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VISITA "AD LIMINA APOSTOLORUM" DEI PRESULI DELLA CONFERENZA EPISCOPALE DELLA COREA

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Pubblichiamo di seguito il discorso che il Santo Padre ha rivolto agli Ecc.mi Presuli della Conferenza Episcopale della Corea, ricevuti questa mattina e incontrati in questi giorni in separate udienze per la Visita "ad Limina Apostolorum":

• DISCORSO DEL SANTO PADRE

Dear Brother Bishops,

1. It is with great affection in the Lord that I welcome you, the Bishops of Korea, on the occasion of your visit *ad Limina Apostolorum*. You have come once more on pilgrimage to the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul, to confess the apostolic faith and to pray for your own episcopal ministry and for the needs of Church in your country. In this meeting we celebrate together the bonds of truth and communion which unite your local Churches with the See of Peter. As you contemplate the witness given by the Apostles *usque ad effusionem sanguinis*, you are able to reflect on your ministry in the light of their teaching and example, and draw fresh inspiration for your work in the service of the Gospel and in the building up of Christ's body, the Church. My mind goes back to my two visits to your country, when I saw for myself how the Church has grown and flourished since the time when the Gospel seed was first sown there over two centuries ago. This year, in fact, you are commemorating the two hundredth anniversary of the first major wave of persecution in Korea, which led to the martyrdom of over three hundred of the faithful. These holy men and women took to heart the words of the Apostle of the Nations: "I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ" (*Phil* 3:8). Korea's first native priest, Saint Andrew Kim Tae-gon, whom I had the joy of canonizing in 1984, urged the faithful to accept persecution since the Church in Korea could be no stranger to the sufferings of Christ and the Apostles. The sacrifice of your martyrs, willingly undergone for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ who had made them his own, as he had Saint Paul (cf. *Phil* 3:12), has indeed borne a rich harvest, and we must pray that it will continue to be a source of pride, hope, strength and inspiration for all Christians throughout the peninsula.

2. Two important events form the background to your present *ad Limina* visit: the Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops and the grace-filled experience of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. Some of you were present at that Assembly, which took place in April and May 1998 and was the occasion for a fruitful and enriching reflection on the challenges posed for evangelization in a continent where Christians form a very small minority. Inspired by the theme: *Jesus Christ the Saviour and his Mission of Love and Service in Asia: "... that they may have life and have it abundantly"* (Jn 10:10), the Synod examined ways "to illustrate and explain more fully the truth that Christ is the one Mediator between God and man and the sole Redeemer of the world" (*Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 38). On the basis of the Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* and following on the experience of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, the task before you now is that of harvesting the fruits of these celebrations and laying solid foundations for a new springtime for Christianity in your own country and throughout the continent.

At the close of the "year of favor" which the Jubilee has been for the entire Church, in the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio ineunte* I offered some thoughts on how we might profit from its many blessings and put the graces received into practice in resolutions and guidelines for action (cf. No. 3). The success of all our initiatives will depend ultimately on their being founded on Christ himself, who continues to accompany the Church on her pilgrim journey "to the close of the age" (Mt 28:20). In a sense, the program to be implemented already exists: it is to be found in the Gospel and the Church's living Tradition. It has its center in Christ himself "who is to be known, loved and imitated, so that in him we may live the life of the Trinity, and with him transform history until its fulfilment in the heavenly Jerusalem" (*Novo Millennio ineunte*, 29). Though it takes account of the circumstances of time and place for the sake of true dialogue and effective communication, this program does not change with shifts in prevailing attitudes. Yours is the responsibility of constantly identifying the features of a pastoral plan adapted to the needs and aspirations of God's people, a plan which will enable all to hear ever more clearly the Good News of Christ and bring the truths and values of the Gospel to bear ever more incisively on the family, on culture, on society itself. The successors of the Apostles should never be afraid of proclaiming the full truth about Jesus Christ, in all its challenging reality and demands, since the truth has an intrinsic power to draw the human heart to all that is good, noble and beautiful.

3. In this regard I am especially pleased to learn of efforts to promote the Biblical apostolate. The availability of a modern Korean translation of the Bible, a project which you undertook for the Bicentenary of the arrival of the faith in your land, makes it possible for all the faithful to have direct access to God's saving word. Specifically to be recommended is the ancient practice of lectio divina as a powerful tool of evangelization since this prayerful reading of Sacred Scripture brings us into contact with "the living word which questions, directs and shapes our lives" (*Novo Millennio ineunte*, 39). In particular, young people should be introduced to the Scriptures – the "school of faith" – from an early age so as to discover the genuine figure of Jesus who loves them, answers their deepest longings, and calls them to follow him with a generous and undivided heart.

By the mandate of Christ, the Bishop is appointed to teach – "in season and out of season" (2 Tim 4:2) – the unchanging faith of the Church, as it is to be applied and lived today. In his Diocese, the Bishop teaches the faith with the authority that comes from episcopal ordination and communion with the College of Bishops under its head (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 22). He teaches in a pastoral way, seeking to shed the light of the Gospel on today's problems and helping the faithful to live fully Christian lives amid the challenges of contemporary society. In this regard, it is important for you to support and encourage the work of theologians as they reflect within the faith on ways of communicating the Christian message ever more effectively and appropriately in the local situation. At the same time you must be concerned to safeguard the authentic interpretation of the Church's teaching and thus ensure that the local Church abides in the truth which alone saves and liberates. Supernatural discernment is required in order to defend "the truth that has been entrusted to you by the Holy Spirit who dwells within" (2 Tim 1:14).

