



21st May, 2011

51/2011

PASTORAL LETTER

OPTING IN FAVOUR OF PERMANENT MARRIAGE

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

On this fifth Sunday of Easter, God has offered us the gift of his Word in order that it may enlighten us, at a moment when, as Catholics, we are called upon to make a choice in favour of our Lord Jesus Christ: "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life; No one comes to the Father, except through me" (John 14, 6).

Our Lord is telling us that our desire to go to God the Father must be intrinsically bound to the person of Our Lord Jesus Christ. For the Christian, there can be no other road which leads to the Father. Each and every one of us must choose Jesus as the Truth: His words bear the real value of everything that surrounds us. We must look through His eyes. We must choose Jesus as the Path which leads us to this Truth. Other paths will not lead us there! Once we make such choices, we come to realize that we are savouring the true Life which is intended for mankind.

We hope that even with regard to the Divorce Referendum, which is actually a referendum on marriage, we will be guided by the words of Jesus.

In this respect, prior to the Referendum, we wish to offer you this Pastoral Letter.

Through the Referendum which will take place in a few days' time, we are being called upon as citizens, to express – through our vote - our convictions with regard to marriage.

This call should not fall upon deaf ears. We cannot remain indifferent. The Referendum deals with a very important matter and any person who may decide not to participate will show a lack of civil and religious maturity.

Marriage and the family are very close to our hearts and, in our society, there is a general consensus on the need to invest further so that these may be strengthened. Marriage and the family form the natural core which is essential for a person to live and grow within an atmosphere of genuine love, as well as for the building of a strong society. Experience has shown us that this is what is required in order for human dignity to be upheld.

For this reason, Jesus Christ teaches us that marriage, which goes hand in hand with the dignity of mankind, should, by its very nature, be a permanent bond.

When the experience of love in marriage and the family fails, wounds are opened up: such wounds take a long time to heal. We all know of people who are wounded because their marriages have failed. As your Spiritual Shepherds, we can assure you that we feel these cries within our hearts, just as God feels them within his own heart. At the same time, one must acknowledge that when these separated persons speak about their experience, they admit that they feel extremely saddened that their marriage has failed. These people, who are wounded and hurt, show us that, as a nation, we should continue to cherish true marriage. As a gesture of love towards those who are suffering, and towards future generations, we must together try and improve the conditions of marriage and the family in order that these hurts may be diminished.

The question posed by the Referendum – whether we desire for divorce legislation to be introduced in our country - is a question which shall have a direct effect upon marriage itself and which impinges upon our conduct as citizens, as well as on the common good of our country. The citizen is called upon to respond to this question in the light of reason.

Within this context, the Catholic citizen has a particular contribution to make. The teachings of Jesus Christ, expressed through the moral law of the Church, leave no doubt that divorce is the wrong solution – a solution upon which a stable society cannot be built. A society which builds upon a foundation of stable marriage means there will be less people who suffer in the future; it is a sign of love towards future generations. Hence our Christian beliefs shed further light upon the truth surrounding the true nature of marriage.

In the light of all this, therefore, it is our duty as your Spiritual Shepherds to remind the people of God and all people of good will that every time the citizen is called upon to express his opinion, through his vote, as in the case of the Referendum, it is his moral obligation to fulfill his duty. This moral obligation becomes greater when the decision involves values which we cannot refute, as in the case of permanent marriage.

Our choice in the Referendum demands much reflection because it carries a great responsibility. It is a decision which will affect not only the present, but also the future. By his vote, the citizen will either build or destroy. A choice in favour of permanent marriage is an act of faith in the family, built upon a bond of love which cannot be severed; whereas a choice in favour of divorce leads to the further destruction of marriage and the family and, as a consequence, the destruction of values and the quality of life. We all shoulder the responsibility for the consequences of our decision.

Faced with this Referendum, the Christian cannot avoid posing some fundamental questions that he or she needs to take into consideration when making important decisions, and this with reference to our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Baptism, the Christian belongs to Jesus and chooses to follow Him. Therefore:

- The Christian must always act with reference to our Lord Jesus Christ and his teachings. In taking his decision on how to vote, he must bear in mind that he shall be accountable to Jesus for his choice;
- The Christian must always act in the light of the mission he has embraced, together with other Christians, and which was given by the Lord Jesus: “Go to the ends of the earth and spread the Good News” Every action of the Christian should serve as an opportunity to offer his or her contribution in order that the teachings of Jesus may inspire the society of mankind which God so loves. Therefore, each and every Christian is called upon to view his or her vote as an occasion to participate in the mission of Jesus Christ with respect to marriage and the family. We should not miss this opportunity because we are uninterested or due to lack of enthusiasm.

We recommend that every Christian prays for divine inspiration. We pray for the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, Queen of the Family, so that in this important hour, during which we are called upon to consolidate the future of marriage and the family, we shall make our choice in accordance with the will of the God.

We impart upon you God’s blessings.

✘ **PAUL CREMONA O.P.**
Archbishop of Malta

✘ **MARIO GRECH**
Bishop of Gozo

✘ **ANNETTO DEPASQUALE**
Titular Bishop of Aradi