



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS FRANCIS
TO MALTA
(2-3 APRIL 2022)

MEETING WITH THE AUTHORITIES, CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

“Grand Council Chamber” of the Grand Master’s Palace in Valletta
Saturday, 2 April 2022

[Multimedia]

Mr President of the Republic,
Members of Government and the Diplomatic Corps,
Distinguished Religious and Civil Authorities,
Representatives of Social and Cultural Life,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I greet you cordially and I thank you, Mr President, for your gracious words of welcome on behalf of your fellow-citizens. Your ancestors showed hospitality to the Apostle Paul in his journey to Rome, treating him and his travelling companions “with unusual kindness” (*Acts* 28:2). Coming from Rome, I too am now experiencing that same warm hospitality, a treasure that the Maltese people have handed on from generation to generation.

Thanks to its geographical position, Malta can be called *the heart of the Mediterranean*. Not only by its geography: for thousands of years, the interplay of historical events and the encounter of different peoples has made this island a centre of vitality and of culture, spirituality and beauty, a

crossroads that has received and harmonized influences from many parts of the world. This variety of influences makes us think of the various winds that sweep this country. Not by chance, in the ancient maps of the Mediterranean, the compass rose, or “rose of winds” was often depicted near the island of Malta. I would like to borrow that image of the *rose of winds*, which describes the winds in terms of the four cardinal points of the compass, to describe four fundamental influences for the social and political life of this country.

It is prevalently from northwest that the winds blow on the Maltese islands. The *north* recalls Europe, especially the home represented by the European Union, built as a dwelling-place for a single great family united in maintaining peace. Unity and peace are the gifts that the Maltese people implore from God whenever your national anthem is sung. The prayer written by Dun Karm Psaila says: “Grant, Almighty God, wisdom to those who govern, strength to those who work, affirm unity among the Maltese people, and peace”. Peace follows unity and rises up from it. This reminds us of the importance of working together, of preferring cohesion to division, and of strengthening the shared roots and values that have forged Maltese society in its uniqueness.

To ensure a sound social coexistence, however, it is not enough to strengthen the sense of belonging; there is a need to shore up the foundations of life in society, which rests on law and legality. Honesty, justice, a sense of duty and transparency are the essential pillars of a mature civil society. May your commitment to eliminate illegality and corruption be strong, like the north wind that sweeps the coasts of this country. May you always cultivate legality and transparency, which will enable the eradication of corruption and criminality, neither of which acts openly and in broad daylight.

The European home, committed to promoting the values of justice and social equality, is also in the forefront of efforts to protect the larger home that is God’s creation. The environment in which we live is a gift from heaven, as your national anthem also recognizes, by asking God to preserve the beauty of this land, a mother dressed by the brightest light. In Malta, where the luminous beauty of the landscape alleviates difficulties, creation appears as the gift that, amid the trials of history and life, reminds us of the beauty of our life on earth. It must therefore be kept safe from rapacious greed, from avarice and from construction speculation, which compromises not only the landscape but the very future. Instead, the protection of the environment and the promotion of social justice prepare for the future, and are optimal ways to instil in young people a passion for a healthy politics and to shield them from the temptation to indifference and lack of commitment.

The north wind often blends with blowing from the *west*. This European country, especially in its young people, shares western lifestyles and thinking. This brings great benefits — I think, for example, of the values of freedom and of democracy — but also risks, which call for vigilance lest the desire for progress be accompanied by detachment from your own roots. Malta is a splendid “laboratory of organic development”, where progress does not mean cutting one’s roots with the past in the name of a false prosperity dictated by profit, by needs created by consumerism, to say

nothing of the right to have any and every “right”. A sound development needs to preserve the memory of the past and foster respect and harmony between the generations, without yielding to bland uniformity and to forms of ideological colonization, that take place, for example, in the field and principle of life. That is ideological colonization that goes against the right to life from the moment it is conceived.

The basis of all solid growth is respect for the human person, respect for the life and dignity of every man and every woman. I am aware of the commitment of the Maltese people to embracing and protecting life. Already in the Acts of the Apostles, the people of this island were known for saving many lives. I encourage you to continue to defend life from its beginning to its natural end, but also to protect it at every moment from being cast aside and deprived of care and concern. I think especially of the rightful dignity of workers, the elderly and sick. And of those young people who risk squandering all the good they have within them by following mirages that leave only emptiness in their wake. These are the fruits of radical consumerism, indifference to the needs of others and the scourge of drugs, which suppresses freedom and creates dependence. Let us protect the beauty of life!

Continuing to follow the rose of winds, we now look to the *south*, from where so many of our brothers and sisters have come in search of hope. I would like to thank the civil authorities and the people of Malta for the welcome they have given them in the name of the Gospel, our common humanity and of their native sense of hospitality. According to its Phoenician etymology, Malta means “safe harbor”. Nonetheless, given the growing influx of recent years, fear and insecurity have nurtured a certain discouragement and frustration. If the complexity of the migration issue is to be properly addressed, it needs to be situated within a broader context of time and space. Time, in the sense that the migration phenomenon is not a temporary situation, but a sign of our times. It brings with it the burden of past injustice, exploitation, climatic changes and tragic conflicts, whose effects are now making themselves felt. From the poor and densely populated south, great numbers of people are moving to the wealthy north: this is a fact, and it cannot be ignored by adopting an anachronistic isolationism, which will not produce prosperity and integration. From the standpoint of space, the growing migration emergency — here we can think of the refugees from war-torn Ukraine — calls for a broad-based and shared response. Some countries cannot respond to the entire problem, while others remain indifferent onlookers! Civilized countries cannot approve for their own interest sordid agreements with criminals who enslave other human beings. Unfortunately this happens. The Mediterranean needs co-responsibility on the part of Europe, in order to become a new theatre of solidarity and not the harbinger of a tragic shipwreck of civilization. The *mare nostrum* should not become the biggest cemetery of Europe.

