



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO MALTA

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO PRIESTS, RELIGIOUS AND LAY PEOPLE OF MALTA

*Cathedral of Victoria
Saturday, 26 May 1990*

Dear Bishop Cauchi,

My Brothers and Sisters, "Praised be Jesus Christ". 1. It is with great joy that I repeat these words in your midst today, for it is in the name of Christ that I come to Malta as a pastor and pilgrim. To the Church in Gozo I bring the love and greetings of all God's people throughout the world, for as members of Christ's Body we all are united in a living bond of charity and peace; we all are one in praising Christ the Head through the power of the Holy Spirit, to the glory of God the Father. I am deeply grateful to Bishop Cauchi for his kind words of welcome, and to all of you for coming here today to be with the Pope in *this magnificent Cathedral dedicated to the Assumption of Our Lady into Heaven*. This Mother Church of Gozo and the other beautiful churches for which your Diocese is known raise our minds and hearts to the eternal beauty that is God. They inspire prayer and contemplation of the mysteries of faith. But without you— the People of God who form this local Church— *without your living faith, these buildings, for all their beauty, would remain empty and lifeless*. They are only outward signs of the far deeper reality which Saint Paul had in mind when he wrote: " *You are God's building* " (1 Cor. 3, 9); " *You are built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit* " (Eph. 2, 19-22). 2. Dear friends, your presence here today expresses both *the unity and the diversity of the spiritual temple* that you are. The whole Diocese is represented here: both clergy and people together with their Bishop. It is precisely out of a variety of ministries, charisms and states of life that you are "*joined together*" *by the Holy Spirit* in preaching the Gospel, professing the Creed, celebrating the sacraments, and in striving to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Cfr. *Matth. 5, 13-14*). Indeed, as the Second Vatican

Council teaches: "It has pleased God to make people holy and to save them, not merely as individuals without any mutual bonds, but by making them into a single people, a people which acknowledges him in truth and serves him in holiness" (*Lumen Gentium*, 9). I give thanks today for the *fidelity with which your local Church "acknowledges God and serves him"* in the Catholic Faith. You can all be proud of your strong religious traditions, the large number of priests and religious, the many Catholic initiatives in the fields of education, charity and social services, the various lay movements, as well as the increasing lay involvement in diocesan and parish life. In all of these ways the Church in Gozo is "built into ... a dwelling place of God in the Spirit" (*Eph. 2, 22*). Saint Paul remarks that "upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets "Christians" *grow* into a holy temple in the Lord" (Cfr. *Ibid. 2, 20*). Growth is the sign of life. As the spiritual heirs of those whom the great Apostle evangelized in Malta soon after the birth of Christianity, you must *renew God's spiritual temple through constant conversion as individuals and as a community in response to the challenges of today*. Having been entrusted with the Good News of salvation, you will want to do everything possible to live it to the full, and to share it with others. This is the work of evangelization, the great mission which Christ entrusted to the first Apostles and which he now entrusts to you.

3. What does *evangelization* entail? In Gozo the task is not so much to bring the Gospel to people who have never heard of it, as *to live the Gospel* ever more perfectly and fully, so that the weak, the alienated and the sceptical may not turn from Christ but embrace him and his gift of salvation. In the words of the Apostolic Exhortation "Evangelii Nuntiandi", the experience of intimate fellowship among church members like yourselves "only acquires its full meaning when it becomes a witness, when it evokes admiration and conversion, and when it becomes the preaching and proclamation of the Good News" (Pauli VI *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 15). Nor does evangelization come to an end even when a whole society has accepted Christianity. Without the "growth" of which Saint Paul speaks, religion can quickly be reduced to an empty tradition. In the words of our Lord and Master, a tree is known by its fruits (Cfr. *Luc. 6, 44*), and thus *a truly Christian society will bear the good fruits of the Spirit*, that is, "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (*Gal. 5, 22-23*), as well as compassion and mutual forgiveness (Cfr. *Col. 3, 12-13*). Although the practice of these virtues begins with individuals, the goal of evangelization is to weave them *into the very fabric of society and social institutions*: in the family, education, politics, the workplace, and in every sector of life.

4. Brothers and sisters, many of you already play an important part in your diocese and your parishes, and in society as well. You have *responded generously to the needs of the Church in Gozo, and even abroad* through the work of the missionaries whose relatives are here today. I offer a special greeting to these families and to all of you who further the Church's life and mission by acting as extraordinary ministers of Communion to the sick, as members of parish councils, as members of associations engaged in various apostolates, and in many other ways too. I also wish to greet the priests present who, in cooperation with Bishop Cauchi, minister to the Lord's flock, as loving shepherds and zealous leaders of the apostolate. To all of you I offer an *invitation to rededicate yourselves* with fresh vigour to the great task of evangelization. I urge you to ask yourselves as individuals and as a local Church: how can the healing and ennobling power of the Gospel be brought to bear on life in Malta today? *In what ways is Christ absent* in the lives of individuals and

in the life of society? What more can be done to *christianize consciences* and to bring the light of the Gospel to human and social problems, particularly for the benefit of the poor and the troubled? How can the gifts of the Spirit be made to shine forth ever more brightly within the Church as a beacon to others, especially the young? *It is by meeting these challenges that the true beauty of God's house increases* in you midst: the "holy temple into which you are built as a dwelling place of God in the Spirit" (Cfr. *Eph. 2, 21*). Yes, dear friends, you are the "living stones" (Cfr. *1 Petr. 2, 5*), of a spiritual building which exceeds in splendour anything that human art or ingenuity can devise. It is *a masterpiece of the Holy Spirit*, who invites your cooperation through words and deeds worthy of your Christian calling.⁵ Upon each of you I invoke the Spirit's gift of wisdom, so that you may discern ever more clearly *the significance of your vocation and the obligations of your mission for the Church and the world today*. With great affection I impart my Apostolic Blessing to you and your loved ones, both near and far. "Praised be Jesus Christ".

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