



The Holy See

LETTER OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE BISHOPS OF MALTA

*To my venerable and dear Brothers
Joseph Mercieca, Archbishop of Malta
and Nicholas J. Cauchi, Bishop of Gozo*

As the Church in Malta prepares to enter upon its year-long observance which will culminate in the Ninth International Mariological Congress, it is a joy for me to write you this Letter and, through you, to send greetings to the whole beloved Maltese people. With the Apostle Peter I say: "Peace to all of you that are in Christ".

It is particularly gratifying to know that on 1 October next you will inaugurate throughout Malta the Diocesan Mission, the aim of which is the spiritual renewal of the Maltese people. As Pastor of the universal Church of Christ, I am pleased to be associated with you, the local Ordinaries, in this solemn call of the People of God to ever greater holiness of life. At this propitious moment and acceptable time may the words of Saint Paul echo throughout your land: "Be renewed in the spirit of your minds and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness".

By its very nature, a call to spiritual renewal is an invitation to prayer. And so the Maltese people are invited to open their hearts to God, to turn their minds to his Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and to implore the purifying action of the Holy Spirit in their lives. It is through prayer – both personal and liturgical – that all the members of the community will attain the strength needed for authentic Christian living.

In prayer they will deeply perceive that a call to renewal means a call to fidelity to Christ as he lives on in the communion of his Church. This communion is a communion of one faith – a communion of truth and life, of holiness and grace, of justice, love and peace. It is a communion which requires from its members mutual respect, fraternal support and loving obedience to the

pastors of the flock.

The Church is a universal communion in which priests, religious and laity live their vocation and cooperate in the salvific mission of Christ through common action in union with the Bishops and the Successor of Peter. And in this common and coordinated ecclesial action there is found the assurance of fidelity to Christ and the guarantee of an effective contribution to the Kingdom of God.

A call to renewal is likewise a call to consistency – consistency between faith and Christian living. A community of faith and prayer must show forth in its conduct what it professes and proclaims. The belief of the Church must be expressed in the private and public life of her members. Consistency must be manifested through an ever more visible and vital Christian witness in all the roles and functions in which the faithful find themselves. The Christian challenge – the call to consistency – involves decisive choices and sacrifices for everyone; it makes claims on those in humble conditions, as well as those with lofty responsibilities. For every category of people Christianity has the same requirements: to embrace Christ in faith and to apply his teachings to the concrete situations of life.

It is moreover, the experience of centuries of Christian living that fidelity to Christ and his Church, far from loyalty to one's homeland, is an effective contribution to the well-being of the whole community. Christ himself instructed us: "Render therefore to Caesar the thing that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's".

At this important time, all Christians must, through a common commitment, take seriously their responsibility to promote the Maltese patrimony of Christian values, which unify and give an authentic visage to the Maltese nation and its people.

To foster Christian values which serve the common good of the whole nation, Catholics must support those educational and charitable and social institutions which are so generously operated by the Church.

Spiritual renewal will also involve further efforts at reconciliation in the pursuit of precious national unity – the unity of brothers and sisters in freedom, justice and charity. Renewal and reconciliation will mean a new era where division is replaced by harmony and where hostility is dissolved by the forces of fraternal respect and Christian love. This new era will likewise be the propitious climate for the material as well as spiritual well-being of every man, woman and child in Malta.

In all your efforts to achieve spiritual renewal and to build up the religious and moral fabric of your nation, you rightfully count on the intercession of Mary, the Mother of God, who presides over the destiny of your people, helping them to overcome all difficulties and to arrive at the third millennium with their Christian cultural identity.

In this regard it is my hope that the Marian celebrations which are yet to come, together with the whole year of spiritual renewal, will be considered ecclesial events which will occasion, among other things, an ever greater union of faith and love among the sons and daughters of Malta, which proudly claims to be the Island of Saint Paul. And may it be thus under the protection of Mary, to whose loving and maternal care I confidently entrust all the inhabitants of Malta.

Through you, venerable Brothers, I send my special Apostolic Blessing to all the faithful, with the assuring words of your own Apostle Paul: "My love be with you all in Christ Jesus".

From the Vatican, 29 September 1982.

IOANNES PAULUS PP. II

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