



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II TO THE BISHOPS OF MALTA ON OCCASION OF THEIR «AD LIMINA» VISIT

Thursday, 4 June 1987 Dear Brothers, 1. With fraternal affection in our Lord Jesus Christ I welcome you today, on the occasion of your *ad limina* visit. This visit is meant to *strengthen and celebrate the bonds of communion* which unite the local Churches of Malta and Gozo with the Bishop of Rome and the Universal Church. It also provides an opportunity for me to support you in the exercise of your episcopal ministry, so that together as shepherds we may encourage both the clergy and the laity to grow in the love of God and in loving service to their neighbour. The Christian faithful of your country are well known for their devotion to the See of Peter and for the vitality of their ecclesial life. This can be seen in *the strong religious traditions of Malta*; the frequency with which the faithful participate in the Eucharist and the other sacraments; the many thriving institutions devoted to the apostolate, to education, charity and social services; the presence of new movements which promote Christian life; the relatively large numbers of clergy and religious, and their zeal in serving their own Dioceses as well as other countries, especially the missions; and the generous commitment of the laity in bearing witness to the Gospel. We give thanks to God for this great "spiritual house made of living stones". (Cfr. 1 *Petr.* 2,5) 2. At the same time, like every other ecclesial community, the Church in Malta is called to *constant renewal*. She is called to *constant renewal*. She is called to discern, in the light of the Second Vatican Council and with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, the gifts of God as well as the hopes and needs of the society in which we live at this moment in history. She is called to continued conversion and purification for the sake of the mission which the whole Church has received from her Lord: to be a "sacrament of salvation" for all people until the end of time. This mission is one of evangelization, which my predecessor Paul VI described so eloquently in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. Evangelization is not only the Church's mission to preach Christ to those who do not know him or no longer walk with him. It is also, as "*Evangelii Nuntiandi*" states, the task of "deepening, consolidating, nourishing and making ever more mature the faith of those who are already called the faithful or believers". (Pauli VI *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 54) This in turn will lead to their committed involvement in the evangelization of society and culture. 3. Essential to this evangelizing mission is the *effective preaching of the word*, for as we are reminded by Saint Paul, Malta's first preacher and teacher, "faith comes from what is heard". (Cfr. *Rom.* 10, 17) Preaching is effective when, in the words of *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, it is "simple, clear direct, well-adapted, profoundly dependent on Gospel teaching and faithful to the Magisterium, animated by a balanced apostolic ardour... full of hope, fostering belief, and productive of peace and unity". (Pauli VI *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 43) We and our clergy must constantly seek to preach in such a way that the timeless message of the Gospel touches the minds and hearts of our people with their hopes and struggles and with the questions and concerns that modern life sets before them. Effective preaching is an important part of the constant evangelization which deepens and nourishes the life of faith received in Baptism. It is also a primary means of renewing both sacramental worship and popular piety and devotion so

