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Visita "ad Limina Apostolorum" dei Presuli della Conferenza Episcopale di Zambia

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Alle ore 11 di questa mattina, il Santo Padre Francesco ha ricevuto in Udienza i Vescovi della Conferenza di Zambia, in occasione della visita "ad Limina Apostolorum".

Pubblichiamo di seguito il testo del discorso consegnato dal Papa nel corso dell'incontro:

Discorso del Santo Padre

Dear Brother Bishops,

I welcome you to the City of the Apostles, where you have come as shepherd pilgrims *ad Limina Apostolorum Petri et Pauli*, and I thank Archbishop Mpundu for his gracious words on behalf of all the bishops, priests and people of your country. As Christ our light and our life draws us together as brothers in the Church, may he deepen the ties between the Successor of Peter and the Bishops of Zambia. This time in Rome offers you a fresh opportunity to reflect on the many ways in which the Lord's flock entrusted to you has been growing in Africa. Pray in these days to discern the way ahead in solidarity and fraternity, towards the plentiful harvest (*Jn 10:2*) to which the Holy Spirit is leading you.

Looking back to the beginnings of the Church in Zambia, it is well known that the rich deposit of faith brought by missionary religious from lands overflowing with growth prompted your forebears to respond with their own works of charity, whose effects are felt throughout your country today. Preparing for generations unborn, these spiritual leaders actively planted the word which the Holy Spirit had proposed to them (cf. *1 Cor 3:6*). Despite the sometimes painful meeting of ancient ways with the new hope that Christ the Lord brings to all cultures, the word of faith took deep root, multiplying a hundredfold, and a new Zambian society transformed by Christian values emerged. It is at once evident how plentiful the spiritual harvest in your vast land already is – blessed with Catholic-run clinics, hospitals and schools, many parishes alive and growing across Zambia, a wide diversity of lay ministries, and substantial numbers of vocations to the priesthood. With the whole Church, we can give thanks to God for what he has already accomplished in the people entrusted to your care.

In our own days, Zambians continue to seek a happy and fulfilling future in the Church and in society, despite great challenges which militate against stability in social and ecclesial life, in particular for families. When family

life is endangered, then the life of faith is also put at risk. As you yourselves have recounted, many – especially the poor in their struggle for survival – are led astray by empty promises in false teachings that seem to offer quick relief in times of desperation.

In regard to these difficulties, I am convinced that "the weakening of [family] bonds is particularly serious because the family is the fundamental cell of society, where we learn to live with others despite our differences and to belong to one another; it is also the place where parents pass on the faith to their children" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 66). Be solicitous whether in or out of season, by supporting this "sanctuary of life" (*Africae Munus*, 42) which is the family, for it is here that the Church's well-being in Zambia must grow and be fostered.

I ask you, with your priests, to form strong Christian families, who – by your catechizing – will know, understand and love the truths of the faith more deeply, and thus be protected from those currents which may tempt them to fall away. Affirm Catholic couples in their desire for fidelity in conjugal life and in their yearning to provide a stable spiritual home for their children, helping them to nurture the life of virtue in the family. By so doing, your authentic teaching of the doctrines of the faith will touch the daily life of Zambian households.

I urge you to be close to your young people as they seek to establish and articulate their identity in a disorienting age. Help them to find their purpose in the challenge and joy of co-creation with God that is the vocation to married life, fulfilled in the blessing of children; or indeed in the celibate vocations to the sacred priesthood or religious life, which the Church has been given for the salvation of souls. Encourage young Catholics by living lives of virtue to experience the liberating gift of chastity as adults. I pray that you will foster ever greater cooperation with Zambia's networks of active Catholic youth, who can in turn lead many others into the Church's family.

In a special way invite those who have grown lukewarm and feel lost to return to the full practice of the faith. As pastors of the flock, do not forget to seek out the weakest members of Zambian society, among whom are the materially poor and those afflicted with AIDS; for "the great majority of the poor have a special openness to the faith; they need God and we must not fail to offer them his friendship, his blessing, his word, the celebration of the sacraments and a journey of growth and maturity in the faith" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 200).

Despite all that the Church in Zambia faces, it is a time not to be discouraged but rather to offer the true freedom which only the Lord can give, sustained by the sacraments. I encourage you to remain sensitive as shepherds to the spiritual and human needs of your closest coworkers: never tire of being kind and firm fathers to your priests, helping them resist materialism and the standards of the world, while recognizing their just needs. Continue also to promote the treasure of religious life in your Dioceses, so that outstanding examples may be brought forth of Zambian men and women seeking to love the Lord with undivided hearts.

In this challenging time after the death of President Sata, I invite you to continue working with your political leaders for the common good, deepening your prophetic witness in defence of the poor in order to uplift the lives of the weak (cf. Pastoral Statement of the Zambia Episcopal Conference, "Act Justly and Walk Humbly with Your God", 27 January 2013).

In all things, cooperate with the graces of the Holy Spirit, in unity of belief and purpose. In union with priests, deacons, religious, catechists and lay leaders, irrigate with your corporal and spiritual works of mercy the vineyard of the Lord which stretches across Zambia like the great Zambezi River.

The Church's mission to evangelize never ends: "it is imperative to evangelize cultures in order to inculturate the Gospel... Each culture and social group needs purification and growth" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 69). Then the People of God in Zambia will receive the gift of the Gospel from you with fresh vigour, as you offer them Christ's joy and mercy anew. May their lives conform ever more deeply to the pattern of the Gospel; then the Lord's Kingdom of peace will spread and grow in your beloved nation.

The Lord of the harvest is preparing to send the rains he promises in due season (*Lev 26:4*); for you are cultivating his fields until he returns at harvest time (*Mt 13:30*). Until then, knowing well how much your work

demands personal sacrifice, patience and love, draw on the faith and sacrifice of the Apostles to whose threshold you have come, in order to return strengthened to the Church in Zambia.

Dear Brothers, trusting in the saving grace of Almighty God, and commending you – along with all priests, religious and lay faithful in your Dioceses – to the intercession of Mary "Mother of the Church which evangelizes" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 284), I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of peace and joy in the Risen Lord.

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