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FLORIANA - 18.04.2010 - 10.00

**Granaries
Holy Mass**

Original text

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ,
Mahbubin uliedi [*My dear sons and daughters*],

I am very glad to be here with all of you today before the beautiful church of Saint Publius to celebrate the great mystery of God's love made manifest in the Holy Eucharist. At this time, the joy of the Easter season fills our hearts because we are celebrating Christ's victory, the victory of life over sin and death. It is a joy which transforms our lives and fills us with hope in the fulfilment of God's promises. Christ is risen, alleluia!

I greet the President of the Republic and Mrs Abela, the civil authorities of this beloved Nation, and all the people of Malta and Gozo. I thank Archbishop Cremona for his gracious words, and I also greet Bishop Grech and Bishop Depasquale, Archbishop Mercieca, Bishop Cauchi and the other bishops and priests present, as well as all the Christian faithful of the Church in Malta and Gozo. Since my arrival yesterday evening I have experienced the same kind of warm welcome which your ancestors gave the Apostle Paul in the year sixty.

Many travellers have disembarked here in the course of your history. The richness and variety of Maltese culture is a sign that your people have profited greatly from the exchange of gifts and hospitality with seafaring visitors. And it is a sign that you have known how to exercise discernment in drawing upon the best of what they had to offer.

I urge you to continue to do so. Not everything that today's world proposes is worthy of acceptance by the people of Malta. Many voices try to persuade us to put aside our faith in God and his Church, and to choose for ourselves the values and beliefs by which to live. They tell us we have no need of God or the Church. If we are tempted to believe them, we should recall the incident in today's Gospel, when the disciples, all of them experienced fishermen, toiled all night but failed to catch a single fish. Then, when Jesus appeared on the shore, he directed them to a catch so great that they could scarcely haul it in. Left to themselves, their efforts were fruitless; when Jesus stood alongside them, they netted a huge quantity of fish. My dear brothers and sisters, if we place our trust in the Lord and follow his teachings, we will always reap immense rewards.

Our first reading at Mass today is one that I know you love to hear, the account of Paul's shipwreck on the coast of Malta, and his warm reception by the people of these islands. Notice how the crew of the ship, in order to survive, were forced to throw overboard the cargo, the ship's tackle, even the wheat which was their only sustenance. Paul urged them to place their trust in God alone, while the ship was tossed to and fro upon the waves. We too must place our trust in him alone. It is tempting to think that today's advanced technology can answer all our needs and save us from all the perils and dangers that beset us. But it is not so. At every moment of our lives we depend entirely on God, in whom we live and move and have our being. Only he can protect us from harm, only he can guide us through the storms of life, only he can bring us to a safe haven, as he did for Paul and his companions adrift off the coast of Malta. They did as Paul urged them to do, and so it was "that they all escaped safely to the land" (*Acts 27:44*).

More than any of the cargo we might carry with us – in terms of our human accomplishments, our possessions, our technology – it is our relationship with the Lord that provides the key to our happiness and our human fulfilment. And he calls us to a relationship of love. Notice the question that he put three times to Peter on the shore of the lake: "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" On the basis of Peter's affirmative response, Jesus assigns him a task – the task of feeding his flock. Here we see the basis of all pastoral ministry in the Church. It is our love for the Lord that must inform every aspect of our preaching and teaching, our celebration of the sacraments, and our care for the people of God. It is our love for the Lord that moves us to love those whom he loves, and to accept gladly the task of communicating his love to those we serve. During our Lord's Passion, Peter denied him three times. Now, after the Resurrection, Jesus invites him three times to avow his love, in this way offering him healing and forgiveness and at the same time entrusting him with his mission. The miraculous catch of fish underlined the apostles' dependence on God for the success of their earthly projects. The dialogue between Peter and Jesus underlined the need for divine mercy in order to heal their spiritual wounds, the wounds of sin.

In every area of our lives we need the help of God's grace. With him, we can do all things: without him we can do nothing.

We know from Saint Mark's Gospel the signs that accompany those who put their faith in Jesus: they will pick up serpents and be unharmed, they will lay their hands on the sick, who will recover (cf. *Mk* 16:18). These signs were immediately recognized by your forebears when Paul came among them. A viper attached itself to his hand, but he simply shook it off into the fire, and suffered no harm. He was taken to see the father of Publius, the *protos* of the island, and after praying and laying hands on him, Paul healed him of his fever. Of all the gifts brought to these shores in the course of your people's history, the gift brought by Paul was the greatest of all, and it is much to your credit that it was immediately accepted and treasured. *Ghożżu l-fidi u l-valuri li takom l-Appostlu Missierkom San Pawl. [Preserve the faith and values transmitted to you by your father the Apostle Saint Paul.]* Continue to explore the richness and depth of Paul's gift to you and be sure to hand it on not only to your children, but to all those you encounter today. No visitor to Malta could fail to be impressed by the devotion of your people, the vibrant faith manifested in your feast-day celebrations, the beauty of your churches and shrines. But that gift needs to be shared with others, it needs to be articulated. As Moses taught the people of Israel, the words of the Lord "shall be upon your heart, and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down and when you rise" (*Deut* 6:6-7). This was well understood by Malta's first canonized Saint, Dun Ġorġ Preca. His tireless work of catechesis, inspiring young and old with a love for Christian doctrine and a deep devotion to the Incarnate Word of God, set an example that I urge you to maintain. Remember that the exchange of goods between these islands and the world outside is a two-way process. What you receive, evaluate with care, and what you have that is of value, be sure to share with others.

I would like to address a particular word to the priests present here, in this year devoted to a celebration of the great gift of the priesthood. Dun Ġorġ was a priest of remarkable humility, goodness, meekness and generosity, deeply devoted to prayer and with a passion for communicating the truths of the Gospel. Let him serve as a model and an inspiration for you, as you strive to fulfil the mission you have received to feed the Lord's flock. Remember, too, the question that the Risen Lord put three times to Peter: "Do you love me?" That is the question he asks each of you. Do you love him? Do you wish to serve him through the gift of your whole lives? Do you long to bring others to know and love him? With Peter, have the courage to answer, "Yes, Lord, you know I love you," and accept with grateful hearts the beautiful task that he has assigned you. The mission entrusted to priests is truly a service to joy, to God's joy which longs to break into the world (cf. *Homily*, 24 April 2005).

As I look around me now at the great crowds gathered here in Floriana for our celebration of the Eucharist, I am reminded of the scene described in our second reading today, in which myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands united their voices in one great song of praise: "*To the One seated on the throne and to the Lamb, be all praise, honour, glory and power, for ever and ever*" (*Rev* 5:13).

Continue to sing that song, in praise of the risen Lord and in thanksgiving for his manifold gifts. In the words of Saint Paul, Apostle of Malta, I conclude my words to you this morning: "L-imhabba tiegħi tkun magħkom ilkoll fi Kristu Ġesù" [*"My love is with you all in Christ Jesus"*] (*1 Cor* 16:24).

Ikun imfahhar Ġesù Kristu! [Praised be Jesus Christ!]
