



The Holy See

PASTORAL JOURNEY TO MALTA

MASS FOR THE FAITHFUL OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF MALTA

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Granaries Square, Floriana

Sunday, 27 May 1990

*Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,*1. Today, the solemnity of the Lord's Ascension, is a day of great rejoicing! The Church throughout the world rejoices as Jesus Christ returns in glory to the right hand of the Father. Today the Catholics of Malta have a special reason to rejoice, for they are gathered around this altar with the Bishop of Rome, the Successor of Peter, who has come to confirm his brethren in faith and love (Cfr. *Luc.* 22, 23). In the unity of the Spirit (Cfr. *Eph.* 4, 3), I greet with great affection and esteem *Archbishop Mercieca and Bishop Cauchi*, and all the faithful of the Archdiocese of Malta and the Diocese of Gozo. My greetings go as well to the public authorities and all of Malta's people, upon whom I invoke the grace and peace of the Risen Lord and the consolation of his Holy Spirit. The glorious event which today's liturgy recalls was still a vivid memory among the first disciples of Jesus when Christianity came to Malta through the *preaching and witness of Saint Paul*. Today, over nineteen hundred years later, belief in the Crucified and Risen Saviour has left a profound mark upon the soul of the Maltese people, and found eloquent expression in many aspects of your national life. It is appropriate that on this joyful occasion we should give thanks for the faith which Malta received from the Apostles, and for the "infinitely great power" (Cfr. *Eph.* 1, 19), with which the Lord Jesus Christ has brought forth abundant fruits of holiness in the lives of its people for so many centuries. As we meet at this altar, I ask God our heavenly Father to inspire in Malta's Catholics an ever deeper unity of mind, heart and spirit, that you may worthily proclaim, in words and in deeds, the atonement and reconciliation which Jesus Christ accomplished on the Cross and which he continues to accomplish through the ministry of the Church, his Body!2. In the first Reading of today's Mass, Saint Luke tells us that, after "Jesus gave his instructions to the apostles he had chosen through the Holy Spirit", he "was

lifted up while they looked on, and a cloud took him from their sight" (*Act. 1, 2. 9*). Just as in the Old Testament the cloud was frequently a sign of the saving presence of God among his people, so today, as it conceals Jesus, it is a reassuring sign that the Risen Lord, in returning to the glory that was his from the beginning, has not abandoned us at all. Instead, he remains truly present and at work in our midst, until the day when he will come again in glory. Although Jesus has left the earth and returned to his heavenly Father we have his word that *he will never leave his Church*. Jesus promises to be with us "always; yes, to the end of time" (*Matth. 28, 20*). In the mystery of God's plan for the Church and for all mankind, the Ascension marks a turning-point, the beginning of a new stage in Jesus' relationship to his disciples. Seated at God's right hand in heaven, the Risen Lord is now present in "the Church, which is his body" (*Eph. 1, 22-23*), *through the power of the Holy Spirit*. By the indwelling of the Spirit in their hearts, believers in every age receive a share in that communion of perfect love that is the life of the Blessed Trinity. And they are given the grace to follow the Lord in a way that can overcome the world (Cfr. *Io. 16, 33*), and its ancient burden of hostility, sin and division. The Holy Spirit dwells within the Church, and it is he who enables all believers to work effectively for the coming of the Kingdom, to witness to the truth of the Gospel and to the reality of the redemption which we have received through the blood of the Cross. Through the Spirit's power the Church is confident that she will indeed fulfil the solemn charge which Jesus left to his followers, to "make disciples of all the nations" and to "baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (*Matth. 28, 19*). "Sent by Christ to reveal and communicate the love of God to all men and nations" (*Ad Gentes, 10*), *the Church knows that only in the Spirit will she succeed in her divine mission of drawing all mankind to Christ, and in bringing to society the grace and peace which he won for us on Calvary*.³ Today, at the close of my visit, *I invite the Church in Malta to meditate on the quality of its response to the great mission which Jesus gave his disciples as he returned to the Father: "You will be my witnesses... to the ends of the earth" (Act. 1, 8)*. I ask you to reflect upon the noble witness of fidelity to the Gospel which the people of these islands have given through the centuries. Beginning with Saint Publius, a great army of confessors, many of whose names are known only to God, has stood fast and maintained the faith, handing it down from generation to generation, even in the face of persecution and adversity. And what of the vast numbers of missionaries who have gone forth from Malta's shores, the many priests and religious whose apostolic labours have strengthened the Church at home, the parents whose faithful perseverance in the faith has borne such rich fruit in devotion and goodness among their children? Truly we can praise God for this witness in the words which Saint Paul himself uses in today's second Reading: "How infinitely great is the power that he has exercised for us believers" (*Eph. 1, 19*). But it is not enough to reflect with humility and gratitude upon God's gifts to you in the past. Today, the Church in Malta must also listen to Christ's voice as he challenges you to *continue to bear witness to the power of his reconciling love*. How many of you have shared with me your sorrow at the serious divisions which are felt at different levels of your society! Can any Christian believe that these divisions are from God? Does not our faith teach us that the root of all hostility among individuals and groups is sin, that ancient sin that ignores and rejects the image of God in our neighbour? In the end, are not all human divisions the fruit of a sinful "refusal of God's fatherly love and of his loving gifts"? (Cfr. *Ioannis*

