



The Holy See

VISITA PASTORALE A MALTA

INCONTRO DI GIOVANNI PAOLO II

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Dear Young People of Malta, Kuntent li qieghed fostkoml am happy to be with you.

1. Si, Kuntent, Kuntent. I find the questions you put before me, through your representatives, are very kind, very positive and constructive. So, I am happy to be with you, and I shall try to give an answer to your questions.

I greet you all with great affection in the Lord Jesus Christ. *Our gathering this morning is a wonderful gift of God to you and to me!* In a certain sense, the Pope has come to Malta to challenge you with the very words we heard in the Scripture passage from the First Letter of Saint John. Are you "strong"? Does the "word of God abide in you"? Have you "overcome the evil one" (Cfr. *1 Jo.* 2, 14)? In the measure of that victory, your youth, your enthusiasm and your faith are a *sign of great hope* for the Church and for society.

As I listened to your kind words of welcome I could sense your *desire to live according to God's will and to take an ever more active part in the life of the Church in your country.* You have also shared with me some of the hard questions which confront you and the difficulties which you experience in obeying the demands of the Christian life. In the time which we have together, I hope to give you some thoughts which come from my heart and are inspired by the faith which unites us in Jesus Christ our Lord.

2. More than one of your questions concerned the lin the face of pressure from your peers and from certain trends in today's society. I understand what you are saying. Sometimes, in answering God's call, we do experience a kind of fear; we hesitate since we realize that obedience to God makes heavy demands on us. Like Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, we feel "greatly distressed and troubled" (*Marc.* 14, 33), as we discover the immediate cost of obedience to the will of the Father. Our proud nature rebels against the thought of having to account for our lives and actions.

Yet, the idea of being accountable, of *being personally responsible* for the use of all the gifts that

God has given to each one of us, *is central to the Gospel of Jesus Christ*. You remember the story of the talents in the Gospel of Saint Matthew (Cfr. *Matth. 25, 14-30*). The master returned to settle the accounts with his stewards. To those who had been good administrators of his possessions he said: " Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master " (*Ibid. 25, 21*). But to the one who had done nothing to make his talent bear fruit, he said: " Take the talent from him... For to everyone who has, more will be given and he will have abundance; but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away " (*Ibid. 25, 28-29*).

Here the Lord is teaching a law that is at the heart of the Gospel message; something that young people everywhere easily understand.

Unless there is a deep commitment in life to what is true and good, unless there is a willingness to pay the price of victory, unless there is a determination to conquer self and really be helpful to others, life itself slips away in lack of direction and meaning. The great hopes of your youth may eventually disappear and die unless they are quickly translated into action, in other words, unless "you are strong" (Cfr. 1 Jo. 2, 14).

3. On all sides we see young people full of the desire to make this world a better place, a kinder and more just place where all can find their home. These ideals are the fresh air that society desperately needs in order to renew itself continuously. But you yourselves know how strongly young people can also be absorbed by passing trends and short-lived goals; how they can be taken in by *the promise of immediate happiness* in irresponsible sexual behaviour, in drug addiction and alcohol, in the frivolous search for material things.

On the other hand, the programme of life that Jesus Christ offers leads to *an authentic joy*, a deep and lasting joy, a happiness that is rooted in the depths of the heart and lasts forever. You know that the joy of Easter, that joy which made the first disciples' hearts burn within them (Cfr. *Luc. 24, 32*), does not come cheap. *Christian joy involves accepting the mystery of the Cross*. Did not Jesus teach us by his own example that only by losing our life do we find it? (Cfr. *Matth. 10, 39*). Did he not say that the grain of wheat must fall to the earth and die if it is to bear fruit? (Cfr. *Jo. 12, 24*). This is *the Gospel law of life which Jesus presents once more to the youth of Malta*. Are you strong enough to reject the false prophets and the merchants of death who have already made so many young people around the world think that there is no hope, nothing worth living for, no better world to work for even at great personal cost?

You asked me about temptations. *All temptations are based on a lie*, and are opposed to the truth which comes from God. They inevitably lead to disillusionment. As in the case of our first parents, temptation tries to make us believe that something other than God's will can succeed in making us truly happy. Very often too, temptation is not a desire to do something that we know is wrong *but to hold back from doing something we know is right*, because we fear that we will not find the strength to follow it through. Again, the programme of life presented by Jesus involves a continuing struggle against temptation. There is nothing strange in this, and there is no need to be afraid: in Christ " you are strong and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one " (*1 Jo. 2, 14*).

So, answering Jesus' call to follow him involves *a life-long process of conversion*. For most of you,

conversion of mind and heart to Christ is more a matter of everyday decisions than the result of a sudden and emotion-filled moment. At the same time, certain decisions are very important, as for example when you decide to turn away from a pattern of behaviour that you know is sinful and destructive, or when you discern to which state in life God may be calling you: marriage, the priesthood or one of the many forms of consecrated life. But *every decision* you make, whether great or small, always remains an *opportunity either to draw closer to God or to distance yourselves from him* and from the truth which alone can set you free (Cfr. *Io.* 8, 32).