4. In your homeland you face the challenge of an increasingly materialistic mentality which is undermining many of the authentic human values upon which Korean society is traditionally based. This calls for renewed efforts to address the widely-felt crisis of values and to strengthen the sense of the transcendent in the lives of the faithful. Your recent initiatives to promote the Gospel of life through the setting up of a special subcommittee under your Conference's Committee for the Doctrine of the Faith to deal with questions relating to bioethics is commendable, as is your steadfast opposition to abortion, not only because it is a terrible offence against God's gift of life but also because it introduces into society a relativistic attitude to all fundamental moral and ethical principles.

In this as in many other areas of Church life the role of the lay faithful is indispensable. It is highly significant that the faith was brought to your homeland at the end of the eighteenth century by the persistent efforts of committed lay people. Among those who died in the 1801 persecution was Korea's first woman catechist, Columba Kang Wan-suk, who fearlessly promoted the Gospel in Seoul and throughout the country before being executed with four companions who had been converted under her influence. Of the 103 martyrs canonized in 1984, mainly victims of the persecutions of 1839 and 1866, 92 were lay people. What better inspiration for the lay faithful of Korea in their generous commitment to evangelization, catechesis, the promotion of Catholic social doctrine and the work of charity than this witness and heritage! Yours is the task of discerning the gifts of the laity, of promoting among them a deeper awareness of the mission they share in the communion of the Church, and of encouraging them to put their talents to use for the renewal of society and the spreading of a culture based on respect for every human person.

5. Your closest collaborators in the work of evangelization are your priests, called upon at ordination to be true shepherds of the flock, preachers of the Gospel of salvation and worthy ministers of the sacraments. Korea is blessed with a high number of priestly vocations, with pastors whose lives are deeply marked by fidelity to Christ and generous dedication to their brothers and sisters. It is important that the faithful see their priests as men whose minds and hearts are set on the deep things of the Spirit (cf. *Rom* 8:5), that they be men of prayer, committed to their priestly ministry and outstanding in moral uprightness. The new Pontifical Korean College here in Rome is a sign of your resolve to ensure that your priests receive a solid continuing formation, which will help them to bear convincing witness to Christ and to carry out the duties of their ministry with dedication and joy.

I encourage you to give particular attention to the formation of those who will teach in seminaries. Not only should they have a thorough training in the sacred sciences, but also a specific formation in the areas of priestly spirituality, the art of spiritual direction and other aspects of the difficult and delicate task that waits them in the education of future priests (cf. *Ecclesia in Asia*, 43). Once more I send a word of prayerful encouragement to the Korean Foreign Mission Society, asking the Lord to bless its work and grant it an increase of vocations for the vast harvest that lies before the Church in the Third Christian Millennium.

6. The documents of the Second Vatican Council contain numerous references to the importance for the universal Church and for each particular Church of the witness and apostolate of consecrated men and women. Through the observance of the evangelical counsels, they make visible in the Church the form that the Incarnate Word took upon himself during his earthly life (cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 14). They are a sign of the new creation inaugurated by Christ and made possible in us by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit, testifying to the supremacy of God and the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ (cf. *Phil* 3:8). Apart from the various invaluable forms of service which consecrated men and women carry out in works of charity, in the intellectual apostolate, in health-care and other areas of ecclesial activity, their special charism is to offer a response to today's widespread demand for authentic spirituality, which expresses itself in large part as a search for prayer and spiritual direction. I invite you to cherish the consecrated life as a special gift of God to your local communities and to give consecrated men and women the support of your ministry and friendship.

7. Dear Brother Bishops, your native land is often in my prayers. I rejoice whenever I hear of progress in advancing reconciliation, mutual understanding and cooperation among all the members of the Korean family. This is a field of action and service which the Church over which you preside should resolutely pursue day after day, discerning and following the signs which Providence offers. To provide material and spiritual solidarity with the Catholic community and the whole population of North Korea, in appropriate ways and with pastoral charity, will undoubtedly prove a positive step towards reconciliation. I pray that Almighty God will continue to bless the efforts of those who work for the good of all the people of the peninsula.

I thank you once more for your generosity and commitment in carrying out the duties of your episcopal ministry, and for the spiritual communion and support which you have always shown me. To the priests, religious and laity of Korea, I express once again my heartfelt encouragement, and in a special way I pray for the elderly and the sick whose sufferings in union with the Crucified Lord are a source of immense spiritual riches for all the People of God. With these sentiments, I commend all of you to Mary, Mother of the Redeemer, and to her I entrust the needs of the Church in Korea, as well as the joys and difficulties of your ministry. I ask the Holy Spirit to give your Dioceses a new outpouring of grace and energy for the mission still to be accomplished. To each of you and to the members of the Church in your land I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.

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