Pauli PP. II *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, 10). In the light of the faith which we profess, can we ever justify hostility towards our neighbour or believe that we are exempted from the Lord's command to love our enemies and to forgive " from the heart " (Cfr. *Matth.* 18, 35), those who sin against us? Dear Brothers and Sisters: in the name of Jesus Christ, I solemnly appeal to all of you today to examine yourselves (Cfr. *1 Cor.* 11, 28), and to put an end to everything that prevents the healing of wounds which have been left open too long. In the name of Jesus Christ, I plead with you to *make a new beginning of forgiveness* and respect for one another. With confidence in the sovereign power of God's grace, especially as it comes to you in the Sacrament of Penance, may you be sustained in the difficult work of restoring mutual respect and dialogue on every level of your national and social life. A major task for all of Malta's Christians is to lay aside grudges and overcome division, whether it be in your families, your place of work, or in political life. Today, the Lord is challenging each of you to translate the faith which you have received into a living and vibrant witness to the power of his reconciling love. And he is asking you to join with all of your brothers and sisters, none excluded, in building a society worthy of Malta's distinguished tradition of Christian faith and virtue!4. In today's liturgy, we have heard Saint Paul pray for the unity and peace of the Christians at Ephesus. I make his prayer my own as I address you, my dear brothers and sisters of the Churches of Malta and Gozo. I pray that God our Father will always "*enlighten the eyes of your minds so that you can see what hope his call holds for you*" (*Eph.* 1, 18-19). *May he enlighten you!* In these last years of the Second Millennium, how clear it is that so many men and women need to be "*enlightened*" by God's grace, so that they will recognize all that is inconsistent with their dignity as sons and daughters of God, made in his image and likeness (Cfr. *Gen.* 1, 26-27), and called to grow into a life that will have no end. In these days, as we look to Eastern Europe and observe the collapse of materialistic ideologies which sought to deprive man of his very soul, we cannot fail to notice elsewhere the rise of a practical materialism, a new idolatry, which also threatens to smother the spirit. How much do Christians need to be "*enlightened*" by Christ so they may reject as incompatible with authentic human freedom and dignity the new culture of consumerism, which glorifies pleasure as an end in itself, without reference to the moral law, and ultimately denies our solidarity with those in need! *May he enlighten you!* More than once in her history, Malta has been admired and praised for her *uncompromising defence of the Christian faith* and her willingness to endure heroic sacrifices for the sake of the culture which that faith nourished and sustained. *In our own days*, as Europe prepares to enter a new period of its history, a period filled with fresh hopes and challenges, Malta is called to contribute to the spiritual unity of the Old Continent by offering her treasures of Christian faith and values. Europe needs Malta's faithful witness too!5. Our celebration of the Ascension reminds us that Christ now sits at the right hand of the Father as the Judge of the living and the dead, the Judge of all mankind and all history. "*How infinitely great is his power!*" (*Eph.* 1, 19). By his Death on the Cross, Jesus laid bare once and for all the tragic consequences of Adam's sin and brought reconciliation and peace to all mankind. *Never fail to trust in that power!* Jesus has transformed the world and made it a new creation. In Jesus, the second Adam, each of you, by virtue of Baptism, has been called to cooperate in preparing this world for his coming in glory and the full establishment of his Kingdom "a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness

and grace, a kingdom of justice, love and peace" (*Missale Romanum*, «Praefatio in Sollemnitate Christi universorum Regis»). Never doubt that our Saviour, "who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think" (*Eph. 3, 20*), will equip you for every good work and enable you to fulfil the mission to which he has called you!" Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven, this same Jesus will come back in the same way as you have seen him go there" (*Act. 1, 11*). As the Church "waits in joyful hope" for her Lord to return in glory, I pray that in your families, in your local Churches, in your social and political life, each of you will cooperate faithfully in Christ's work of building his Kingdom until the day, known only to the Father, when he will return in glory. Amen.

Remarks at the conclusion of the Eucharistic Celebration: My dear Brothers and Sisters, The power of the Almighty God brought the Apostle Paul to the shores of Malta. That was the beginning of a new era, of a Christian era, and it was here that he evangelized your forefathers, but his destination was Rome; and when he went to Rome, he joined Peter, and he probably spoke to the Apostle Peter about Malta. But it seems to me that it was necessary to wait almost 2,000 years until one of the successors of Peter in Rome could visit Malta. What should I do now? It was not possible for Paul to remain in Malta. It is also, and more so, impossible for Peter to remain in Malta. So I shall return to Rome and I shall meet Paul. It is necessary to meet Paul and to tell him about Malta. I shall say, "Paul, do you remember Malta? Do you remember that you founded a Church in Malta, and I found after so many centuries that it is wonderful church. It is a very strong people. Malta has good Catholic people; and returning to Rome, I shall say to the Italian people in the language you also understand '*Sia lodato Gesù Cristo*'. But where did I learn these words? The first time I pronounced these words was after my election, but I learned these words in my native country, and there are some Polish people here. I should say to them, but then you could not so easily understand... So, after my visit in Malta I shall do all that in Rome and for the moment, I also, only for the moment, shall speak in your native language.

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