



10th April, 2010

45/2010

**MESSAGE FROM CARDINAL TARCISIO BERTONE
ON THE OCCASION OF THE VISIT TO MALTA OF H.H. POPE BENEDICT XVI**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The Holy Father is greatly looking forward to his Apostolic Visit to the Maltese Islands, due to take place from 17 to 18 April, 2010. He greets all of you in the joy of the Risen Lord and he invokes upon you the abundant blessings that flow from Christ's conquest of sin and death and his triumphant entry into life.

In the days of preparation that remain, His Holiness asks you to pray that his Visit will be a time of spiritual renewal for the whole Church in Malta and Gozo. Just as Peter was invited by the Lord to confirm his brethren in their faith (cf. Lk 22:32), so now the Successor of Peter comes among you to strengthen you in your commitment to follow Jesus Christ. Malta has remained staunchly faithful to Christ over many centuries, and has done much to defend the faith, both at home and abroad. You may be proud of your Christian heritage, proud of the witness of many generations of Maltese Catholics who have lived out their faith with exemplary devotion, and proud of the apostolic fervour with which countless men and women from your islands have engaged in missionary activity, bringing the good news of Jesus Christ to distant shores.

The Holy Father knows how much you are attached to your great heritage, and he invites you to deepen this attachment as a living reality and as a truth that is always relevant, notwithstanding the fact that, in today's society, this carries the risk of being opposed, ignored or forgotten. Malta speaks with assurance of the need to defend the sanctity of marriage, the centrality of the family for a healthy society, and the need to protect the dignity of human life from conception to natural death. Malta knows how to care for the weaker and more vulnerable members of society, including the unborn, not least of all because she places such value on family life, which is the "first and indispensable teacher of peace" and of the virtues needed to maintain it (Message for the 2008 World Day of Peace, 3). The family also teaches us how to live in solidarity in every area of social and civil life. These are the great truths to which Malta can testify with authority and conviction.

At a time when the Maltese people celebrate with particular joy the 1950th anniversary of Saint Paul's arrival on their shores, the Holy Father commends all of you to the intercession of that great apostle and missionary, who tirelessly proclaimed the good news of the crucified and risen

Lord to the people of the Mediterranean. And in this year when the universal Church is celebrating a Year for Priests, he urges you in particular to value the great gift of the priesthood and to support and pray for your priests, so that they may grow in gratitude to God and in fidelity and enthusiasm for the ministry. He commends them and he commends all of you to the intercession of an outstanding Maltese priest, Saint Ġorġ Preca, to whom, in a special way, he entrusts his forthcoming Visit. And finally, he asks the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, venerated with particular devotion at your National Shrine of Ta' Pinu, to look down in love upon all the people of Malta and Gozo and to intercede for them with the One she was privileged to bear in her womb, the Saviour of the Word.

With these sentiments, His Holiness cordially imparts his Apostolic Blessing to all the people of Malta and Gozo, as a pledge of joy and peace in the Risen Lord. Il-Mulej ibierek lill-poplu kollu ta' Malta u ta' Ġhawdex!

From the Vatican, 31 March 2010