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BRASIL - APARECIDA - 12.05.2007

Sanctuary
Rosary

Official translation

My Venerable Brothers in the College of Cardinals,
in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Beloved Religious and all of you who have lovingly followed Christ in response to sound of his voice,
Dear Seminarians, preparing for the priestly ministry,
Dear Members of Ecclesial Movements and all you lay people who bring the power of the Gospel into the world of work and culture, in the heart of your families and your parishes!

1. Just as the Apostles, together with Mary, “went up to the upper room” and there, “with one accord devoted themselves to prayer” (*Acts* 1:13-14), so too we are gathered here today at the Shrine of Our Lady of Aparecida, which at this time is our “upper room” where Mary, Mother of the Lord, is in our midst. Today it is she who leads our meditation; it is she who teaches us to pray. It is she who shows us the way to open our minds and hearts to the power of the Holy Spirit, who comes to fill the whole world.

We have just prayed the rosary. Through these sequences of meditations, the divine Comforter seeks to initiate us in the knowledge of Christ that issues forth from the clear source of the Gospel text. For her part, the Church of the third millennium proposes to offer Christians the capacity for “knowledge—according to the words of Saint Paul—of God’s mystery, of Christ, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (*Col* 2:2-3). Mary Most Holy, the pure and immaculate Virgin, is for us a school of faith destined to guide us and give us strength on the path that leads us to the Creator of Heaven and Earth. The Pope has come to Aparecida with great joy so as to say to you first of all: “Remain in the school of Mary.” Take inspiration from her teachings, seek to welcome and to preserve in your hearts the enlightenment that she, by divine mandate, sends you from on high.

How beautiful it is to be gathered here in the name of Christ, in faith, in fraternity, in joy, in peace and in prayer, together with “Mary, the mother of Jesus” (*Acts* 1:14). How beautiful it is, my dear Priests, Deacons, Consecrated men and women, Seminarians and Christian families, to be here in the National Shrine of Our Lady of Aparecida, which is God’s Dwelling-place, the House of Mary and the House of the Brothers; and in the coming days it is also to serve as the setting for the Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean. How beautiful it is to be here in this Marian Basilica, towards which, at this time, the gaze and the hopes of the Christian world are turned, especially for the Christians of Latin America and the Caribbean!

2. I am glad to be here with you, in your midst! The Pope loves you! The Pope greets you affectionately! He is praying for you! And he implores the Lord’s choicest blessings upon the Movements, Associations and new ecclesial realities, a living expression of the perennial youth of the Church! Be truly blessed! From here I address my truly affectionate greeting to the families who are gathered here to represent all the dearly beloved Christian families present throughout the world. I rejoice especially with you and I offer you an embrace of peace.

I am grateful for the welcome and the hospitality of the Brazilian people. Ever since my arrival I have been received with great affection! The various manifestations of appreciation and the greetings show how much you love, esteem and respect the Successor of the Apostle Peter. My Predecessor, the Servant of God John Paul II, mentioned on numerous occasions your affability and your spirit of fraternal welcome. He was completely right!

3. I greet the dear priests who are present, and I keep in my thoughts and prayers all the priests spread throughout the world, especially those in Latin America and the Caribbean, including the *Fidei donum* priests. What great challenges, what difficult situations you have to face, with such generosity, self-denial, sacrifices and renunciations! Your faithfulness in the exercise of the ministry and the life of prayer, your search for holiness, your total self-giving to God at the service of your brothers and sisters, as you expend your lives and energy in order to promote justice, fraternity, solidarity and sharing—all this speaks powerfully to my pastoral heart. The witness of a priestly life well lived brings nobility to the Church, calls forth admiration among the faithful, and is a source of blessings for the community; it is the best way to promote vocations, the most authentic invitation to other young people to respond positively to the Lord’s call. It is true collaboration in building the Kingdom of God!

I thank you sincerely and I encourage you to continue living in a manner worthy of the vocation you have received. May the missionary fervour, the passion for an increasingly contemporary approach to evangelization, the authentic apostolic spirit and the zeal for souls always be present in your lives! My affection, my prayers and my thanks go also to the elderly and infirm priests. Your conformation to Christ Suffering and Risen is the most fruitful apostolate. Many thanks!

