



# The Holy See

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PASTORAL JOURNEY TO MALTA

**EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION  
AT THE SHRINE OF OUR LADY TA' PINU**

***HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II***

*Island of Gozo  
Saturday, 26 May 1990*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,*

*"My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord" (Luc. 1, 46).*

1. These joyful words, drawn from the Responsorial Psalm of today's liturgy, were first spoken by the Blessed Virgin Mary as she reflected upon the "great things" which God had done for her and for his Chosen People. How appropriate it is that *the Church in Gozo should echo Mary's song of praise* at this Shrine of Our Lady Ta' Pinu, as we celebrate the ancient faith of the Maltese and Gozitan people and rejoice in the bonds of ecclesial communion which have always united them to the Apostolic See!

At this, the first Mass which I celebrate since my arrival in Malta, I give thanks for the many blessings which God has bestowed upon the people of these islands from the time when the Apostle Paul first preached the Gospel among you. In greeting you all with affection in the Lord, I assure you of my prayer that Christ's peace will always find a dwelling place in your hearts and in your homes. *To Bishop Cauchi I express my gratitude* for his words of welcome, which have given voice to the traditional faith of the Gozitan people, their deep love of this beautiful land, and their hope that the blessings of nature which God has destined for all mankind may be safeguarded for the benefit of future generations. 2. This morning, we celebrate our communion with the Church of every time and place, that Church of which the Blessed Virgin Mary stands out as the pre-eminent

member (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 53). At this venerable Shrine of Our Lady Ta' Pinu, we give thanks to our Lord Jesus Christ for the *loving presence and protection of his Virgin Mother* which the Church in Malta and Gozo has experienced throughout its history. For centuries, the faithful of these islands have drawn near to Mary in prayer and have sought her loving intercession to aid them in their needs and to comfort them in their distress. In calling Mary blessed among women, they have echoed the words of the Angel Gabriel at the Annunciation (Cfr. *Luc.* 1, 28), and fulfilled the prophecy which she herself uttered to her kinswoman Elizabeth: "From this day forward all generations will call me blessed" (*Ibid.* 1, 48). In a very special way, *Mary has been the patroness of the Christian families of Malta and Gozo* as they have sought to fulfil their unique role in God's plan for the salvation of the human race. We may be confident that with a mother's love Mary has not failed to intercede for generations of parents and children, inspiring in them that fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom (Cfr. *Ps.* 110 [109], 10) and accompanying them on their pilgrimage of faith. *Today, Malta's families must still rely upon Mary's motherly protection and care*, as they face new challenges to the fulfilment of their vital mission to individuals and all society! In God's plan, the family is where children learn what it means to be responsible individuals and members of a larger community, where they first encounter the virtues of unselfish love and self-sacrifice, and where they first come to understand the mystery of God's love as it is expressed in the love of their parents. Since the family is the "first and vital cell of society" (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 11), the spiritual health of its families will always be the fundamental measure of a society's strength. May the families of Malta and Gozo never hesitate to look to Mary, the Mother of the Holy Family of Nazareth and the Mother of all mankind in the order of grace (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 62), as a sure guide amid life's challenges and trials! 3. In the Gospel of today's Mass, we are invited to reflect on Mary's maternal cooperation in the divine mission of her Son. Saint John tells us that at the *wedding feast of Cana*, when Jesus began his public ministry by turning the water into wine, he worked the miracle at the urging of his Mother, who was concerned for the needs of the guests. Meditating upon this passage of Scripture down the ages, the Church has come to understand that the confident words which Mary spoke to the servants— "Do whatever he tells you" (*Io.* 2, 5), are a mysterious indication of *Mary's unique maternal role in the entire economy of Christ's grace*. As a mother, "Mary places herself between her Son and mankind in the reality of their wants, needs and suffering" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Redemptoris Mater*, 21). Out of loving concern for others, she brings all mankind's needs within the radius of Christ's saving power. Towards the end of John's Gospel, Mary appears once again, this time *standing at the foot of the Cross*. What more powerful image could the Evangelist have given us of Mary's profound spiritual union with the redemptive mission of her Son? When from the Cross Jesus says to the Beloved Disciple, "Behold your Mother!" (*Io.* 19, 27), he entrusts Mary to us, to each one of his disciples, to be our Mother too. At the foot of the Cross, Mary is fully revealed as Mother of the Church, *Mater Ecclesiae* inviting each of us to trust in her prayers. Let us never hesitate to turn to her! How often, in your families, do you feel powerless in the face of painful and apparently insoluble situations? How many people find it a constant struggle to forgive longstanding grudges, or to overcome deeply-rooted feelings of anger, hostility, jealousy or resentment? How many people desperately long for someone they love to abandon a way of life or

