



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. DR JAMES FARRUGIA
AMBASSADOR OF MALTA***

Thursday, 20 May 1999

Mr Ambassador,

I gladly respond to your greeting with Our Lord's words which, as you recalled, are repeated at every Eucharistic celebration: "*Peace be with you!*". May peace be with you, Mr Ambassador, with the Churches of Malta and Gozo and with all the Maltese people!

I was able to repeat this greeting many times to the Maltese people nine years ago during my Pastoral Visit to that beloved country. Indeed, we are close to the anniversary of those unforgettable days of May 1990, when I had the grace, Mr Ambassador of visiting and praying in your country mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles. St Paul, shipwrecked, and the other survivors of the storm were received there with "unusual kindness"; "the chief man of the island, named Publius", welcomed them and received them as his guests "hospitably" and, when they left, the Maltese "put on board whatever [they] needed" (cf. Acts 28:2-10).

Tradition dates the beginning of the Church in Malta and the faith of the Maltese in Jesus Christ to Paul's stay there. This faith grew and vigorously persevered down to our time, strengthened by the numerous trials and difficulties that it had to face over the centuries.

I noticed this faith while praying with the people of Malta in the Co-Cathedral of St John, at the shrine of Mellieha, in the stadium with the young people, in St Paul's Grotto at the shrine of Our Lady of "Ta' Pinu" and on St Paul's island.

This same faith is expressed in the hundreds of churches, both small and monumental that, often built through the sacrifices of ordinary people, characterize many of the island's city and country roads.

It is the same faith that I hope is the genuine reason for the many beautiful feasts of the saints

that, rooted in the tradition of the Maltese people and celebrated with special outward effort, offer an excellent opportunity for serious catechesis and for an authentic growth in Christian life.

Mr Ambassador, you mentioned great moral and civil values, such as peace, life and the family. In particular I would like to stress the importance of the family, the little Church, where, together with life, the seed of faith also sprouts and grows, and where children are taught to follow the law of God. Today the family institution is subject to fierce attacks in various parts of the world. Even Malta is experiencing the spread of a mentality that threatens to contaminate the healthy convictions of the population in this regard. This is why the Maltese Episcopate recently took a stand on the issue in a public statement reaffirming the principles of the natural law on which this fundamental institution is based, and it recalled that "stable and united families are a nation's most important and valuable resource".

They are also an essential value for the Church. In fact, it is in the family that vocations to lay commitment as well as to the priesthood, still numerous today in Malta, are born and mature. It is an immense grace and joy for the Church and for all the people of Malta to be able to continue that same generosity shown to the shipwrecked Paul. Malta can offer priests and religious to other Churches which need them. I hope that the missionary spirit of the Apostle Paul will always be kept alive in the heart of all the island's people.

I also hope that there will be an increase in the number of Maltese who distinguish themselves in the consecrated life and in pastoral zeal, as faithful representatives of faith, popular piety and missionary spirit. Let us hope that the Church in Malta, together with the ecclesial communities of the whole world, can rejoice in seeing some of its sons and daughters recognized for their heroism and holiness!

Malta, in the centre of the Mediterranean, is today more than ever a meeting place for different peoples and cultures. The wellknown spirit of acceptance that characterizes the Maltese people strengthens this vocation of the island to be a place of meeting and dialogue. It is an important role that the Maltese and their authorities can exercise for knowledge and understanding among peoples, thus fostering peace and cultural, scientific and economic cooperation. The Pope offers this wish with hope and great love for the people of Malta.

Mr Ambassador, you also mentioned the relations between the civil institutions and the Church in Malta. Thanks be to God, they are excellent and inspired by a desire for constructive, continual and honest dialogue. This is an attitude which is already well tested and in past years has helped to overcome some difficulties and to conclude fruitful bilateral agreements. I am certain that this same spirit will continue to mark future relations between the Apostolic See and the Maltese nation.

I assure you, Mr Ambassador, that, for the Church's part, this desire for collaboration is constant. It

is also demonstrated by the cordiality with which today I receive and welcome the Letters of Credence appointing you as Ambassador of the Republic of Malta to the Holy See. This same sentiment of cordiality is extended, through you, to the people of Malta, to the authorities and to the newly elected Head of State, His Excellency Mr Guido de Marco.

For your new task as ambassador, which crowns a long life devoted to the service of your country, in which you held many important public offices, I offer you my warmest wishes and bless you together with your loved ones and the entire Maltese people.

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