With this mention of shipwreck, my thoughts turn to Saint Paul who, in the course of his last journey across the Mediterranean, unexpectedly came to these shores and found ready assistance. Then, bitten by a viper, he was thought to be a criminal, but then came to be

considered a god because he suffered no ill effects from it (cf. *Acts* 28:3-6). Between these two extremes, the really important thing was missed: Paul was a man, a man in need of assistance. Humanity is first and foremost: that is the lesson taught by this country whose history was blessed by the arrival of the shipwrecked apostle. In the name of the Gospel that Paul lived and preached, let us open our hearts and rediscover the beauty of serving our neighbours in need. Let us continue on this path. Today, when those who cross the Mediterranean in search of salvation are met with fear and the narrative of "invasion", and safeguarding one's own security at any price seems to be the primary goal, let us help one another not to view the migrant as a threat and not to yield to the temptation of raising drawbridges and erecting walls. Other people are not a virus from which we need to be protected, but persons to be accepted. For that matter, "the Christian ideal will always be a summons to overcome suspicion, habitual mistrust, fear of losing our privacy, all the defensive attitudes which today's world imposes on us" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 88). May we not allow indifference to stifle our dream of living as one! Certainly, acceptance entails effort and requires renunciations. So it was in the experience of Saint Paul: to save the ship, it was necessary to sacrifice the merchandise it was carrying (cf. *Acts* 27:38). Yet every sacrifice, every renunciation made for a greater good, for life of man who is the treasure of God, is holy!

Finally, there is the wind coming from the *east*, which often blows at dawn, which is why Homer called it "Eurus" (*Odyssey*, V, 349.423). Yet from the east of Europe, from the land of sunrise, the dark shadows of war have now spread. We had thought that invasions of other countries, savage street fighting and atomic threats were grim memories of a distant past. However, the icy winds of war, which bring only death, destruction and hatred in their wake, have swept down powerfully upon the lives of many people and affected us all. Once again, some potentate, sadly caught up in anachronistic claims of nationalist interests, is provoking and fomenting conflicts, whereas ordinary people sense the need to build a future that, will either be shared, or not be at all. Now in the night of the war that is fallen upon humanity, please, let us not allow the dream of peace to fade!

Malta, which shines brilliantly in the heart of the Mediterranean, can serve as an inspiration to us, for it is urgent to restore beauty to the face of a humanity marred by war. A beautiful Mediterranean statue dating back centuries before Christ depicts peace as a woman, Eirene, holding in her arms Ploutus, wealth. That statue reminds us that peace generates prosperity, and war only poverty. Significantly, in that statue peace and prosperity are depicted as a mother holding her child in her arms. The tender love of mothers, who give life to the world, and the presence of women are the true alternative to the baneful logic of power that leads to war. We need compassion and care, not ideological and populist visions fueled by words of hatred and unconcerned for the concrete life of the people, ordinary people.

Over sixty years ago, in a world menaced by destruction, where law was dictated by ideological conflicts and the grim logic of blocs, a different voice was raised from the Mediterranean basin, countering the exaltation of self-interests with a call for a prophetic leap in the name of universal

fraternity. It was the voice of Giorgio La Pira, who stated that “the historic juncture in which we are living, the clash of interests and ideologies that shake a humanity in prey to incredible childishness, restore to the Mediterranean a capital responsibility. It is that of defining once more the rule of a moderation in which man, abandoned to madness and lack of moderation, can recognize himself” (*Intervention at the Mediterranean Congress of Culture* , 19 February 1960). Those were timely words; we can repeat them because they have a great relevance. How much we need a “human moderation” before the infantile and destructive aggression that threatens us, before the risk of an “enlarged Cold War” that can stifle the life of entire peoples and generations. That “childishness”, sadly, has not disappeared. It has reemerged powerfully in the seductions of autocracy, new forms of imperialism, widespread aggressiveness, and the inability to build bridges and start from the poorest in our midst. Today, it is difficult to think with the logic of peace. We have gotten used to thinking with the logic of war. It is from there that the cold wind of war begins to blow, and this time it has been encouraged over the years. War has in fact been prepared for some time by great investments in weaponry and a massive trade in arms. It is distressing to see how the enthusiasm for peace, which emerged after the Second World War, has faded in these recent decades, as has the progress of the international community, with a few powers who go ahead on their own account, seeking spaces and zones of influence. In this way, not only peace, but also so many great questions, like the fight against hunger and inequality are no longer on the list of the main political agendas.

But the solution to the crisis of each is care for those of all, since global problems require global solutions. Let us help one another to sense people’s yearning for peace. Let us work to lay the foundations of an ever more expanded dialogue. Let us go back to gathering in international peace conferences, where the theme of disarmament will have a central place, where our thoughts will turn to future generations! And where the enormous funds that continue to be destined to weaponry may be diverted to development, health care and nutrition.

Looking once more to the east, I would like to devote a final thought to the nearby Middle East, whose languages, harmonized with others, are reflected in the native language of this nation, as if to recall the capacity of the Maltese people to generate beneficial forms of coexistence in a sort of conviviality of differences. This is what the Middle East needs: Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, and other contexts torn by problems and violence. May Malta, the heart of the Mediterranean, continue to foster the heartbeat of hope, care for life, acceptance of others, yearning for peace, with the help of the God whose name is peace.

God bless Malta and Gozo!
