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Visita "ad limina Apostolorum" dei Presuli della Conferenza Episcopale della Tanzania

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Alle ore 12.30 di questa mattina, il Santo Padre Francesco ha ricevuto in Udienza i Vescovi della Conferenza Episcopale della Tanzania per la visita "ad Limina Apostolorum".

Pubblichiamo di seguito il testo del discorso che il Papa ha consegnato ai Presuli nel corso dell'incontro:

Discorso del Santo Padre

Dear Brother Bishops,

I offer you a warm fraternal welcome on the occasion of your visit *ad Limina Apostolorum*, which is an opportunity to strengthen the bonds of communion between the Church in Tanzania and the See of Peter. I thank Archbishop Ngalalekumtwa for his thoughtful words offered on your behalf and in the name of the priests, men and women religious, and all the lay faithful of your country. I would ask you kindly to assure them of my prayers and spiritual closeness.

The Church in Tanzania is blessed with many gifts for which we must all give thanks to God. I think, in the first place, of the impressive history of missionary work throughout the region. Arriving with a desire to make "the name above every other name" (*Phil 2:9*) known and loved, these Spirit-filled evangelizers laid a firm foundation for the Church which has inspired subsequent generations in their efforts to proclaim the Gospel and build up the Body of Christ. In our own day too, missionary outreach must be "paradigmatic for all the Church's activity" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 15). Building upon the zeal and sacrifices of the first evangelizers, you must always maintain and foster this missionary imperative, so that the Gospel may increasingly permeate every work of the apostolate and shed its light on all areas of Tanzanian society. In this way, a new and dynamic chapter in the great missionary and evangelical history of your country will be written.

The work of evangelization in Tanzania, then, is not merely a remarkable event of the past; no, it happens every day in the Church's pastoral work in parishes, in the liturgy, in the reception of the sacraments, the educational apostolate, health care initiatives, catechesis, and in the lives of ordinary Christians. It is carried out whenever faithful believers stir up the minds and hearts of those who, for whatever reason, are weak in living out the grace

of the Gospel. It happens above all – through words and through integrity of life – by proclaiming Jesus Christ crucified and risen to those who do not know the joy that comes from loving him and surrendering their lives to him. This is the great challenge facing God's people in Tanzania in our day: to give a compelling witness to the loving redemption of humanity by Jesus Christ experienced and celebrated by the community of believers in the Church.

Here I think in a special way of the witness of missionary discipleship (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 119-120) given by workers in the Church's healthcare apostolate, not least in caring for those suffering from HIV/AIDS, and by all who strive diligently to educate people in the area of sexual responsibility and chastity. I also think of all those who devote themselves to the integral development of the poor, and in particular, of destitute women and children. May the Holy Spirit who gave strength, wisdom and holiness to the first missionaries in Tanzania continue to inspire the entire local Church in this vital witness.

Because of the critical importance of their ministry of teaching, sanctifying and governing Christ's flock, the need for holy, well-educated and zealous priests is always great. I join you in expressing gratitude and encouragement for the ministry of your priests. The sacrifices they make, known often only to God, are a source of much grace and holiness. It is your urgent responsibility, as their fathers and brothers in Christ, to ensure that priests receive an adequate human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral formation – not only in the seminary, but throughout their lives (cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 43-59). This will enable them to give themselves more fully to the priestly ministry in fidelity to the promises made at their ordination. This formation must be ongoing; only through daily conversion and growth in pastoral charity will they mature as effective agents of spiritual renewal and Christian unity in their parishes and, like Jesus, gather people together "from every tribe and tongue" (*Rev* 7:9) for the praise and glory of God the Father. As men of deep wisdom and genuine spiritual leaders, priests will be a source of inspiration for their flock, and draw many young men to respond generously to the Lord's call to serve his people in the priesthood.

The indispensable role of the lay faithful in the ongoing evangelization of your country was clearly brought out by two recent ecclesial events: the National Eucharistic Congress of 2012 and the Seminar held to close the Year of Faith. I appreciate your efforts to promote events such as these, which contribute greatly to strengthening the faith among the People of God in Tanzania. A particularly outstanding exercise of the lay apostolate is that of the men and women catechists in your country who labour to pass on the Gospel and the fullness of the Christian life. In your service to the local Church, make every effort to provide catechists with a comprehensive understanding of the Church's doctrine. This will equip them not only to counter the challenges of superstition, aggressive sects and secularism, but even more importantly, to share the beauty and richness of the Catholic faith with others, particularly the young. In fidelity to the mission received at baptism, each member of the Church will then be able to renew the Church and society as a leaven from within. As well-formed lay disciples, they will know how to "imbue culture and human works with a moral value" (*Lumen Gentium*, 36), something greatly needed in our own time.

Dear brothers, the work of evangelization begins in the home. The gift that healthy families represent is felt with particular vitality in Africa. Moreover, the Church's love for, and pastoral solicitude towards the family is at the heart of the new evangelization. As you know, I have called a Synod devoted to the family later this year, the pastoral care of which was a central concern of the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops in 2009. May our encounter today be an incentive to review your common response to that Synod's call for a more energetic apostolate to the family, through uncompromising and selfless spiritual and material assistance (cf. *Africae Munus*, 43). By promoting prayer, marital fidelity, monogamy, purity and humble service of one another within families, the Church continues to make an invaluable contribution to the social welfare of Tanzania, one which, coupled with her educational and healthcare apostolates, will surely foster greater stability and progress in your country. There is scarcely a finer service which the Church can offer than to give witness to our conviction of the sanctity of God's gift of life and to the essential role played by spiritual and stable families in preparing the younger generations to live virtuous lives and to face the challenges of the future with wisdom, courage and generosity.

I am particularly encouraged to know that Tanzania is committed to ensuring the freedom that followers of various religions enjoy to practice their faith. The ongoing protection and promotion of this fundamental human

right strengthens society by enabling believers, in fidelity to the dictates of their conscience and in respect for the dignity and rights of all, to advance social unity, peace and the common good. I am grateful for your ongoing efforts to promote forgiveness, peace and dialogue as you shepherd your people in difficult situations of intolerance and, at times, of violence and persecution. Your prayerful and united leadership – which is already bearing fruit as you confront these challenges together – will continue to show the path to those entrusted to your pastoral care and to the wider society. I urge you also to work with government and civic institutions in this area so as to ensure that the rule of law prevails as an indispensable means for guaranteeing just and pacific social relations. I pray that your example, and that of the entire Church in your country, will continue to inspire all people of good will who long for peace.

With these thoughts, dear brother Bishops, I commend all of you to the intercession of Mary, Mother of the Church, and with great affection I impart my Apostolic Blessing, which I willingly extend to all the beloved priests, religious and lay faithful of your country.

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