



The Holy See

BENEDICT XVI

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Saint Peter's Square
Wednesday, 21 April 2010

Apostolic Journey to Malta

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As you know, last Saturday and Sunday I made an [Apostolic Journey to Malta](#) on which I would like to reflect briefly today. The occasion of my Pastoral Visit was the 1,950th anniversary of St Paul's shipwreck off the coast of the Maltese Archipelago and his stay in those islands for about three months. The event can be dated to about the year AD 60 and is recounted with a wealth of detail in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles (chapters 27-28). Like St Paul, I too experienced the warm welcome of the Maltese truly extraordinary and for this reason once again express my deep and cordial gratitude to the President of the Republic, to the Government and to the other State Authorities. I also extend my fraternal thanks to the Country's Bishops, together with all those who collaborated in organizing this festive meeting of the Successor of Peter and the Maltese People. The history of this People, almost 2,000 years old, is inseparable from the Catholic faith that characterizes its culture and traditions. It is said that there are at least 365 churches in Malta, "one for each day of the year", a visible sign of this profound faith!

It all began with that shipwreck: after drifting for 14 days, driven by the winds, the ship that was carrying the Apostle Paul and many others to Rome ran aground in the shallows off the Island of Malta. Thus, after the very cordial meeting with the President of the Republic in Valetta, the capital beautifully framed by the joyful greeting of so many boys and girls I went on pilgrimage straightaway to the so-called "[Grotto of St Paul](#)", near Rabat, for an intense moment of prayer. I was also able to greet there a large group of Maltese missionaries. To think of that small

archipelago in the middle of the Mediterranean and of how the seed of the Gospel got there, gives rise to a great sense of wonder at the mysterious designs of divine Providence: it comes naturally to thank the Lord and also St Paul who, in the midst of that violent storm, kept his trust and hope and communicated them to his companions on the voyage. From that shipwreck, or rather from Paul's subsequent stay in Malta, a fervent and solid Christian community came into being. After 2,000 years it is still faithful to the Gospel and strives to combine it with the complex questions of the contemporary age. This of course is not easy, nor must it be taken for granted, but the Maltese People know how to find in the Christian outlook responses to the new challenges. For example, one sign of this is the fact that they have kept intact their profound respect for unborn life and for the sacredness of marriage, opting to refrain from introducing abortion and divorce into the Country's legislation.

My journey therefore aimed to strengthen in the faith the Church in Malta, a very vivid reality, well structured and present on the territories of Malta and of Gozo. The whole of this community met in Floriana, in Granaries Square, in front of the Church of St Publius where I celebrated [Holy Mass](#) with a very fervent participation. It was a cause of joy and comfort to me to feel the special warmth of that people which gives the feeling of a large family, bound together by faith and a Christian approach to life. After the celebration I wanted to meet several of the victims of abuse by members of the clergy. I shared in their suffering and with emotion, I prayed with them, assuring them of the Church's action.

Although Malta gives the feeling of a large family, we should not think, because of its geographical location that it is a society "isolated" from the world. This is not how it is, as we see, for example, from the contacts that Malta entertains with various countries and from the fact that Maltese priests are present in many nations. Indeed, the families and parishes of Malta have been able to inculcate in many young people the sense of God and of the Church, so that many of them have responded generously to Jesus' call and have become priests. A large number of these priests have embraced the missionary commitment *ad gentes* in distant lands, heirs of the apostolic spirit that impelled St Paul to take the Gospel to places where it was not yet known. This is an aspect I willingly reasserted, namely, that "faith is strengthened when it is given to others" (Encyclical [Redemptoris Missio, n. 2](#)). Malta developed from the offshoot of this faith and is now open to various economic, social and cultural realities to which it makes a valuable contribution.

It is clear that down the centuries Malta often had to defend itself and this can be seen from its fortifications. The strategic position of the small archipelago obviously attracted the attention of various political and military powers. Yet the deepest vocation of Malta is the Christian vocation, in other words the universal vocation to peace! The famous Maltese cross, which everyone associates with that nation, has frequently fluttered on flags amidst conflicts and contests but thanks be to God it never lost its authentic, perennial meaning. It is a sign of love and reconciliation, and this is the true vocation of peoples who welcome and embrace the Christian message!

A natural crossroads, Malta is located on a central migration route. Men and women, as St Paul once did, land on the coasts of Malta, sometimes driven by very harsh living conditions, violence and persecution. This naturally entails complex humanitarian, political and legal problems whose solution is not easy but must be sought with perseverance and tenacity, organizing interventions at the international level. It would be good to do this in all nations whose Constitutional Charters and cultures are rooted in Christian values.

The challenge of combining our contemporary complexity with the perennial validity of the Gospel is fascinating to all, but especially to the young. The new generations, in fact, are strongly aware of this and that is why I wanted [a youth meeting in Malta](#), despite the brevity of my Visit. It was a moment of profound and intense exchanges, rendered even more beautiful by the environment in which it took place the Port of Valletta and by the enthusiasm of the young people. I could not but remind them of the youthful experience of St Paul: an extraordinary experience, unique yet able to speak to the new generations of every epoch, because of that radical transformation which followed his encounter with the Risen Christ. I therefore looked at the young people of Malta as potential heirs of the spiritual adventure of St Paul, called, like him, to discover the beauty of God's love, given to us in Jesus Christ; to embrace the mystery of his Cross; to win, despite trials and tribulations, not to fear the "storms" of life, nor shipwreck, because God's plan of love is greater even than storms and shipwreck.

Dear friends, this, to sum up, was the Message that I took to Malta. However, as I mentioned, I myself received so much from the Church there and from that people blessed by God which could effectively collaborate with his grace. Through the intercession of the Apostle Paul, of St George Preca, a priest and the first Maltese Saint, and of the Virgin Mary whom the faithful of Malta and Gozo venerate with such deep devotion, may Malta always advance in peace and in prosperity.

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I welcome the newly-ordained deacons from the Pontifical Scots College, together with their family members and friends. Upon all the English-speaking visitors present at today's Audience, especially those from Finland, Norway, Sweden, Indonesia, the Philippines, Canada and the United States, I invoke the joy and peace of the Risen Lord.

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