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## **PASTORAL LETTER FOR LENT 2010**

### **“TO WHOM SHALL WE GO?” (Jn. 6:68)**

Beloved Sons and Daughters,

Among the many positive things we have in our country, we note that the thirst for learning has grown and, as learning opportunities have increased, teaching has spread. At the same time, although today man has learned to read, it seems he has a problem to read his life history and that of his nation; although man is capable to add numbers, he seems to find it difficult to work out the sum total of his life. Rich in the knowledge of science and technology, man has managed to unwind many entangled knots but, at the same time, he is becoming more confused in the way he lives.

The lack of happiness, injustices, poverty, quarrelling, broken marriages, new orphans, and pornography are but a few proofs of this. Yet, a larger sign of all this is the culture of our times enslaved in doubts, in particular the doubt about the dignity of every man, the meaning of truth, of goodness, of the beauty of life, and where humanity is ultimately heading for. We have become so unable to understand and evaluate what is happening around us, we have become so confused, that some are becoming disheartened of being able to pass on to society, and particularly to young people, what is valid and certain, criteria of behaviour and meaningful values which offer peace of mind!

#### **Belief in man**

Yet, in spite of this situation, we should not lose heart! Man, through self examination, can find the key to the solution. Because man is not only capable of learning, but is naturally open to goodness, to truth and to all that is beautiful! So long as he has good teachers, and as long as he does not resist and be stubborn in the face of who wishes to help him realise his own identity, man can and will move out of the terrifying desert that is in life. Among these teachers, there is God.

## **God teaches man**

We believe in God who teaches his people. God offers to deal with us always and in the same way as he did with the Jews when they were in the desert. In Deuteronomy, we read: "He found them wandering through the desert, a desolate, windswept wilderness.

He protected them and cared for them, as he would protect himself. Like an eagle teaching its young to fly, catching them safely on its spreading wings, the Lord kept Israel from falling. The Lord alone led his people without the help of a foreign god" (32,10-12). In the same Book, we have the beautiful likeness where the desert is compared to a place of recovery, a hospital, where God cures us all.

This is God whom Lent presents to us every year: He is God who accompanies us to teach us and build us up. God who makes himself present in the concrete circumstances we live in, even if these are bad or painful. He is God who helps every person, walks along its path so that gradually, one step after another, it can move out of life's desert. "He will take care of his flock like a shepherd; he will gather his lambs together and carry them in his arms; he will gently lead their mothers" (Is. 40,11). God leads us to become whole men, alien to sin and tied to his will. First and foremost, He speaks to the heart. He finds us exactly where we feel the void, where we are hurt, where we are completely doubtful. He touches us to cure precisely where we are confused, where we are most weak when faced by vices like drugs, drink and games, that slowly strip us of every dignity.

We, the bishops, believe that here lies the key for the direction of our society: that we recognize God as the first educator and that we do not fear to enter into this educational relationship that He wishes to build with us, as individuals and as a society!

## **God believes in us**

God, in whom we believe, is with us even where we fall and surrender to evil that is in and around us. The fact that our life is at present being fashioned and kneaded by elements which impede our liberty, even when deep down in our hearts we wish to be honest, is resulting in the creation of desert situations. These are situations where corruption overcomes us easily, where moral or physical harm, which cannot be easily undone, is inflicted, when we enter into illicit relationships and do not find a way to change our ways. These are frequent situations where we lose heart. But today, we the bishops wish to reiterate strongly that, even in such circumstances, God never abandons man. God has great trust in us. The ugly realities of our life do not scare and worry God. He knocks for us to let him in, so that he fashions and protects that person and that society "like the pupil of his eyes".

God teaches us with a lot of patience to find strength that shapes and forms us humanly and spiritually. Saint Paul writes: "For God has revealed his grace for the salvation of the whole human race. That grace instructs us to give up ungodly living and worldly

passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this world, as we wait for the blessed Day we hope for, when the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ will appear” (Tit. 2,11-13).

### **Acknowledgement of Scripture**

Where do we find this educational programme of God? In Scripture! There, we do not only find words inspired by God, but also episodes and experiences that show how God spoke to people in the history of mankind. There we find the dialogue of salvation that was fulfilled in the history between God and man, which reached its fullness in the person and life of Jesus Christ, who was made man to redeem us by his death and resurrection. In order to protect man, God redeemed us for a high price (1 Cor. 6,20). He “gave up all he had, and took the nature of a servant ... he was humble and walked the path of obedience all the way to death, death on the cross” (Phil.2,7-8). The Church is called to continue this dialogue in the history with humanity, wherever man is found.

True education in faith can only be effected in the deepest knowledge of the Word of God. We need to realise the urgent need for the Word of God to find back its place in the heart of our parish communities and in the centre of the groups and movements that give life to the Church. We encourage our parish communities to focus on the Word of God and build up themselves more on it. Today, we have to realize honestly that many of our activities that do not start from the Word of God and do not lead to it, are only futile efforts that make more difficult, and do not help, the educational process of our people and our Christian formation.

### **The Church: a Mother and Teacher**

The Church is a community which received the Gospel but, before evangelising, she has to be evangelised herself. It is a Mother Church and Teacher. She is not only a Mother and not only a Teacher. She is a Mother as she has to love and have pity and open doors to everyone; but she is a Teacher because, by means of the same Word of God, she has to “teach the truth, rebuke errors, correct faults, and give instruction for right living”(2 Tim.3,16). The Church, while showing compassion and mercy, cannot fail to offer and point out the way of truth as found in the Word of God.

The Lenten talks, the reading of the Word of God proposed by the Liturgy, retreats, prayer accompanied by fasting and charity, are all great moments where we can receive the Word that forms us so that we can then renew our environments: the family, places of work, public institutions and ecclesial communities.

The Good News of the Gospel is for the benefit of all: for those who go to Church, those who formed part of the Church and left, and those who are searching the truth outside the Church. As in the Temple of Jerusalem there was the “yard of the pagans” where non-Jews used to enter, so also we need to find space in our Church for the unbelievers

or for those who feel far away from the Church. Like Christ who died for all so that all might be saved, the Church, a sister and handmaid, can never be exclusive.

### **The Pope's Visit**

We wish that this year Lent will be a time of grace not only for us to take part in the Easter of Christ, but also to prepare ourselves for His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI's visit. Since our Master, Jesus Christ, left Peter to confirm the disciples in the faith, we see in the Pope, Vicar of Christ and Peter's successor, the one who confirms us in the educational process of faith that will lead us to state as Peter did: "Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life" (Jn.6,68).

We impart on you our pastoral blessing.

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**Archbishop of Malta**

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