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Sommario:

♦ Visita “ad Limina Apostolorum” dei Presuli della Conferenza Episcopale di Namibia e Lesotho

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Il Santo Padre Francesco ha ricevuto questa mattina in Udienza i Vescovi della Conferenza Episcopale di Namibia e Lesotho, in occasione della 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 greet you, the pastors of Lesotho and Namibia, in the grace and peace of God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, on your visit to pray at the threshold of the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul. By this visit you express your desire to deepen the bonds of communion with the Successor of Peter and the See of Rome. I thank Archbishop Lerotholi and Archbishop Nashenda for their kind words offered on your behalf and in the name of all entrusted to your care.

You have come to Rome from the cities, towns and villages of Lesotho and Namibia, lands known for their flourishing Christian faith. The Holy Spirit planted the seeds of faith through the labours and sacrifices of many missionaries, who were sustained equally by generations of indigenous coworkers in the vineyards of the Lord. Your lands often presented great challenges, both environmental and social, but your Christian forebears persevered so that green shoots should spring up “like grass amid waters, like willows by flowing streams” (*Is*

44:4). From the deserts of Namibia to the high peaks of Lesotho, the tall tree of faith grew, giving God's protection and shelter to many souls, nourished as it is by the waters of grace.

Your countries are rightly known for their churches and chapels, parishes, mission stations and outstations, which draw many to a community life centered on prayer and work. Renowned too are your numerous schools at every level, your clinics and hospitals, built with love and faithfulness from the materials of Namibia's soil and Lesotho's mountains. I encourage you to continue supporting and nurturing these great blessings, even when resources are sparse, for the Lord promises that he will not fail to bless us: "I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon your descendants, and my blessing on your offspring" (*Is* 44:3).

I know that your communities face many challenges daily, and I am sure that this weighs heavily on your hearts. Strengthen them in love to overcome selfishness in private or public life; be generous in bringing them the tenderness of Christ where threats to human life occur, from the womb to old age – and I think particularly of those suffering with HIV and AIDS. In all of this, "for their formation in Christian virtues and their growth in holiness" (*Africae Munus*, 109) the faithful entrusted to your care will look to you and your priest coworkers. By your devotion to them, in turn, you will "not only win them to the cause of Christ but also make them protagonists of a renewed African society" (ibid.).

I think too of Christian families fragmented due to employment far away from home, or because of separation or divorce. I urge you to continue offering them help and guidance. Be of fresh resolve in preparing couples for Christian matrimony, and in constantly sustaining families by offering generously the Church's Sacraments – ensuring in a particular way that the Sacrament of mercy is widely available. I thank you for your efforts in promoting healthy family life in the face of distorted views that emerge in contemporary society. May we all help to form families who can be purveyors of peace in the world; for "the family is the best setting for learning and applying the culture of forgiveness, peace and reconciliation" (ibid., 43).

From healthy families will come numerous priestly vocations, families where men have learned "to love inasmuch as they [have been] unconditionally loved... [having learned] respect... justice... the role of authority expressed by parents [and] loving concern for the members who are weaker" (ibid., 42-43). The children of such families will more readily be open to a life of unconditional service to the family of the Church.

In a time of an apparent decrease in vocations to the priesthood and to religious life, it is important to speak openly about the fulfilling and joyful experience of offering one's life to Christ. For when your Christian communities are built up by your own continued example of "living in truth and joy your priestly commitments, celibacy in chastity and detachment from material possessions" (ibid., 111), then vocations to the priesthood and the consecrated life will most certainly abound. Continue, too, the demanding work of guiding, with personal and paternal care, every vocation properly discerned as well as all your priests already ordained, so that with the nourishment of ongoing formation these coworkers in the Lord's fields may be nurtured and sustained throughout their priestly lives. I ask you to convey to them my spiritual closeness and prayerful support.

Careful spiritual attention in developing pastoral plans needs to be offered to the poorest in your societies (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 33); I have found that "whenever our interior life becomes caught up in its own interests and concerns, then there will be no more place for the poor" (ibid., 2). I ask you to be particularly mindful of those most in need in your Churches, entrusting all your initiatives to God's care, for he is "able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that you may always have enough of everything and may provide in abundance for every good work" (*2 Cor* 9:7). In living this way, you will help all the faithful discover the greatest richness: the love of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

I give thanks, with you, to Almighty God for the continued witness and service of so many communities of religious brothers and sisters who are vital to the praying heart of the Church, along with the many committed sodalities and other lay associations in the Church in Lesotho and Namibia. For just as we have relied on them in building up the Church, both materially and spiritually, so now their role becomes ever more indispensable.

I urge you, finally, to persevere as men of deep and constant prayer, in the way of Blessed Joseph Gerard, who listened to the promptings of the Holy Spirit in all matters. Prayer precedes and leads to authentic evangelization. As you know from experience, when the Church summons all Christians to constantly take up anew the task of evangelizing the world, “she is simply pointing to the source of authentic personal fulfilment” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 10); that is, she is showing us the path to our deepest happiness.

Dear Brothers, on returning home may you be like the tree planted by streams of water, yielding fruit in due season, whose leaves do not wither; may you prosper in all that you do (cf. *Ps*1). May your visit here lead you to bring Christ’s healing mercy ever more abundantly to all for whom you have care.

Commending you and the faithful whom you serve in Lesotho and Namibia to the loving intercession of Mary, Mother of the Church, who rekindles our hearts in service of her Son, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of peace and joy in the Risen Lord. To him be glory for ever and ever.

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