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PASTORAL LETTER

THE QUALITY OF CHRISTIAN LIFE

Brothers and sisters,

We are writing to you after moments of silence and reflection. We wish to say this in a calm moment hoping that it will enter the heart of each one of us. We feel that we must take important decisions on the quality of Christian life of each and every one of us. These decisions will help us to be a Church that is a leaven to today's society. We are issuing this Pastoral Letter in the month of October, so as to unite it to the month of the Rosary, so that it is strengthened by this prayer to Very Holy Virgin Mary.

Today's reality

These decisions ought to be taken in the light of three big realities that make our choice more difficult for a deeper faith in the Lord and for a greater commitment to build up the Church on the teachings of Jesus.

The first reality is the powerful and fast changes of society and culture around us. It is difficult for a Christian to identify himself/herself in all that pertains to this culture. It is a culture that helps us live better some values such as the environment, the acceptance of persons with a different cultural background, the openness to the global reality including opportunities and risks that this involves. But on the other hand it has become difficult to live Christian values such as: respect for the individual from conception to the last moment of life, permanent marriage and stable family life in which children can grow in security, an experience of God that through prayer brings about commitment in the Church and Christian commitment in society.

The second reality results from the introduction of divorce in our country, as we now have a society that can be more vulnerable in the context of marriage and family context. These have a very important part to play in the network of society and the Church. The introduction of divorce wounds every marriage, both the civil one as well as marriage as the sacrament.

The third reality is the case of abuse of minors by some priests. Every kind of abuse brings about enormous suffering. We feel humiliated in front of the victims of abuse, as

well as in front of the Church and the society to which we have been sent to be witnesses.

Decisions

Facing all this, during these days each one of us must take an important decision: to live as a Christian in these circumstances. And this is not an easy decision to take. This can be done if our faith in Christ, our commitment for him and the Church be stronger than these events as they are based on the promise of Christ to remain with the Church till the end of time. We know that this is possible as the first disciples of the Lord – about whom we read in the Acts of the Apostles – in hard circumstances succeeded to pass on the teaching of Jesus to those coming after them.

The Church started around Christ dead on the Cross and the fear that this fact brought about to the disciples as they thought that all had ended; an experience of weakness of its members – Judas who betrayed him, Peter who disowned him for three times, the other Apostles except John, that left him alone on the Cross. There was also the persecution by the big part of the Jewish Community that Jesus loved so much and by the Roman Empire. Christ with his Resurrection gave the Church the power to overcome the weakness inside of her and to change every persecution into an opportunity to love more.

There will be persons who take a decision to stay away from, or leave, the Church. We should not judge them. The love of God the Father towards each person, whoever one may be, does not let us judge but only love, and love as God the Father sent His Son to show us the Truth in Love which is the essence of our Faith.

The story of the Church in our country

The Church, even that in Malta, succeeded to live in all circumstances. In her history she passed from the first times, when St. Paul left the first Christian community in Malta. The episodes of this community are hidden in history, but we can associate them with the persecution that the Church passed through in the Roman Empire. Even during the Arab occupation, studies show that there was a “small community” that succeeded to keep the faith.

There were centuries when the history of the Church in our country was endowed with cultural backing and large numbers of her members. Those times gave our country a cultural and religious heritage that is still strong today, and this brought about a lot of good. But we will be mistaken if we think that these conditions are of central importance. When we think so, it may be that when these conditions are taken away or are changed, all will collapse.

In fact, when we recognize that the cultural and political support is only the crust of the Church and of our Faith, we must look to unite ourselves to that which is central to our

faith, Our Lord Jesus Christ, and build a new reality in the circumstances of today. It is the challenge of a new evangelization that the Church is looking for today. This can only happen when building the Church as a community would include the relationship with our Lord Jesus of each and every one of us. Above all the Church will “succeed” only if she is a means of salvation for all men.

The Church can do without the cultural and political support as she has an inner spiritual power. The Church must continually look to purify itself from all that is just an external support to that which is the strength in the conviction of the Faith and of the Holy Spirit. These are strong moments of rising up when who gives his part in the Church will have no support of social privileges and so will feel the need to entrust himself or herself in the hands of God.

Choices

The Choice that we must make is often much deeper than that which tradition and culture push us to do to remain united to the Church. This choice means if we are ready to be part of the Church that wants to portray Christ. My personal choice, the choice of my family must come from inside and be strengthened with prayer and solidarity from the Community of the faithful. Otherwise one will not find enough strength to live it in today’s circumstances. This is the experience which we are proposing to you today.

We must think as St. Paul who was burdened with a “thorn”: who wanted to depend more on the strength of the Lord than on his strength alone. These are the words that Our Lord told him: “My grace is enough for you; for my strength shows itself best where there is weakness” and the conclusion of Paul: “for when I am weak, then I will be strong” (2 Cor 12, 9.10).

The call of Pope Benedict XVI

We wish to conclude this letter by uniting ourselves to Pope Benedict XVI in what he tells us regarding the reality of the Church today:

“In the great ambience of culture in many places of the West, the roots of Christianity are duly present there. But we are all the more approaching a Christianity of personal decision. I must say that on one hand we must strengthen the Christianity of conviction, renew and spread its life around us so that more people will get to know and live their faith. On the other hand we must simply note that we are not identical with culture and with the nation – but that we have the strength to give the country those values that it accepts and empower them, even if the majority are not Christians who believe” (*Light of the World*, 2011, 169).

It is in the light of all this that the Church in our country must examine again and see what is the mission that His Holiness Pope Benedict entrusted to us before leaving Malta:

“Let me encourage you once more to cultivate a deep awareness of your identity and to embrace the responsibilities that flow from it, especially by promoting the Gospel values that will grant you a clear vision of human dignity and the common origin and destiny of mankind. Be an example, at home and abroad, of dynamic Christian living. Be proud of your Christian vocation. Cherish your religious and cultural heritage.”

Mary our mother who was in the midst of the apostles praying to God the Father to send the Holy Spirit on the Church will accompany us in our prayers wishing for a renewed strength in our mission to make her Son alive and present among us through the Community of the Church. We ask you to put this intention in reciting the Rosary which we encourage you to do daily.

We impart upon you God’s blessings.

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

✠ **MARIO GRECH**
Bishop of Gozo