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Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Francis in Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste, and Singapore (2 to 13 September 2024) – Holy Mass on the Taci Tolu Esplanade

In the afternoon, after leaving the Apostolic Nunciature, the Holy Father transferred by car to the esplanade of Taci Tolu for the celebration of Holy Mass.

Upon arrival, the Pope watched the performance of a traditional welcome dance typical of Timorese hospitality, and greeted some people with disabilities. At 16.30 (09.30 in Rome) Pope Francis presided over the Eucharistic celebration.

During Holy Mass, after the proclamation of the Gospel, the Pope delivered his homily.

At the end of the celebration, after the words of thanks from the archbishop of Dili, His Eminence Cardinal Virgílio do Carmo da Silva, the Pope toured among the faithful and then returned by car to the Apostolic Nunciature.

Approximately 600,000 faithful participated in the Holy Mass on the esplanade and in the nearby areas.

The following is the homily delivered by Pope Francis during the celebration of Holy Mass, and his impromptu words to the faithful at the end of Mass:

Homily of the Holy Father

“A child has been born for us, a son given to us” (*Is* 9:6).

With these words, in the first reading, the prophet Isaiah addresses the inhabitants of Jerusalem. It was a prosperous time for that city, but sadly also characterized by great moral decadence.

We see much wealth there, but this affluence blinds the powerful, seducing them into thinking that they are self-sufficient, with no need for the Lord, and their conceit leads them to be selfish and unjust. For this reason, despite so much prosperity, the poor are abandoned and go hungry, infidelity is rampant, and religious practice is increasingly reduced to mere formalism. This deceptive façade of a world that at first sight appears to be perfect hides a reality that is much darker, harsher and more cruel. A reality where there is much need for conversion, mercy and healing.

This is why the prophet announces to his fellow citizens a new horizon, which God will open before them: a future of hope, a future of joy, where oppression and war will be banished forever (cf. *Is* 9:1-4). He will make a great light shine upon them (cf. v. 2), which will deliver them from the darkness of sin that oppresses them. Yet he will do so not with the power of armies, weapons or wealth, but through the gift of a son (cf. vv. 6-7).

Let us pause for a moment to reflect on this image: God shines his saving *light* through the *gift of a son*.

In every place, the birth of a son is a shining moment of joy and celebration, and can instil also in us a desire for the good, a renewal of goodness, a return to purity and simplicity. In the presence of a newborn child, even the coldest of hearts is warmed and filled with tenderness. An infant's vulnerability always bears a message so strong that it touches even the most hardened souls, bringing with it feelings and desires for harmony and serenity. Brothers and sisters, the birth of a child indeed brings marvels!

God's closeness comes through a child. God becomes a child, not merely to amaze and move us, but also to open us to the Father's love, and so that we might let ourselves be fashioned by him, so that he may heal our wounds, reconcile our differences and reorder our lives.

How wonderful that here in Timor-Leste there are so many children. Indeed, you are a young country and we can see every corner of your land teeming with life. What a great gift it is that so many children and young people are present, constantly renewing our energy and our lives. Furthermore, this is a sign, since making room for little ones, for children, welcoming them, taking care of them, and making ourselves "small" before God and before one another, are precisely the attitudes that open us to the Lord's action. By becoming like children, we allow God to act in us.

Today, we venerate Our Lady as Queen, that is, the mother of a King, Jesus, who chose to be born small, to make himself our brother, and who asked for the "yes" of an innocent young woman (cf. *Lk* 1:38).

Mary understood this, to the point of choosing to remain small all her life, to make herself ever smaller, serving, praying, withdrawing to make room for Jesus, even when this cost her much.

So, dear brothers and sisters, let us not be afraid to make ourselves small before God, and before each other, let us not be afraid to lose our lives, to give up our time, to revise our schedules and to scale down our plans when necessary, not in order to diminish them but to make them even more beautiful through the gift of ourselves and the acceptance of others.

All of this is well symbolized by two beautiful traditional treasures of this land: the *Kaibauk* and the *Belak*. Both are made of precious metal, which shows how important they are!

The *Kaibauk* represents the horns of a water buffalo and the light of the sun, and can be used as a headdress worn high on the forehead, or placed on the tops of houses. It speaks of strength, energy and warmth, and can represent the life-giving power of God. What is more, through its lofty position on the head and on housetops, it reminds us that with the light of the Lord's word and the power of his grace, we too can cooperate, through our choices and actions, in the sublime plan of redemption.

Complementary to the *Kaibauk* is the *Belak*, which is worn on the chest. This recalls the gentle glow of the moon, which humbly reflects the light of the sun during the night, enveloping everything in a light fluorescence. It

speaks of peace, fertility and sweetness, and symbolizes the tenderness of a mother, who by her delicate loving gestures makes whatever she touches glow with the same light she receives from God.

The *Kaibauk* and *Belak* show the strength and tenderness of father and mother. Indeed, that is how the Lord reveals his kingship, consisting of charity and mercy.

Finally, let us ask together in this Eucharist, as women and men, as Church and as society, that we may reflect in the world the strong and tender light of God's love, of that God who, as we prayed in the Responsorial Psalm, "raises the poor from the dust, and lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes" (*Ps* 113:7-8).

Impromptu words at the end of Holy Mass

Dear brothers and sisters,

I have been thinking a lot about what is the best thing Timor-Leste has? Its sandalwood? Its peaches? These are not the best things. The best thing is its people. I cannot forget the people on the side of the road, with the children. How many children you have! The people, the best thing they have is the smile of their children. And a people that teaches its children to smile is a people that has a future.

But be careful! For I have been told that crocodiles come to some beaches; crocodiles come swimming and have a stronger bite than we can keep at bay. Be careful! Be careful of those "crocodiles" who want to change your culture, who want to change your history. Stay faithful. And do not go near those "crocodiles" because they bite, and they bite hard.

I wish you all peace. I wish you many children: may the smile of this people be its children! Take care of your children; but also take care of your elderly, who are the memory of this land.

Thank you; many thanks for your charity, for your faith. Move forward with hope!

And now let us ask the Lord to bless us all, and then we will sing a hymn to the Virgin Mary.
