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VISITA "AD LIMINA APOSTOLORUM" DEI PRESULI DELLA CONFERENZA EPISCOPALE DI INGHILTERRA E GALLES

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Pubblichiamo di seguito il discorso che il Santo Padre Giovanni Paolo II ha rivolto agli Ecc.mi Presuli della Conferenza Episcopale di Inghilterra e Galles, incontrati questa mattina e ricevuti nei giorni scorsi, in separate udienze, in occasione della Visita "ad Limina Apostolorum":

• DISCORSO DEL SANTO PADRE

Your Eminence,
Dear Brother Bishops,

1. "Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord" (*1 Tim* 1:2). With these words of greeting I cordially welcome you, the Bishops of England and Wales. I thank Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor for the good wishes and kind sentiments expressed on your behalf. I warmly reciprocate them and I assure you of my prayers for yourselves and those entrusted to your pastoral care. In "coming to see Peter" (*Gal* 1:18) you strengthen in faith, hope and charity your bonds of communion with the Bishop of Rome. Your first visit *ad Limina Apostolorum* of this new millennium is an occasion to affirm your commitment to make the face of Christ increasingly more visible within the Church and society through consistent witness to the Gospel that is Jesus Christ himself (cf. *Ecclesia in Europa*, 6).

2. England and Wales, despite being steeped in a rich Christian heritage, today face the pervasive advance of secularism. At the root of this situation is the attempt to promote a vision of humanity apart from God and removed from Christ. It is a mentality which exaggerates individualism, sunders the essential link between freedom and truth, and consequently destroys the mutual bonds which define social living. This loss of a sense of God is often experienced as "the abandonment of man" (*ibid.*, 9). Social disintegration, threats to family life, and the ugly spectres of racial intolerance and war, leave many men and women, and especially the young, feeling disoriented and at times even without hope. Consequently it is not just the Church which encounters the disturbing effects of secularism but civic life as well.

Jesus Christ, alive in his Church, enables us to overcome the bewilderment of our age. As Bishops we are called to remain vigilant in our duty to proclaim with clear and passionate certainty that Jesus Christ is the source of hope; a hope that does not disappoint (cf. *Rom* 5:5). The faithful of England and Wales look to you with great expectation to preach and teach the Gospel which dispels the darkness and illuminates the way of life. Daily proclamation of the Gospel and a life of holiness is the vocation of the Church in every time and place. This mandate, which manifests the Church's deepest identity, requires the utmost solicitude. The phenomena of secularism and widespread religious indifference, the decline in vocations to the priesthood and Religious Life, and the grave difficulties experienced by parents in their attempts to catechize their own children, all attest to the vital need for Bishops to embrace their fundamental mission to be authentic and authoritative heralds of the Word (cf. *Pastores Gregis*, 29). For this to be achieved Bishops, called by Christ to be teachers of the truth, "have the obligation of fostering and safeguarding the unity of faith and of upholding the discipline which is common to the whole Church" (*Lumen Gentium*, 23). It is by fidelity to the ordinary Magisterium of the Church, by strict adherence to the discipline of the universal Church, and by positive statements which clearly instruct the faithful, that a Bishop preserves God's people from deviations and defections and guarantees them the objective possibility of professing the true faith without error (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 890).

3. Dear Brothers, your reports clearly indicate that you have taken to heart my profound conviction that the new millennium demands a "new impetus in Christian living" (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 29). If the Church is to satisfy the thirst of men and women for truth and authentic values upon which to build their lives no effort can be spared in finding effective pastoral initiatives to make Jesus Christ known.

In the midst of recurring impulses to division, suspicion and opposition, the great challenge facing us is to make the Church the home and school of communion (cf. *ibid.*, 43), recognizing that she is "a people brought into unity from the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" (*Lumen Gentium*, 4). Thus it is of great importance that the catechetical and religious education programmes which you have introduced should continue to deepen the faithful's understanding and love of Christ and his Church. Authentic pedagogy on prayer, persuasive catechesis on the meaning of liturgy and the importance of the Sunday Eucharist, and promotion of the frequent practice of the Sacrament of Reconciliation (cf. Congregation for the Clergy: Instruction *The Priest, Pastor and Leader of the Parish Community*, 27) will do much to meet this pastoral goal and enkindle in the hearts of your people the joy and peace deriving from participation in the Church's life and mission.

