



**THE CHURCH IN MALTA**

**COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE**  
Archdiocese of Malta

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## **HOMILY OF THE MASS AT THE OPENING OF THE THIRTEENTH PARLIAMENT**

I would like to extend my heartfelt welcome to all the members of the Thirteenth Parliament since Independence. I thank each and every one of you for your presence here today as we invoke the gift of the Holy Spirit on you and your new mission in society.

I would like to extend a very warm welcome to the Honourable Prime Minister, to the Honourable Speaker of the House, to the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, to the Honourable Chief Justice and the Members of the Bench of Judges and Magistrates, to their Excellencies the Ambassadors, members of the Diplomatic Corp and to all our distinguished guests.

The First Reading from the Book of Proverbs highlights a number of traits and blessings that have always been held in high esteem by civilisations both ancient and modern: loyalty, faithfulness, good repute, understanding, long life, riches, honour, pleasantness, peace, happiness. All these are the choice fruit of wisdom “Happy is the man who finds wisdom.” And wisdom is a blessing from the Lord: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart [...] Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil.” May the Lord, in His goodness and mercy, bless all of you and your hard work, with the gift of wisdom. To quote the Address Pope Benedict XVI gave to the Bundestag in Berlin on 22 September 2011: “Politics must be a striving for justice, and hence it has to establish the fundamental preconditions for peace. Naturally a politician will seek success, without which he would have no opportunity for effective political action at all. Yet success is subordinated to the criterion of justice, to the will to do what is right, and to the understanding of what is right. Success can also be seductive and thus can open up the path towards the falsification of what is right, towards the destruction of justice. ‘Without justice – what else is the State but a great band of robbers?’ as Saint Augustine once said.”<sup>1</sup>

The Second Reading from the Letter of Saint Paul the Apostle to the Romans, provides solid grounding for communal living: “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2011/september/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20110922\\_reichstag](https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2011/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20110922_reichstag)

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities.” As Pope Benedict XVI said in Berlin: “To serve right and to fight against the dominion of wrong is and remains the fundamental task of the politician. At a moment in history when man has acquired previously inconceivable power, this task takes on a particular urgency. Man can destroy the world. He can manipulate himself. He can, so to speak, make human beings and he can deny them their humanity. How do we recognize what is right? How can we discern between good and evil, between what is truly right and what may appear right? [...] For most of the matters that need to be regulated by law, the support of the majority can serve as a sufficient criterion. Yet it is evident that for the fundamental issues of law, in which the dignity of man and of humanity is at stake, the majority principle is not enough: everyone in a position of responsibility must personally seek out the criteria to be followed when framing laws.”<sup>2</sup>

According to Saint Paul, the one in authority is “God’s servant for your good”, for our good, for the common good. The apostle exhorts his fellow Christians to pay authorities their dues, “taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honour to whom honour is due.” But for Saint Paul, the fundamental rule refers to love: “Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbour has fulfilled the law.”

Pope Francis has these words of encouragement for politicians in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* n. 205: “I ask God to give us more politicians capable of sincere and effective dialogue aimed at healing the deepest roots – and not simply the appearances – of the evils in our world! Politics, though often denigrated, remains a lofty vocation and one of the highest forms of charity, inasmuch as it seeks the common good. We need to be convinced that charity “is the principle not only of micro-relationships (with friends, with family members or within small groups) but also of macro-relationships (social, economic and political ones).” I beg the Lord to grant us more politicians who are genuinely disturbed by the state of society, the people, the lives of the poor! It is vital that government leaders and financial leaders take heed and broaden their horizons, working to ensure that all citizens have dignified work, education and healthcare. Why not turn to God and ask him to inspire their plans? I am firmly convinced that openness to the transcendent can bring about a new political and economic mindset which would help to break down the wall of separation between the economy and the common good of society.”<sup>3</sup>

The Gospel Reading from Luke, Chapter 16, brings us to the fundamental theme of accountability. “Turn in the account of your stewardship.” The Master commends the dishonest steward of the parable for his shrewdness. I can imagine Jesus sighing deeply as he says: “the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light.” To quote the comment by the renowned biblical scholar Georg Bertram, “In

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html#Social\\_dialogue\\_in\\_a\\_context\\_of\\_religious\\_freedom](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html#Social_dialogue_in_a_context_of_religious_freedom) par. 205

the parable of the unjust steward wisdom has the sense of cunning. Cleverly resolute action is imposed by the hopelessness of the situation and the resultant urgency. In acting as he does, even the worldly man can be a model for the children of light. Phronimos (φρόνιμος) (wise or shrewd) in these parables applies to those who have grasped the eschatological position of man.”<sup>4</sup>

This word of Jesus, therefore, reminds us that there are different levels of accountability: accountability to one’s conscience, accountability to society, and, in the eschatological sense, accountability to God who alone weighs and judges the hearts of men and women in truth and justice.

As Pope Benedict aptly declared, “At this point Europe’s cultural heritage ought to come to our assistance. The conviction that there is a Creator God is what gave rise to the idea of human rights, the idea of the equality of all people before the law, the recognition of the inviolability of human dignity in every single person and the awareness of people’s responsibility for their actions. Our cultural memory is shaped by these rational insights. To ignore it or dismiss it as a thing of the past would be to dismember our culture totally and to rob it of its completeness. The culture of Europe arose from the encounter between Jerusalem, Athens and Rome – from the encounter between Israel’s monotheism, the philosophical reason of the Greeks and Roman law. This three-way encounter has shaped the inner identity of Europe. In the awareness of man’s responsibility before God and in the acknowledgment of the inviolable dignity of every single human person, it has established criteria of law: it is these criteria that we are called to defend at this moment in our history.”<sup>5</sup>

The Lord teaches us not to despise fidelity in the small things of life. This includes fidelity in the small acts of everyday life, it includes those many meetings, those decisions that do not reach the headlines the next day, but make up the backbone of governance and service to the community. “He who is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much.”

All this may attract the cynical smile and the scoffs of those who feel they are wiser than the children of light. But the Lord insists: “God knows your hearts.” To conclude with the first line from the first reading: “My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments.”

## ✠ Charles Jude Scicluna

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<sup>4</sup> G. Bertram, “φρόνιμος.” Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Ed. Kittel & Friedrich, 1974, Vol IX, pp. 220-235: 234

<sup>5</sup> Benedict XVI, Address to the Bundestag, 22 September 2011: *ibid.*