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**A LETTER BY ARCHBISHOP PAUL CREMONA O.P.,  
ON THE PASTORAL VISIT TO MALTA OF POPE BENEDICT XVI**

***'SO THAT OUR JOY MAY LAST FOREVER'***

Brothers and Sisters,

Recently, the Shepherd of the Universal Church, Pope Benedict XVI, visited us in Christ's name, and together we spent some joyful hours in his presence. The true protagonist of this event was the Holy Spirit, who enkindled the faith that lies in each and every one of us. At the Granaries, the Pope himself told us that "this joy is able to transform our lives and fill us with hope for the realization of God's promises".

The days he spent among us gave witness to the fact that the spirit of God is still very much alive within many Maltese and Gozitan people, as is the desire for his presence. This desire is lived within the life of Catholic Church. It is a faith which must be manifested by those who already believe in God, a faith which must be lived by those who have already opted for God, and shared it with those who have not as yet encountered Christ. We are the mediators of this encounter!

We were present and waited in anticipation for the Pope's teachings. Yet it is evident that, from our end, we also were able to give him something in return: we shared with him the enthusiasm for our faith, as well as our love for him. By the grace of God, we were able to make him feel happy.

The Pope has called for a new Evangelization, based upon the Word of God – an Evangelization led by the same spirit through which the apostles in the early Church experienced Christ's presence amongst them. We are in need of this new Evangelization not because the essence of Gospel has changed, but rather because the society in which it must be lived and transmitted today, is different from the society of other eras.

I feel that this new Evangelization must stem from the fact that we are able to live our faith with the same enthusiasm which we shared during the visit of His Holiness, not merely because he was physically present among us, but because we have Christ in our midst – Christ, who is alive in spite of the fact that we cannot see him.

We need to give witness to the presence of Jesus under the same conditions that were present during the Pope's visit: an enthusiasm which was manifested in spite of many distractions; a joy which is grounded in Jesus and not in our own abilities, even when we are humbled because of our sins; at a time when our society and some areas of the media are not so much in our favour; that same yearning for the Word of God as we felt for the Pope's words; a great love for all men, without distinction – a love which offers up all that we have to Jesus; a choice that may be recognised in our communion with the Church and the Christian community rather than an individual style of spirituality, which is not characteristic of the happiness that stems from union with one another.

There is no doubt that during the Pope's stay, we exhorted one another to attend the celebrations and did our utmost to help each other to get there. We need to carry on doing this every Sunday, in order that we can encourage one another to participate in the Eucharist, where we encounter Jesus.

All those who attended the celebrations and participated in them were filled with immense joy. I wish to thank all those who did their utmost so that this spirit could be expressed so zealously. All the crowds who were present are in turn responsible to draw others to the Church and provide them with an experience that will encourage them to remain among us. This task is first and foremost the responsibility of us, your Bishops and priests, but it extends to the whole community: every person can contribute his share in order that the same atmosphere of the past days can extend to the daily life of the Church.

On this occasion, we have had the chance to listen not only to what others have to say about the Pope, but rather we have the testimony of many people who have had the opportunity to meet him personally; or others who have been inspired by the look in the Pope's eyes – a look full of compassion and filled with the presence of God, a look which has been described as peaceful, soft, compassionate, a look that penetrates the spirit of the other person. And what is there to prevent us – priests or baptized lay persons – from experiencing God in this same way? As can be seen from the Acts of the Apostles, this is the way in which the Gospel was transmitted in the early days of the Church – and this is the way it needs to be transmitted even today!

Brothers and sisters, following the Papal visit, no Christian who is convinced of his faith must remain hidden. We need to make a quantum leap, with much love and humility, but with conviction, in order that we may share our joy and our faith with others. After all, in his final words to us before leaving our islands, Pope Benedict entrusted with this mission:

“Be an example, at home and abroad, of dynamic Christian living. Be proud of your Christian vocation. Cherish your religious and cultural heritage. Look to the future with hope, with profound respect for God’s creation, with reverence for human life, and with high esteem for marriage and the integrity of the family! Be worthy sons and daughters of Saint Paul!

During the past days, we have spoken much about the joy which the pastoral visit of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI has brought us. The greatest gift we can offer to the Pope is that he can rest assured that we are not simply sharing our experiences about his visit, but that he has entreated us to speak openly about the presence of Jesus in our lives.

I impart upon you my Apostolic Blessing.

✠ Paul Cremona  
Archbishop of Malta