



The Holy See

MEETING WITH THE MEMBERS OF THE "SOCIETAS DOCTRINAE CHRISTIANAE"

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II

Hamrun, 9 May 2001

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. In the joy of Easter I make my own the words of the Risen Lord: "Peace be with you! *Il-paci maghkom!* I thank you for your warm welcome. It shows that the hospitality which once embraced the Apostle Paul (cf. *Acts* 28:2) is still to be found in Malta. I am grateful for the gracious words spoken on behalf of both branches of the Society by the Superior General, who expressed all your love for the Church and for the Successor of Peter.

2. The island of Malta is a rock rising from the sea, where the soil is often thin and the sun harsh. Even this place where we are meeting bears the name *Blata l-Bajda*, the "White Rock". Yet down the centuries *Malta has been extraordinarily generous and fertile in the deeper ways of the Spirit*. The unshakeable faith of the Maltese people has ensured that this rock has been the good soil of which the Gospel speaks. In this soil, Blessed Gorg Preca planted the *Society of Christian Doctrine*, where it has flourished in the century of its life. Unlike the fig-tree of the Gospel story which we have just heard (cf. *Lk* 13:6-9), you have produced fruit in abundance, and for that we give glory to God and thank him here today.

Not only did Dun Gorg sow the seed; he tended the sapling and fed the young tree so that it would grow strong and fruitful, as it has. You have flourished because you have roots reaching deep into Christ, and because you have been well nurtured by Dun Gorg's life of holiness.

To understand your vocation more deeply, consider the fig-tree. Its new leaves are a sign that summer is at hand (cf. *Lk* 21:29-31); in the hot season, its shade provides shelter from the sun; it gives abundant sweet fruit as food; and Scripture says that its fruit has healing power (cf. *Is*

38:21). This is an image of what you are called to be! As *catechists*, you are to provide sweet nourishment for all who hunger for God; you are to bring healing to those who are suffering for lack of light and love. If you do these things, you will truly be *a sign of the springtime which the Holy Spirit is now preparing for the Church*.

3. Wherever Dun Gorg went to preach he was followed by crowds of people. They were captivated by his words. Why? It was because they recognized in the preaching of Dun Gorg *the voice of Jesus himself*. It was the Lord to whom they were listening; they were drawn by *the irresistible attractiveness of Christ* who alone, they knew, could satisfy the deepest longing of their hearts. The beauty of holiness which is found supremely in Jesus and is reflected in today's new *Beatus* will never fail to draw the human heart. It is certain that if we can show forth the face of the Risen Lord to the world then we shall touch and win souls in ways that will be surprising!

4. It is in the depths of contemplation that we discover "the glory of God which is in the face of Christ" (2 Cor 4:6). That is why your rule of life urges you to pray often and to meet regularly with your spiritual director, who serves as guide and companion on the path of your fidelity. *To contemplate the face of Christ is to be filled with spiritual energy for the mission entrusted to you*. Like Saint Paul, from contemplation you are called to go forth as missionaries: not just as *teachers* but as *witnesses* who can speak with power because you can say, like the first disciples: "We have seen the Lord!" (Jn 20:25). It was Pope Paul VI who wrote that "the people of our day are more impressed by witnesses than by teachers, and if they listen to these it is because they also bear witness" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 41). This was true of Dun Gorg in a wonderful way, and it must also be true of you, his spiritual children.

In his Letter to the Galatians, Saint Paul writes that God "was pleased to reveal his Son in me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles" (1:16). He does not speak of Christ revealed "to me" but of *Christ revealed "in me"*. Once Jesus reveals himself to Saul on the road to Damascus, and once Paul opens his heart to receive the gift, *the Apostle himself then becomes the revelation*. He is filled with Christ, so that he can say in the same Letter: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (2:20). His whole life, all that he does, says and thinks, his body, mind, heart and soul, become the revelation of Jesus to the world. This is the mystery of the sublime vocation given not just to Saint Paul and Blessed Gorg Preca, but to each of you as well.

5. Your founder was especially devoted to the words: *Verbum Dei caro factum est*; based on the Prologue of Saint John's Gospel: "The Word was made flesh" (1:14). Here in fact is the foundation of your vocation and apostolate. The Divine Word in a certain sense continually takes flesh in his Mystical Body, the Church. You are to help in this by doing for others what Dun Gorg has done for you. You are to plant the seed of God's word in people's hearts, so that Christ may live in them! You must teach everyone – children, young people, adults – *to contemplate the face of Christ, to see the Lord* (cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 16), so that the light of God's glory which shines from the face of Jesus may shine forth from them as well. This is the "rooting of the Church in time and

place [which] mirrors the movement of the Incarnation itself" (*ibid.* 3).

As you set forth and continue this sacred mission, let the words of your founder echo ceaselessly in your hearts: *MUSEUM – Magister, utinam sequatur Evangelium universus mundus! Divine Teacher, may the whole world follow the Gospel!* Entrusting you to the intercession of the Virgin Mary, Saint Paul and Blessed Gorg Preca, as well as Blessed Ignatius and Blessed Adeodata also beatified today, I impart my Apostolic Blessing to all the members of the *Society of Christian Doctrine* as a pledge of endless mercy in Jesus Christ, "the faithful witness and firstborn from the dead" (*Rev 1:5*). *Il-paci maghkom!*