



**ADDRESS OF YOUNG PEOPLE OF MALTA AND GOZO TO HIS HOLINESS POPE
BENEDICT XVI
SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER
18TH APRIL 2010
Gospel text: Mark 10:17**

Jerome Caruana

Your Holiness,

As young people, we believe that the Church's richness lie in the fact that it brings together a great diversity of people, not only with regards to age, language and culture, but also in the variety of expressions of Christian living, in our different perspectives on life, and the meaning which we give to the mystery of Jesus Christ in human history. Today in our meeting with you, your Holiness, our desire is to make manifest this plurality in the Church in Malta. We are here because we hold in our hearts a sincere wish to seek and discover the truth.

We believe that this communion of faith finds expression in the power of the Holy Spirit. Our hearts encompass our different lives and personalities. It is our desire that through God's presence among us, our personal lives as well as the social life of the Church will experience a new creation. We are one Church, an inclusive Church, a Church that listens. Thus, as the young man who approached Jesus Christ asked: "Good Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" we, the Maltese and Gozitan young people, as well as our friends from other countries who are present here with us today, turn to you, your Holiness, Master, and confide our thoughts to you.

Paul Caruana

Your Holiness,

I wish to speak on behalf of those young people who, like me feel they are on the outskirts of the Church. We are the ones who do not fit comfortably into stereo-typed roles. This is due to various factors among them: either because we have experienced substance abuse; or because we are experiencing the misfortune of broken or dysfunctional families; or because we are of a different sexual orientation; among us are also our immigrant brothers and sisters, all of us in some way or another have encountered experiences that have estranged us from the Church. Other Catholics put us all in one basket. For them we are those "who claim to believe yet do not live up to the commitment of faith." To us, faith is a confusing reality and this causes us great

suffering. We feel that not even the Church herself recognizes our worth. One of our deepest wounds stems from the fact that although the political forces are prepared to realize our desire for integration, the Church community still considers us to be a problem. It seems almost as if we are less readily accepted and treated with dignity by the Christian community than we are by all other members of society. We understand that our way of life puts the Church in an ambiguous position, yet we feel that we should be treated with more compassion – without being judged and with more love.

We are made to feel that we are living in error. This lack of comprehension on the part of other Christians causes us to entertain grave doubts, not only with regards to community life, but also regarding our personal relationship with God. How can we believe that God accepts us unconditionally when his own people reject us? Your Holiness, we wish to tell you that on a personal level – and some of us, even in our respective communities – are persevering to find ways in which we may remain united in Jesus, who we consider to be our salvation. However, it is not that easy for us to proclaim God as our Father, a God who responds to all those who love him without prejudice. It is a contradiction in terms when we bless God's Holy Name, whilst those around us make us feel that we are worth nothing to him. We feel emarginated, almost as if we had not been invited to the banquet. God has called to him all those who are in the squares and in the towns, those who are on the wayside and in the country side, however we feel he has bypassed our streets. Your Holiness, please tell us what exactly is Jesus' call for us. We wish you to show to us and the rest of the Church just how valid is our faith, and whether our prayers are also heard. We too wish to give our contribution to the Catholic community. Your Holiness, what must we do?

Kimberly Terrible

Your Holiness,

I speak on behalf of those young people who are on a journey of faith and are close to the Church. When we look around us, we can see an active Church that embodies a strong sense of commitment. It is true that on our part, we may not always be as inclusive as we should, and we do not always listen with respect to one another, yet the truth of the matter is that we too, as a group, feel excluded by society. We are among hundreds of young people who try to put into action the enthusiasm that we feel for our faith. For us, the Church represents that space in society which is openly accepting of God. Although it is easier to proclaim our faith, rather than to live it, we are committed to keeping the presence of the Church as alive as possible in our society, yet at the same time, we know that by pledging ourselves to the Church, we are consciously estranging ourselves from our contemporary culture.

At times, the thought crosses our minds that our work may be insignificant, that the Catholic community has merely attained the status of a Movement. We give up on our dreams of being one community, and we feel that it is our faith itself that impedes us from entering further into dialogue with society. Although we pray that God's Kingdom may come about, that all of creation may be united as one, we still feel that our hopes are in vain. Although we try to live

according to God's will, we feel that this is a fruitless exercise because our efforts do not reach far and beyond the peripheries of our society. The enthusiasm we hold in our hearts comes into conflict with our doubts and apprehensions: that we may have to abandon our efforts like an unfinished building, which although founded on strong foundations, is far too expensive to complete. A heavy responsibility bears upon us, as we strive to be not only the promise of the future for the Catholic Community, but being the protagonists of the presence of God's kingdom. It is our sincere desire that our endeavours lead the people of God in the right direction, but we must ensure that the path is being followed. We wish to see our dedication bearing fruit: that it is, in reality, renewing the Church, and not simply going down in the annals of history. We believe that by the work we perform in our parishes, in schools, in our groups and movements, in our voluntary service both locally and abroad, we are truly giving witness to Jesus Christ in our lives. We wish to leave our mark on the Church even as we are young. Your Holiness, what must we do?

