



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF MALTA
ON THEIR «AD LIMINA» VISIT**

Saturday, 11 December 1982

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

1. It is a joy for me to welcome you today, for in you I greet the whole Church in Malta. I greet the People of God in their long religious history, with their wonderful heritage of devotion to Mary the Mother of God. In you I greet all the categories of the faithful, especially the poor in your midst, and all those who minister to the poor, assist them, and work for their spiritual and material well-being in the charity of Jesus Christ. In you I greet not only the individual members of the ecclesial community but the Church in its entirety, since you are, as Bishops and therefore as successors of the Apostles, *the authentic and authoritative representatives of the Church in Malta*. If it is true - as it is - that the universal Church is built on Peter, it is also true that the household of God is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone" (*Eph. 2, 20*). My cordial and affectionate greeting goes also to your elder brother in the faith, Archbishop Gonzi, whom I assure once again of my prayerful remembrance.

2. Truly, in you, venerable Brothers, I embrace the Church in its fullness; in you I see everyone represented here today: *the entire community of the redeemed*, bearing still the weaknesses of humanity and the effects of sin, being constantly in need of reconciliation, but already assured of final victory over sin and death because of the redemptive power of the blood of Christ, the Lamb of God. In our meeting today we celebrate the mystery of the pilgrim people of God: it is at one and the same time the mystery of God's presence among us, the mystery of *Christ's headship over us, and the mystery of our discipleship* in him. The unity of the whole Body of Christ, clergy, religious and laity, with differing roles of service, is manifested and reinforced in your unity with me and with the universal Church.

3. I wish now to assure you of something that you already know but which is worth repeating: *I am close to you* in all your labours for the Gospel, and I deeply appreciate your dedication to your apostolic ministry. I am close to you in your pastoral solicitude for Malta, avoiding as you rightly do activities of a purely political nature, and proclaiming the word of God in all its relevance for each individual and for society itself. I am your Brother and fellow Apostle who share with you *the serene and tranquil moments* of your apostolate as you announce in Christ the Saviour the good tidings of great joy to all the people (Cfr. *Luc. 2, 10*).

But I am also close to you *in the difficulties and obstacles* that you encounter, in the griefs and pastoral anxieties that are yours as you seek to be faithful to Jesus Christ, and as you seek to be faithful to the people of Malta by exhorting them to maintain that Christian cultural heritage which is theirs: the Maltese heritage of *popular religious devotion*, which expresses an awareness of God and a radical dependence on his providence. You also have my full prayerful support as you serve the true interests of your people by insisting on the dignity of *the Maltese family*, based, as it is and as it must always be, on the indissoluble union of husband and wife. This indissoluble union deserves for ever the esteem, support and protection of a Christian society conscious of its responsibilities to God and to its members. And in all your efforts to proclaim *the sanctity and inviolability of human life* and the dignity of every man, woman and child, you must always remember that you are not alone: millions and millions of people of good will round the world support your cause, and the Lord of history will himself vindicate your fidelity to his eternal plan of life. As you rightly proclaim the need to provide for the religious education of your fellow-citizens and of Malta's future leaders, you pay homage to a society conscious of its cultural identity and sensitive to its Christian nationhood.

4. Your *ad Limina visit* gives me the appropriate opportunity to extend to the whole ecclesial community of Malta the invitation *to unite around the persons of the Bishops*. My invitation is the echo of the Lord's words to the disciples: "He who hears you hears me" (*Luc. 10, 16*). The Second Vatican Council intensely desired that unity with the Bishops of the Church should be enacted at every level in the community: between the Bishops and the clergy, the Bishops and religious, and the Bishops and the laity; and all of these groups with each other and with the Bishops. The call for unity with the Bishops is *a call to serve the "good of souls"* in a community of salvation in which everyone together must acknowledge the work of the Redeemer, strive to accept it with personal faith, making it effectively available to others: "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (*Rom. 10, 9*). At the same time, unity of wills and action is a great means for presenting all the individual exigencies of Christ's saving message.

5. In particular today I wish to encourage the primary collaborators of the Order of Bishops - *all your priests*, both diocesan and religious. In the name of the Lord I thank them for their generous partnership with you and with me in the Gospel. I likewise ask them to make constant effort to discover vocations to the priesthood and religious life, offering their own example of holiness,

pastoral orientation and fidelity to the Church's magisterium.

6. Through you I extend my thanks to all those who work together with you in the cause of the Catholic education of the youth Christ himself is looking for other zealous apostles of catechism and I wish to commend all those who individually or in associations have given themselves *to catechesis or to the Christian formation of the young*. May the Lord himself bless all your initiatives and pastoral endeavours in this field; and may the publication of the Maltese catechetical texts be of special effectiveness in communicating Christ and his undiluted message of salvation.

It is my prayer that the Lord will sustain you in your zealous efforts to maintain *the Catholic schools*, and that all the difficulties will be overcome for the good of the whole Maltese nation, which benefits immensely from their contribution. At every level may these schools always be instruments, at the service of parents and of the community, of true evangelization, offering encouragement to spiritual growth and human advancement to the pupils and students, through the example of the teachers, and the shared experience of prayer and Catholic doctrine faithfully presented.

7. In the building up of the local Churches in unity, the laity have an irreplaceable contribution to make. The authentic witness of Christian living has besides an incomparable value for evangelization. Through the fidelity of the laity and their active collaboration with the priests and the Bishops, the Church grows to the fullness of Christ. *Unity with the Bishops* is the guarantee of effectiveness for all the lay apostolate, which, in the words of the Second Vatican Council, is "a participation in the saving mission of the Church" (*Lumen Gentium*, 33). In its turn, the saving mission of the Church is the very saving mission of Christ, who, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, lives on in the Church, for the glory of the Father.

My encouragement goes to *the religious of Malta*, asking them to continue generously in their special vocation of bearing witness to the holiness of the Church through consecration in chastity, poverty and obedience. "And I am sure that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (*Phil.* 1, 6).

To all the faithful of Malta who are living the mystery of Christ in the communion of his Church I send my Apostolic Blessing with the expression of my love in Christ Jesus. With confidence in her maternal intercession I commend you all to Mary, being convinced that she does indeed *preside over the destiny of the Maltese people* at this juncture of history as at every other. Through her intercession may it prove to be an hour of reconciliation, unity and peace for Malta.

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