



8 th September, 2010

103/2010

**MESSAGE BY ARCHBISHOP PAUL CREMONA O.P.
DURING PONTIFICAL MASS ON THE OCCASSION OF VICTORY DAY**

Your Excellency President George Abela & Mrs. Abela,

Borthers and Sisters,

Today's celebration brings to mind two historical events: the end of the Great Siege of Malta in 1565 and the end of the Second World War – with particular reference to Malta's role in it – on 8th September 1942.

We commemorate this day in two ways. Firstly, as a reality which is both historical and civil, and which recalls the joy the people felt on both these occasions, a joy which meant that they were once again free to resume their normal lives – without suffering, fear and death which war inevitably brings with it.

Secondly, we commemorate this feast as a religious reality, not only because the history of our people has been inextricably intertwined with Christianity for the past 2000 years, but also because they lived through these events as part of their faith. During these times, our people were sustained by prayer and by hope which are part and parcel of our faith.

Thus, we commemorate these events within the context of these two realities and with a deep sense of respect towards those people who lived through them

Today, I would like to dwell upon and share with you, the religious and faith interpretation of these historical events. It is not possible for people of faith to separate these two interpretations, and so as a nation in which the majority of our people still practice the Catholic faith, it is important for us to reflect upon the interpretation that concerns this faith.

The faith interpretation

For the Christian person, the Word of God holds relevance in several ways. It is a means of knowing that which is supernatural: a way of knowing who God is – as he revealed himself to us through Our Lord Jesus Christ; a way of knowing the true value of life and what awaits us after death.

When God became man, the Word of God entered human history and became a means of interpreting the life of mankind in itself, a means of shedding light upon the personal history of each and every one of us. The believer uses the Word of God to reflect upon past events and also as a means of personal inspiration, in order to imbue his life with the values which arise out of such a Word.

Through the Word of God, this process is revealed in three very important moments:

1. In the Creation account, we read that God said to man: “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it”. This was a sign that man was to shoulder the responsibility, together with his Creator, of ruling over creation. The Word of God does not only speak to us of the Creator who left man to his own resources, but of a God who is continually inviting man to watch over creation and whose life is bound to God.

In Genesis, Chapter 3, we find a profound reflection regarding the effects of sin and evil upon mankind. We read: “By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food” (3,19). This shows us the challenges which man must face in order to enhance creation together with God – challenges which demand toil and suffering, challenges which many times, require man to swim against the current.

2. Through Abraham, God entered human history for the first time, to remain there with His people. Abraham is that man who trusts God implicitly and who allows himself to be guided by God, taking his decisions in conformity with God’s will. This trust in God is a characteristic which is also found in Moses. In Moses’ case, however, God is more specific: He does not only expect to be trusted, but asks the people to allow Him to lead them as a nation by giving them clear directions: His Commandments. God wished to help mankind by specifically indicating to him those values which society needs in order to become more humane. Man realizes just how valuable God’s Commandments are when they are invoked in his favour: he should not be killed; those close to him should be faithful towards him; he should not be robbed. God knew that there was a possibility that man could become confused: he would expect these values, yet he might not be prepared to live them out. Therefore God proved to man that He truly expected him to take decisions based on His commandments. A culture of values is fostered when one contributes his share in order to create a society in which, for example, there is no stealing. One cannot merely speak about it and expect not to be robbed – he must take a firm decision not to steal.

3. The final step in this process is Jesus Christ, who came in our midst not only to teach us, but to live and suffer, in order to build a society based on God's Commandments. In today's Gospel, we read of Joseph and Mary: two ordinary people through whom God implemented his plan of entering human history. Throughout the centuries, there have been other people, like Joseph and Mary, who accepted to give life to Jesus through their own lives, and who contributed towards building a society based on Christian values. From the very moment that the apostles and disciples met Jesus, they were captivated by him, and out of their own free will, they pledged themselves to his teachings. They accepted Him as "the Way, the Truth and the Life" (Jn 14,6). This became of paramount importance for them and as a result of the fact that the Word of God became for them the most valid criteria in their lives, many of them died as martyrs. The Church was built upon these people, who felt that their mission was to pass on to others, that which they believed about Jesus and that which they tried to put into action in their society.

The Church

The Church would like to offer the Word of God and propose His teachings to society, since she firmly believes that these are the true human values.

The Church's vision is based upon the fundamental values of the Gospel and it is her wish to transmit this vision to society: man's deepest dignity does not lie in any concession which the state may grant, but it lies deep within him, created as he is in the

image of God; man, as in the case of Eve, is always a gift to the other; communication is based on love – an everlasting love which grows and develops between a man and a woman, and upon which should be modeled every other type of communication in society. Part of the Church's mission is to acknowledge that which is good or bad – that which is conducive to living out these values in society and that which impedes it. The aim of her mission overrides all considerations which may be purely subjective and personal. Such considerations taken on their own merits, are not conducive towards the development of culture and therefore ultimately, they can only do damage to the common good of society.

Is this not perhaps what is happening in the world around us? The waste of so many young lives – youths who have no motivation in their lives? The great divide between the poor and the rich which grows larger by the day? Children who are deprived of the loving care of both parents within a stable family?

Proposals

I wish to share with you some ideas which Jesus proposed to those around him:

The first proposal is that those who believe in Jesus cannot simply believe in an ideal, but they must believe also in that which he taught, otherwise they will not be able to achieve such an ideal. These ideals must become the criteria by which his conscience is guided: they must become the map of his life. It sometimes happens that we speak about these ideals yet we do not adopt them. Hence we do not achieve the values which He taught.

The second proposal is that Jesus came to remind us of those principles that should be the starting point in order to build a society which is most suitable for man. Think of all the times in which Jesus went beyond the culture of the people of his time in order to return to those values which may be easily forgotten. It is almost as if he wished he draw out the difference between trying to fit values into an already formed culture or taking such values as the starting point in order to foster a society in which these values may become a reality and not a dream. Realities such as people who are living in poverty or suffering, due to complications which arise out of economic interests; the strengthening of marriage and the family, or prevailing legislation of other countries; the devaluation of the environment, or man's greed to dominate over nature for his own economic gain.

Jesus' proposals are radical and those who wish to live according to his Word, must heed his teachings: those who sacrifice their lives for their friends; those who do not escape reality and bear their crosses; blessed are the persecuted, for they shall receive justice. It was in the face of this radical teaching that St Paul took his decision "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?" (Rom 8,35). Each and every one of us needs to take that same decision: "neither personal interest, nor dishonest gains; neither abuse of power, nor the temptation of corruption, nor fear shall separate me from living that which Jesus taught".

The Church today

The Church proposes Christian ideals. It is not within her competence to provide practical solutions. She (the Church) proposes these solutions through its members. An example of this may be found in the person of three famous statesmen: Schumann, Adenauer, De Gasperi, who dedicated their efforts to bring unity within Europe following the Second World War. I urge Christians to shoulder their personal responsibility within their respective areas to find creative ways of disseminating the values which they embrace. They are further encouraged to direct their efforts towards achieving the ideals as transmitted to us by H.H. Pope Benedict XVI before leaving our island: "unity, solidarity and mutual respect stand at the basis of your social and political life".