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**PAPUA NEW GUINEA – Vanimo – 08.09.2024 – 15.30**

**Meeting with the Faithful of the Diocese of Vanimo**

*Esplanade in front of Holy Cross Cathedral*

**Address of the Holy Father**

**Official translation**

Dear brothers and sisters, good afternoon!

I thank the Bishop for his words. I greet the Authorities, priests, consecrated men and women, missionaries, catechists, young people, the faithful – some of whom have travelled here from very far away – and you, dear children! Thank you Maria Joseph, Steven, Sister Jaisha Joseph, David and Maria for what you have shared. I am happy to meet you in this wonderful, young and missionary land!

As we heard, since the middle of the nineteenth century, the mission here has never ceased. Consecrated men and women, catechists and lay missionaries have not stopped preaching the word of God and offering help to their brothers and sisters through pastoral care, education, healthcare and many other ways. They have faced many difficulties in order to be an instrument “of peace and love” for all, as Sister Jaisha Joseph told us.

As a result, churches, schools, hospitals and missionary centres all around us testify that Christ came to bring salvation to all, so that each person may flourish in all his or her beauty for the sake of the common good (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 182).

You are “experts” in beauty here, because you are surrounded by it! You live in a magnificent land, enriched by a great variety of plants and birds. One cannot help but be amazed by the colours, sounds and scents, as well as the grandiose spectacle of nature bursting forth with life, all evoking the image of Eden!

The Lord entrusts this richness to you as a sign and an instrument, so that you too may live united in harmony with him and with your brothers and sisters, respecting our common home and looking after one another (cf. *Message for the Fifth World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation*, 1 September 2019).

Looking around us, we see the “sweetness” of nature. Yet when we look to ourselves, we realize that there is an even more beautiful sight: that which grows in us when we love one another, as David and Maria witnessed to when speaking of their journey as a couple joined together by the Sacrament of Matrimony. Indeed, our mission is precisely to spread the beauty of the Gospel of Christ everywhere through loving God and our brothers and sisters (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 120)!

In carrying out this mission, Steven told us how some of you face long journeys to reach the most distant communities, sometimes leaving your homes behind. You are doing something beautiful, and it is important that you are not left alone. The entire community needs to support this effort, so that you can carry out your service serenely, especially when having to reconcile the demands of the mission with family responsibilities.

However, there is also another way in which we can help, and that is for each of us to be missionaries where we live (cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Decree *Ad Gentes*, 23): at home, at school, in the workplace, so that everywhere – in the forests, villages and cities – the beauty of the landscape is matched by the beauty of a community where people love one another. Jesus taught us this when he said, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (*Jn* 13:35; cf. *Mt* 22:35-40).

In this way, we will increasingly form a great orchestra – which Maria Joseph, our violinist, likes so much – able with its notes to “recompose” rivalries, to overcome divisions – personal, family and tribal –, to drive out fear, superstition and magic from people’s hearts, to put an end to destructive behaviours such as violence, infidelity, exploitation, alcohol and drug abuse, evils which imprison and take away the happiness of so many of our brothers and sisters, even in this country.

Let us remember that love is stronger than all this and its beauty can heal the world, because it has its roots in God (cf. *Catechesis*, 9 September 2020). Let us spread and defend it, even when doing so may lead to misunderstandings and opposition. Blessed Peter To Rot, spouse, father, catechist and martyr of this land gave witness to love by word and example. He gave his life precisely to defend the unity of the family in the face of those who wanted to undermine its foundations.

Dear friends, after visiting your country, many tourists return home saying they have seen “paradise”. They usually refer to the natural beauty they enjoyed. We know, however, that this is not the greatest treasure here. There is a more beautiful and fascinating treasure that is found in your hearts and that manifests itself in the charity with which you love each other.

The most precious gift you can share with everyone is to make Papua New Guinea famous not only for its variety of plant and animal life, its enchanting beaches and clear sea, but famous above all for the good people you meet here. I say this especially to you, children, with your contagious smiles and your exuberant joy, which spreads out in every direction. You are the most beautiful image that visitors can take with them and keep in their hearts!

I encourage you, then, to continue to beautify this happy land with your presence as a loving Church. I bless you and pray for you. And I ask you also to pray for me. Thank you.

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