4. Integral to the success of your programmes of pastoral renewal is the role of priestly ministry. The Church needs humble and holy priests whose daily journey of conversion will inspire the entire People of God to the holiness to which it is called (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 9). Firmly grounded in a personal relationship of deep communion and friendship with Jesus the Good Shepherd, the priest not only will find sanctification for himself but will become a model of holiness for the people he is called to serve. Assure your priests that the Christian faithful – indeed society at large – depend upon and are greatly appreciative of them. I am confident in this regard that you will show them your special affection by accompanying them as fathers and brothers along all the stages of their ministerial life (cf. *Pastores Gregis*, 47).

Similarly, Religious Priests, Brothers and Sisters need to be encouraged as they too seek to enrich ecclesial communion by their cooperative presence and ministry in your Dioceses. As a gift to the Church, the consecrated life lies at her very heart, manifesting the deep beauty of the Christian vocation to selfless, sacrificial love. Your recent endeavours to promote a "culture of vocation" will certainly become a welcome sign of the treasure of the various states of ecclesial life which together exist "that the world may believe" (*Jn* 17:21).

As a priority in your response to the call for a new evangelization, I am heartened to learn of your resolute efforts to bring further energy to youth ministry. The growth of groups such as "Youth 2000" and the development of university chaplaincy programmes are evidence of the desire of many young people to share in the Church's life. As ministers of hope, Bishops must build the future together with those to whom the future is entrusted (cf. *Pastores Gregis*, 53). Offer them an integral Christian formation and challenge them to follow Christ. You will find their enthusiasm and generosity exactly what is needed to promote a spirit of renewal not just among themselves but in the entire Christian community.

5. Evangelization of culture is a central aspect of the new evangelization, for "at the heart of every culture lies the attitude man takes to the greatest mystery: the mystery of God" (*Centesimus Annus*, 24). As Bishops, you rightly seek to find ways for the truth of Christ to be given due consideration in the public arena. In this regard, I recognize the fine contribution of your pastoral letters and statements on matters of concern in your society. I urge you to continue to ensure that such statements give full and clear expression to the whole of the Church's magisterial teaching. Of particular concern is the need to uphold the uniqueness of marriage as a lifelong union between a man and a woman in which as husband and wife they share in God's loving work of creation. Equating marriage with other forms of cohabitation obscures the sacredness of marriage and violates its precious value in God's plan for humanity (cf. *Familiaris Consortio*, 3).

Without doubt a primary factor in the shaping of today's culture is the mass media. The fundamental moral requirement of all communication is that it should respect and serve the truth. Your efforts to assist those working in this field to exercise their responsibility are commendable. Though these efforts may at times meet with resistance, I encourage you to endeavour to work together with the men and women of the media. Invite them to join you in breaking down barriers of mistrust and in striving to bring peoples together in understanding and respect.

6. Finally, within the context of the evangelization of culture, I wish to acknowledge the fine contribution of your Catholic schools both to enriching the faith of the Catholic community and to promoting excellence within civic life in general. Recognizing the profound changes that affect the world of education, I encourage teachers, lay and Religious, in their primary mission of ensuring that those who have been baptized "become daily more appreciative of the gift of faith which they have received" (*Gravissimum Educationis*, 2). While religious education, the heart of any Catholic school, is today a challenging and taxing apostolate, there are also many signs of a desire among young people to learn about the faith and to practise it with vigour. If this awakening in faith is to grow, we need teachers with a clear and precise understanding of the specific nature and role of Catholic education. This must be articulated at every level if our young people and their families are to experience the harmony between faith, life and culture (cf. Congregation for Catholic Education, *Consecrated Persons and their Mission in Schools*, 6). Here I would make a special appeal to your Religious not to abandon the school apostolate (cf. *Pastores Gregis* 53) and indeed to renew their commitment to serve also in schools situated in poorer areas. In places where much exists to lure youth away from the path of truth and genuine freedom, the consecrated person's witness to the evangelical counsels is an irreplaceable gift.

7. Dear Brothers, with fraternal affection I share these reflections with you and assure you of my prayers as you seek to make the face of Christ ever more recognizable in your communities. The message of hope which you proclaim will not fail to evoke fresh fervour and a renewed commitment to Christian life. United in our love of the Lord and inspired by the example of the newly beatified Mother Teresa of Calcutta, let us go forward in hope! With these sentiments I commend you to Mary, Star of the New Evangelization, that she may sustain you in pastoral wisdom, strengthen you in fortitude and enkindle in your hearts love and compassion. To you and to the priests, deacons, Religious, and lay faithful of your Dioceses I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.

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