4. Dear Deacons and Seminarians, you have a special place in the Pope's heart, and so I extend to you too my most fraternal and heartfelt greetings. Your exuberance, enthusiasm, idealism and encouragement to face new challenges boldly serve to give the People of God a renewed openness, make the faithful more dynamic and help the community to grow, to progress, and to become more trusting, joyful and optimistic. I thank you for the witness that you bear, working together with your Bishops in the pastoral activities of your dioceses. Always keep before your eyes the figure of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who "came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mt 20:28). Be like the first deacons of the Church: men of good reputation, filled with the Holy Spirit, with wisdom and with faith (cf. Acts 6:3-5). And you, seminarians, give thanks to God for the call that he addresses to you. Remember that the Seminary is the cradle of your vocation and the first place where you experience communal life (cf. *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Priests*, 32). I ask you, with God's help, to be holy faithful and happy priests in the service of the Church!

5. I now turn my gaze and my attention to you, dear consecrated men and women, gathered here in the Shrine of the Mother, Queen and Patron of the Brazilian people, and also to those who are spread throughout the whole world.

Dear religious men and women, you are an offering, a present, a divine gift that the Church has received from her Lord. I give thanks to God for your lives and for the witness that you offer the world of faithful love for God and for your brethren. This unreserved, totally, definitive, unconditional and impassioned love is manifested in silence, in contemplation, in prayer and in the most varied activities that you undertake in your religious families, in favour of humanity and especially of the poorest and most abandoned. All this calls forth in the hearts of the young the desire to follow Christ the Lord more closely and radically, and to offer their lives so as to bear witness before the men and women of our day to the fact that God is Love, and that it is worth allowing oneself to be conquered and entranced in order to devote one's life exclusively to him (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, 15).

Religious life in Brazil has always been important and has had a key role in the work of evangelization, from the very beginnings of the colonial era. Only yesterday, I had the great joy of presiding at the eucharistic celebration which included the canonization of Saint Antônio de Sant'Ana Galvão, a Franciscan priest and religious and the first saint to have been born in Brazil. Alongside him, another admirable witness to the consecrated life is Saint Pauline, foundress of the Little Sisters of the Immaculate Conception. I could quote many other examples. May all of them together serve as an incentive to you to live out your total consecration. God bless you!

6. Today, on the eve of the opening of the Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, at which it will be my pleasure to preside, I want to tell each of you how important it is to maintain our sense of belonging to the Church, which leads us to grow and to mature as brothers and sisters, children of the one God and Father. My dear men and women of Latin America, I know that you have a great thirst for God. I know that you follow the Lord Jesus who said: "No one comes to the Father, but by me" (Jn 14:6). The Pope therefore wants to say to all of you: *The Church is our home! This is our home!* In the Catholic Church we find all that is good, all that gives grounds for security and consolation! Anyone who accepts Christ, "the way, the truth and the life" in his totality, is assured of peace and happiness, in this life and in the next! For this reason, the Pope has come here to pray and to bear witness with you all: *It is worth being faithful, it is worth persevering in our faith!* The coherence of the faith also requires, however, a solid doctrinal and spiritual formation, which thus contributes to building a more just, humane and Christian society. The Catechism of the Catholic Church, together with its abridged version published under the title of "Compendium", will be of help here because of the clear notions it provides concerning our faith. Let us ask straight away that the coming of the Holy Spirit may be for all people like a new Pentecost, so that it may illumine our hearts and our faith with the light that comes down from above.

7. It is with great hope that I turn to all of you assembled here within this majestic Basilica, and to all who took part in the Holy Rosary from outside, to invite you to become profoundly missionary and to bring the Good News of the Gospel to every point of the compass in Latin America and in the world.

Let us ask the Mother of God, Our Lady of Aparecida, to protect the lives of all Christians. May she, who is the Star of Evangelization, guide our steps along the path towards the heavenly Kingdom:

*"Our Mother, protect the Brazilian and Latin American family!
Guard under your protective mantle the children of this beloved land that welcomes us,
As the Advocate with your Son Jesus, give to the Brazilian people constant peace and full prosperity,
Pour out upon our brothers and sisters throughout Latin America a true missionary ardour, to spread faith and hope,
Make the resounding plea that you uttered in Fatima for the conversion of sinners become a reality that transforms
the life of our society,
And as you intercede, from the Shrine of Guadalupe, for the people of the Continent of Hope, bless its lands and its
homes,
Amen."*