Roberta Attard & John Borg

Your Holiness,

We are a young couple about to get married, and we speak on behalf of young people whose vocation is married life and family.

We believe that, as mature Christians, we are called to live our faith and our vocation within a society and a culture that is not at all accommodating. This is of grave concern to us, because the more time passes, the more difficult it is for us to live up to the commitment of our choices as Christians. We do not wish our choice to be an automatic or natural one; we do not wish to be Christians simply because our ancestors were; neither do we wish this for our children. We have taken a commitment to live intimately with God, through the grace of our marriage. We choose to be married before God because we believe that our family will be guided by God's own spirit. But we must admit that family life is not easy in this day and age. We are conscious that our choices are made against a background of a culture in which the concept of family is undergoing radical change: we firmly believe that family values go further than simply being a group of people united as members of the same family. Our difficulty lies in rearing a united and happy family in a fragmented culture. It is indeed hard to make a lifelong commitment to one's spouse and children, to share our life together, when it is just as easy to live a single life. We are not only referring to the material demands which society puts on a couple, example, the need for both spouses to work in order to support the family financially, but also to the culture of individualism, which causes confusion in our life. We feel that it is an impossible feat to realise our ideals. At the same time, we cannot just renounce the modern way of life, most especially because of our children. We feel hemmed in between two separate realities. On the one hand, we wish to live our married life as mundanely as possible, without putting our children at a disadvantage, on the other hand we are not altogether convinced that contemporary life style gives stability to our family – which also works against the interest of our children. In our hearts, we are sceptical towards the idea of simply trusting God to provide for our daily needs. We fear that our children are being raised in a more competitive world than the one we grew up in.

We are not sure about our own interpretation of God's providence: whether it is totally gratuitous or whether it is a form of compensation for our wisdom and prudence in raising our children. We feel that our culture encompasses a wide panorama which incorporates different forms of life. We wish to persist with our idea of the family, however, we fear that life offers too many hurdles for us to live our married lives in God's light.

We are not just expecting a reward at the end of our earthly lives. We believe that the grace of God's presence in our married life will sustain our family as we develop and grow together. We ask you to help us discern the signs of the Spirit in our marriage. Help us to see that it was God himself who called us to our vocation as married couple, even before we invited him to be part of our marriage. Show us the way to live our married life as a calling from God.

Your Holiness, tell us, what must we do?

Dillon Bugeja

Your Holiness,

I stand here on behalf of my friends who are on the road to discerning our vocation to the priesthood or to the consecrated life.

We firmly believe that God's call to man should be a most extraordinary experience, although at times strange, that one can live. It is a call that at one and the same time creates a state of happiness and of despair. Together with other young people here with us, we have listened to and heeded the call to serve through the ministry of the priesthood and the consecrated life. Courageously we are taking small steps towards our ministerial ordination in order to look after and care for God's people. It is a people whose desire is to live as fruitfully as possible in our modern world – a people who are not building walls, but rather seek to build bridges. Yet our vocation seems strange to those members of society who do not form part of our circle. Many times when we try to integrate ourselves in other areas outside the church, we are not taken seriously. It is our desire to grow closer to those people who have distanced themselves from God, yet how are we to touch those hearts which are cold and suspicious? Maybe by the standards of the collective consciousness of our culture, the Church seems to be a restraining force, a force that goes against the grain in life. And the priest often seems to be a personification of this negative force. We must admit that the Church has passed through phases and episodes that are not easy to explain or justify once seen through the eyes of today's open minded mentality. Today we also hear of priests who fail other persons. But it seems almost as if this admission of our shortcomings is not worth anything, and we are still held at arm's length by some people.

We do not feel that it is just that we are held responsible for the mistakes made by a few others – that we too are measured by the same yardstick – especially since we are trying to live out the implications of our vocation in a faithful manner. Yet at the same time we are aware that this forms part of our calling. With trepidation, we beg God for forgiveness of our sins and to save us

from danger because we realize that to a great extent, although we may have to face difficult situations, we do not wish to endanger others.

Yet we need to take the necessary steps forward even though we may not always be convinced about our wider role as pastors. Why should we continue to follow the sheep who seeks another flock? Why should we leave the flock where we are made welcome? We desire to be sustained in our mission as priests because our Church should be prepared to make everybody welcome, to find a place for everyone who needs it. We believe that in the name of Jesus Christ, we should invite new people to discover God, to look after the hearts of all persons, not only Catholics. Yet to do this we need to put ourselves in the shoes of the Shepherd who leaves his flock, to go after one single heart. We wish you integrate ourselves into a society who does not reserve a place for us.

Your Holiness, what must we do?

Jerome Caruana:

Your Holiness,
We ardently await your message of hope, a message that in the years to come will help us to recognise better the true face of the Divine Master – Jesus of Nazareth.