4. One of you has asked about difficult moments in my own life and what I learned from them. A very personal question! During the Second World War, at that time, you were not in this world, you were not yet the young citizens of this beautiful land of Malta. But the Second World War is a historical event, and some of us, myself also, have the experience of when my country was occupied, oppressed. It was not easy to work day after day in difficult circumstances. It was not easy to study at the university. It was not easy to see suffering and injustice on such a worldwide scale, and at the same time to continue to live the virtue of hope, trusting God and trusting other people. It was not easy to make room for the voice of the Lord calling me to a total self-giving in the priesthood and to study in secret under all kinds of limitations in preparation for that consecration. But *no true vocation is easy!*

What I learned in those and other "hard" moments was to *judge all things in the light of Christ*: the way, the truth and the life of every individual and of all peoples (Cfr. *Io.* 14, 6). The great Saint Paul warns us that there is only one proper foundation on which to build— Jesus Christ— and each one of us must take care how we build on that foundation (Cfr. *1 Cor.* 3, 10-11). Christ is the "bridegroom" (Cfr. *Io.* 3, 29), the "friend" (Cfr. *ibid.* 15, 14), the "companion" on the road of life, the one who fills our hearts with the same joy as he gave the disciples on the road to Emmaus! (Cfr. *Luc.* 24, 13-35). He is our "bread" (Cfr. *Io.* 6, 35), our "peace" (Cfr. *Eph.* 2, 14), the one who takes our burdens on himself and refreshes us in our fatigue (Cfr. *Matth.* 11, 28-30). And let us not forget, from the height of his Cross he gave us his own Mother to be our Mother (Cfr. *Io.* 19, 27), to comfort us and guide us in every trial and challenge. No, young people of Malta, you are never alone when you strive to do God's will and obey his commandments (Cfr. *ibid.* 14, 21). When you experience doubts of difficulties, never be afraid to approach the Lord as he makes himself present to you *in prayer and in the Sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist*. There you will not only find his loving forgiveness but you will also receive the strength you need to persevere in joyfully doing his will.

Giving Christ first place in your lives, however, not only involves a conversion of the heart; it also involves *a continuous conversion of the mind*. As disciples, you are called to judge all things in the light of Christ. At every moment of your lives, in every decision you make, you must ask yourselves: "*Does my way of thinking and acting correspond to the mind of Christ?*". It is important to remember this as you debate ideas and values which are common enough in modern society but which may well be in contrast with the liberating truth about man as we have learned it from Christ. For the authentic Christian, the Gospel is the criterion of every decision and every action. In a word, everything must be judged by God's standards, not by those of man (Cfr. *Marc.* 8, 33).

5. You have shared with me some of the hurt which you feel at the *divisiveness and hostility* you see around you. You clearly recognize that these attitudes are contrary to the Gospel, and when they are tolerated or encouraged by those who profess to be followers of Christ the credibility of the Gospel itself is compromised. *Here too you must be strong.* Each of you is called to spread Christ's reconciling love to those around you. The building of peace between individuals or within social groups requires great patience, respect for the convictions of others, and a sincere attempt to engage in a constructive dialogue aimed at discerning the truth and working together for the good of each other and all society.

The greatest contribution which you can make to healing the wounds of division, wherever they may be found, will come from your *commitment to act with a mature Christian conscience.* You must judge all things in the light of your faith in Christ. *Realize that Christ has set you free!* You are not bound by the mistakes, grudges and biases inherited from the past. God has given you the youth, the energy and the idealism *to create new models of cooperation.* Do not be afraid to use these gifts, and to apply your faith to each one of your relationships, to family life, to your work, to your involvement in society, to every area of your life! At home, at school and at work, *be artisans of a new solidarity,* one rooted in the generous Christianity which is Malta's most precious inheritance from past generations!

Before coming to the conclusion, I shall repeat that you really asked me very kind questions. I shall say you found the questions in the Gospel, in the same source in which I am finding the answers.

Now during the introductory speech your representative maybe also gave half of my speech. He did my work.

6. Dear young people of Malta: I leave *you with the assurance that you have a very special place in the Church of Christ* as she strives to fulfil the mission of reconciliation and salvation which she received from the Lord. By receiving the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist, you have become full members of the Church. You share fully in her mission of sanctifying the world and imbuing all temporal realities with the spirit of Christ (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 31).

The Church needs you. She needs each of you individually, but she also needs the testimony of your parish communities, your associations and movements. She needs you to bear witness to the holiness, the justice, the loving service of the poor and the needy which are the mark of Christ's true disciples. The Church needs you to be imbued with the spirit of Christ, strong in your commitment to building his kingdom. Today the Pope makes this appeal to you: never be afraid to give yourselves fully to God as you strive to live out the vocation he has given you in Christ! Never lose hope in God's power to sustain you along the way, even when situations seem most hopeless! *Be strong and overcome the evil one! Let the word of God abide in you!* (Cfr. *1 Io.* 2, 14). I am confident that from your generosity and youthful enthusiasm the Lord will bring forth rich fruits for the life of the Church and for the good of Malta.

I repeat my great affection to all of you, to every one of you, to the young people, and I commend you all to the loving prayers of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is a time when she, Mother of Christ, is praying with the apostles waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit, for Pentecost. She is praying also with us; she is praying with you, and to these loving prayers of the Blessed Virgin Mary I commend all of you.

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