that they may truly reflect the teaching of the Council. 4. Nor should we fail to mention *catechetical instruction*, which has been vigorously carried out in your dioceses for many years, in particular through the devoted efforts of priests, religious and laity, individually or in groups. Among the latter I would mention the Society of Christian Doctrine, which is celebrating this year the Eightieth Anniversary of its foundation. As with preaching, the content of catechesis must be solidly based on the revealed word of God and always in accord with the authentic teaching of the Church; it must likewise reflect an awareness of sound modern biblical, theological and liturgical scholarship. Its methodology must be truly effective so as to serve the needs of those for whom it is intended. *Catechetics and general education should work in harmony*, so that young people receive a Christian understanding of human life and values. In this respect, the right of children and young people to an adequate catechetical training is matched by the duty on the part of schools, including State schools, to enable them to receive this training and thus to reach a higher synthesis which integrates and unifies their various fields of study with the Christian outlook which is so much in harmony with the cultural and historical roots of the Maltese people. The Church schools of Malta too continue to provide a great and necessary service to both the Church and the country, thanks to the generous commitment of so many priests, religious and lay men and women, and thanks also to the material support offered by parents as well as all the Catholic faithful. It is important that these schools should coordinate their activities and decide the criteria of their action in close union with you, the Bishops, who have the pastoral responsibility of watching over all aspects of the life of the Catholic community in your dioceses. I share your interest and concern that under your pastoral guidance these schools should continue to flourish, in harmony with their special character and history. 5. Thus far I have spoken of evangelization in terms of the Church's inner life: her preaching, catechesis and educational goals. That inner life must in turn be directed towards the service of Christ and his Gospel within the entire community. This *wider sense of evangelization begins with the family*, which plays an important role both as a "domestic church" and as the primary cell of society. The family is the place where witness to the Gospel receives concrete application and then extends to neighbours and others. The way in which believing families live— that is to say, their values, their work and leisure, and what they teach their children—bears witness to the real meaning of love, self-giving, service, dialogue, freedom, concern for the common good, prayer, and so many fundamental truths about life which are threatened today by materialism, consumerism, and pleasure-seeking. Christian families are called to be "apostles" to each other, showing true compassion and love to families in need, and being open to society as a whole in genuine solidarity. I know that, with the help of expert clergy and laity, the Bishops of Malta have sought to uphold the reverence due to the family by means of marriage preparation and by helping families to meet challenges in ways that are faithful to the Gospel and Church, with respect for the nature of marriage and its indissolubility. I commend you for these efforts and I encourage you to persevere with the evangelization of families so that they may serve the gift of life in all its dimensions, both physical and spiritual. May Malta always be exemplary in its esteem for family life! 6. Another focus of evangelization is the *world of work*. The technological advances of our time, which are having such a profound impact on individuals, families and society, require a pastoral response which will help people understand their work in the light of their Christian faith. As I have explained in *Laborem Exercens*, the human person is the subject of work and the primary basis of its value. This conditions the ethical nature of all work and the rights and responsibilities of workers, who are called to a spirituality of work in the footsteps of Christ, himself a "Man of Work". As Bishops, you are called to offer dedicated and generous pastoral care, including competent religious and ethical guidance, to those involved in all the many aspects of the world of work. 7. Like work, *culture too must be ordered to the well-being of the individual and of society*, especially today in the midst of the many rapid changes which promote development but also create new challenges. As *Evangelii Nuntiandi* tells us, in every age cultures must be regenerated by an encounter with the Gospel. (Pauli VI *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 20) It is important for the Church in Malta to ensure that this encounter takes place. Her

higher cultural institutions, such as the Faculty of Theology, relying on suitably trained clergy and laity, can exercise a very positive influence through planned interaction with others who have an important role in shaping the nation's culture: teachers and university students, scientists and scholars, and members of the professions. It is a matter of proclaiming the Gospel as an alternative to the ideologies of our day which judge individuals and culture solely in terms of efficiency, profit and power. 8. In the end, the Church's mission to evangelize embraces *all of society*. *Gaudium et Spes* describes this in a striking manner when it says that the Church is called to be "a leaven and, as it were, the soul of human society". (*Gaudium et Spes*, 40) Her religious mission can be "a source of commitment, direction and vigour in establishing and consolidating the human community according to the law of God". (*Ibid.* 42) Likewise, although the Church and the political community are autonomous and independent, "both are devoted to the personal vocation of man, though under different titles". (*Ibid.* 76) I am confident that the Church in Malta will continue her dedicated work for a society that is at once more Christian and more human by further promoting the freedom and responsibility of its citizens; by fostering mutual respect and harmony so as to create true dialogue among all; and also by not hesitating to pass moral judgments, even in matters relating to politics, whenever fundamental human rights or the salvation of souls requires it. (Cfr. *Gaudium et Spes*, 76) 9. Dear Brothers: the work of evangelization demands *a profound communion of all the members of the Church*, united in purpose and in action—a communion of Bishops, clergy, religious and laity in which the divine gifts we have received are made fruitful through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is especially the laity who, by exercising their vocation directly in the world of human affairs, bear witness in that world to the "richness, complexity and dynamism" of the reality of evangelization.(Cfr. Pauli VI *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 17) I join you in looking to them with hope, and I commend you for shepherding them with dedication and zeal. As we prepare to celebrate the Marian Year, may Mary the Mother of God, to whom the Maltese people are so devoted, sustain all of you in the great task of making her Son ever better known and loved. May she always be for you a sign of fidelity and a source of strength. © Copyright 1987 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana