



The Holy See

FAREWELL CEREMONY

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II

Gudja International Airport, 9 May 2001

*Mr President,
Mr Prime Minister,
Your Excellencies,
Beloved People of Malta,*

1. As the Successor of Peter I must go back to Rome, the See of Peter, and to my duties as Pastor of the Universal Church.

But I shall not forget this visit to the Maltese Islands. Above all I shall not forget the Maltese people. *Thank you for being a part of my Jubilee Pilgrimage in the footsteps of Saint Paul!* In the "geography of salvation"!

At the end of my first visit, I told you that on my return to Rome I would tell the Apostle Paul that the Maltese were "a good Catholic people". Now, I shall tell your Patron that you are still doing what he wanted: "fighting the good fight of the faith; taking hold of the eternal life to which you were called" (*1 Tim 6:12*), just as Blessed Dun Gorg, Blessed Ignatius and Blessed Adeodata did. I leave you their example to follow, and I commend you to their intercession.

2. Thank you, Mr President, for your personal kindness during my all too brief visit. My gratitude goes also to the Prime Minister and the Government, to the Armed Forces and the Police Force, and to all who have assisted this pilgrimage in any way. I know that you have done this with sacrifice and love. I thank you from my heart.

My visit has been a moment of intense communion with Archbishop Mercieca, Bishop Cauchi and Bishop Depasquale, and with the priests, religious and lay faithful. To the Churches in Malta and Gozo I say only this: be faithful to Saint Paul, your father in faith on these Islands, remain in

steadfast union with Peter and with the Universal Church. *In this way you will be ever faithful to Christ.*

3. Malta is at the centre of the Mediterranean. You therefore have a unique vocation to be builders of bridges between the peoples of the Mediterranean basin, between Africa and Europe. The future of peace in the world depends on strengthening dialogue and understanding between cultures and religions. Continue in your traditions of hospitality, and continue in your national and international commitment on behalf of freedom, justice and peace.

4. As my Jubilee Pilgrimage comes to an end, I solemnly entrust to Almighty God's loving protection the peoples of the places I have visited. In the places linked to the Two Thousandth Anniversary of the Saviour's birth I have hoped and prayed for a *great renewal of faith among Christians*. I have wished to encourage believers and all people of good will *to defend life, to promote respect for the dignity of every human being, to safeguard the family against so many present-day threats, to open their hearts to the world's poor and exploited, and to work for an international order built on respect for the rule of law and on solidarity with the less fortunate.*

This is also the task and the ideal I leave to you, beloved people of Malta.

In the Acts of the Apostles, Saint Luke writes that the Maltese "honoured [Saint Paul and his companions] with many marks of respect, and when [they] sailed they put on board the provisions [they] needed" (Acts 28:10). Spiritually I have had this same experience, and I go away praising God in my heart for all of you.

Thank you, Malta.

Il-Bambin iberikkom ilkoll! May God bless you all!