



# The Holy See

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WELCOME CEREMONY IN MALTA

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER**

*Gudja International Airport, 8 May 2001*

*Mr President,  
Members of the Government,  
Brother Bishops,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

1. With heartfelt gratitude to God, I stand on Maltese soil for the second time. The *Jubilee Pilgrimage which I am making on the Two Thousandth Anniversary of the Birth of Jesus Christ* has brought me to *Malta*. After visiting some of the places especially connected with the history of salvation, at Sinai, in the Holy Land, and now in Athens and Damascus, my pilgrimage in the footsteps of Saint Paul brings me to you.

2. Thank you, Mr President, for the kind invitation which you extended to me in the name of the Maltese people. Thank you for your courteous words of welcome here today. I am grateful also to the distinguished members of Parliament, the Civil and Military Authorities, the members of the Diplomatic Corps, and all who are honouring this occasion with their presence.

With affection in the Lord, I greet Archbishop Mercieca, Bishop Cauchi, and Auxiliary Bishop Depasquale, as well as the other Bishops present, some of whom represent the missionary vocation of the Maltese Church, while others are descendants of Maltese emigrants. I greet the priests, the deacons, the men and women religious; and in particular the young people who are preparing to serve the Lord in the priesthood and consecrated life. I greet the catechists and all who actively collaborate in the Church's mission.

In the words of your Patron Saint Paul I greet all the Maltese people, without exception: "*Grace to*

*you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil 1:2).*

3. The memory of my first visit, eleven years ago, spontaneously comes to my mind. I remember my meetings with the priests and religious, the workers, the intellectuals, the families and the young people. I remember the Co-Cathedral of Saint John in Valletta, the Marian Shrines of Mellieha and Ta' Pinu on the Island of Gozo. I remember the Bay and the Islands of Saint Paul, and in particular the ancient Grotto, venerated as the place where he stayed.

I remember above all *the faith and the enthusiasm of the Maltese and Gozitans.*

Saint Paul arrived in Malta as a prisoner on his way to Rome, the place of his martyrdom. Here he and his shipwrecked companions were treated – as we read in the Acts of the Apostles – "with unusual kindness" (28:2). Here he bore witness to Christ and restored to health the father of Publius and other people of the Island who were sick (cf. Acts 28:8). The goodness of the Maltese people was met by the "the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour" (Tit 3:4). For two millennia you have been faithful to the vocation involved in that singular encounter.

Today the Successor of Peter wishes to confirm you in the same faith, and to encourage you in the spirit of Christian hope and love. He prays that, like your forbears, you too may bear good and abundant fruit. Good trees yield abundant good fruit (cf. Mt 12:33-35), as has been the case of the Venerable Servants of God whom I shall have the joy of declaring *Blessed* tomorrow.

4. Marked by its position in Europe and in the Mediterranean, Malta is heir to a singularly rich cultural tradition, the heart of which is *the humanism of the Gospel*. In a world in search of a sure light to guide the transformations which it is undergoing, you have *a spiritual and moral heritage* perfectly able to heal and elevate the dignity of the human person, to strengthen the fabric of society, and to endow human activity with a deeper sense and meaning (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 40). This is the wisdom and insight which Malta can offer to the new historical era that is slowly but surely emerging.

Dear Maltese Friends, cherish your Christian vocation! Be proud of your religious and cultural heritage! Look to the future with hope, and set out with renewed vigour to *make this new Millennium a time of solidarity and peace, of love for life and respect for God's creation.*

5. I have entrusted my pilgrimage to the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Apostle Paul. I invoke their intercession upon all the inhabitants of Malta and Gozo!

I bless you all, and in particular the sick, the elderly and all those who are suffering in body and spirit.

*Il-Mulej ibierek il-poplu kollu ta' Malta u ta' Ghawdex!* [God bless the people of Malta and of Gozo!]

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