a course of action which they know will only lead to frustration and unhappiness? And how frequently do our hearts go out to someone who is caught up in the toils of mental anguish or a bitter grief which knows no consolation? At moments like these, should we not trust in Mary's loving intercession, confident that *the most hopeless of human situations can be transformed by the saving power of Jesus*, who in answer to her request turned water into wine, who died on the Cross that we might live forever? 4. Mary's cooperation in the mystery of God's plan as it unfolded in the Incarnation of her Son invites all Christian parents and children to think about their own vocation to be *cooperators in the mystery of God's grace at work within their families*. Our faith teaches us that *each human life*, beginning at the moment of conception, is a *gift from the Creator* and endowed with an infinite value in his eyes. Our faith reminds us that all human beings have been created in God's own image and likeness and given a vocation and destiny that will find their ultimate fulfilment beyond this earthly existence, in a communion of life and love with the Blessed Trinity. Faith also teaches us that we are united with all other members of the human race in a *deep moral solidarity*, that our actions and choices have consequences not only for ourselves but for others, and that we shall be judged by the measure of our love and concern for the least of our brothers and sisters. Is it not in the life of their families that most people come to learn the magnificent truth which lies behind these profound affirmations of Christian faith? Unfortunately, it is easy for individuals and families to be so caught up in the many anxieties of daily life that they fail to stand back, put their lives in spiritual perspective, and rediscover the truth of their own vocation. How tragic this is, for without a spirit of prayer and meditation how can we discern God's will for us, turn to him in obedience and love, and thus experience the happiness and peace for which he created us? For this reason, I encourage all of you to *pray constantly* (Cfr. 1 *Thess.* 5, 17), especially within your families, in humble thanksgiving for everything that God in his goodness has done for you. Ask him every day to help you to *remain faithful to the vocation which he has given you in Christ!* Do not be afraid to bring before him all your hopes, your needs and concerns. *Parents*, pray for your children, that they may grow in the new life which they received in Baptism. *Children*, pray for your parents, for you too have a part to play in making them holy (Cfr. *Gaudium et Spes*, 48). Moreover, as members of a greater family, pray in union with Christ's Body throughout the world *for the needs of all humanity*: for the sick and the oppressed, for the leaders of nations, for those who labour for justice and peace among peoples, and for those who promote responsible stewardship of the natural environment. Pray for all those who in any way give glory to God by humbly serving the needs of their brothers and sisters. And whether your work is at home, in the fields or at sea, in the factories or in Malta's growing tourist industry, offer it to the Lord as a pleasing sacrifice in preparation for the coming of his kingdom! In the past, Malta's *strong family life has provided a solid basis for the stability and harmonious development of society*. In the present age can the families of Malta and Gozo continue to meet this urgent challenge? Like many societies, yours is not immune to a kind of spiritual disorientation caused by rapid social changes and the attraction of value systems and modes of behaviour which run counter to the deepest convictions which have moulded your identity as a people. Today, invoking the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Reconciliation and Queen of Peace, I ask all of you to pray with me that Malta's families will be the crucible in which your society will forge a *renewed commitment*

*to the Gospel values which are its most precious inheritance from the past!* 5. As "the Church journeys through time towards the consummation of the ages and goes to meet the Lord who comes... she proceeds along the path already trodden by the Virgin Mary, who 'advanced in her pilgrimage of faith, and loyally persevered in her union with her Son unto the Cross'" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Redemptoris Mater*, 2). My brothers and sisters: As you seek to persevere in your own pilgrimage of faith, *I commend your families to Mary's maternal protection and prayers*. May she, who "pondered in her heart" (*Luc. 2, 51*), the mystery of God's love as it was revealed in the life of her Son, guide parents and children to respond fully to the vocation which they have received as sons and daughters of God, redeemed by Christ and born again in the Holy Spirit (*Cfr. Io. 3, 5*). May she *guide the Church's pastors in their catechesis and ministry to young people and to those about to marry*. And may she *guide all those responsible in any way for the public welfare*, that they may respect and support family life by wise and prudent legislation, rejecting as harmful to the good of society everything that would ignore or deny God's plan for the family and lessen respect for the gift of human life. As we continue our celebration of the Eucharist at this Sanctuary which the love and devotion of generations of Maltese Catholics have raised to Mary the Mother of God, may our voices be joined to hers as we praise God for the many graces which he has bestowed upon his people in Malta and Gozo: "The Almighty has done great things for me!". Yes, "the Almighty has done great things" among us! He has done "great things" for all his people! Amen.

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