation of their own, with a deepened spiritual life in the rapidly secularizing world around them. It is urgent to ensure that all those entrusted to your care understand, embrace and propose their Catholic faith intelligently and willingly to others. In this way, you, your clergy and your people will give such an account of your faith by word and example that it will be convincing and attractive. People of good will, seeing your witness, will respond naturally to the truth, the goodness and the hope that you embody.

It is true that yours is a pastoral burden which has been made heavier by the past sins and mistakes of others, most regrettably including some clergy and religious; but the task now falls to you to continue to repair the errors of the past with honesty and openness, in order to build, with humility and resolve, a better future for all concerned. I therefore encourage you to continue to be pastors of souls who, along with your clergy, are always prepared to go one step further in love and truth for the sake of the consciences of the flock entrusted to you (cf.

Mt 5:41), seeking to preserve them in holiness, to teach them humbly and to lead them irreproachably in the ways of the Catholic faith.

Finally, as Bishops, you are conscious of your special duty to care for the celebration of the liturgy. The new translation of the Roman Missal, which is the fruit of a remarkable cooperation of the Holy See, the Bishops and experts from all over the world, is intended to enrich and deepen the sacrifice of praise offered to God by his people. Help your clergy to welcome and to appreciate what has been achieved, so that they in turn may assist the faithful as everyone adjusts to the new translation. As we know, the sacred liturgy and its forms are written deeply in the heart of every Catholic. Make every effort to help catechists and musicians in their respective preparations to render the celebration of the Roman Rite in your Dioceses a moment of greater grace and

beauty, worthy of the Lord and spiritually enriching for everyone. In this way, as in all your pastoral efforts, you will lead the Church in Australia towards her heavenly home under the sign of the Southern Cross.

With these thoughts, dear Brother Bishops, I renew to you my sentiments of affection and esteem, and I commend all of you to the intercession of Saint Mary MacKillop. Assuring you of my prayers for you and for those entrusted to your care, I am pleased to impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of grace and peace in the Lord. Thank you.

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