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THE HOLY SPIRIT IS CALLING US TO LOVE

PASTORAL LETTER FOR PENTECOST SUNDAY 2019

Fifty days after Easter, after the Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ, we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit on the apostles and the disciples united in prayer with Mary, the Mother of Jesus. As narrated by St Luke in the Acts of the Apostles, this experience is described as a strong wind that filled the upper room where the disciples were gathered, and as tongues of fire that appeared on each and every one of them. We read also about other tongues: when the apostle Peter and those who were with him went out to preach the Good News courageously, all those who heard them realised that, although they came from different countries, they could still understand the Good News, each one in his own tongue.

This teaches us that on the feast of Pentecost we are commemorating the fact that the gift of the Holy Spirit brings together people speaking different languages, who come in contact with those who witness to Jesus. As a result, they can see the power of Jesus. Through this we are shown how the shameful divisions between people can be eliminated. As we learn from the experience of the Tower of Babel, division is the fruit of man's pride which makes him want to build his civilization without God. In this way man ends up sowing division and violence.

A society that embraces diversity

The Holy Spirit is not a spirit who imposes a rigid uniformity that chokes up diversity. The Holy Spirit is like a holy dew that shines on the plants, on the flowers, on the different trees of the Garden of Creation, without destroying or annihilating all that God Himself declared to be good. Today the Church is calling out to the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Holy Trinity One God, with the measured words: ***Veni Creator Spiritus (Come Holy Spirit)***. Come and create in the hearts of your faithful the gift of love: love of God, love of all human beings, love of all creation, love of yourselves.

In the light of this year's celebration of Pentecost, our appeal to all people of good will is that together we build an inclusive society that welcomes diversity as a great gift of the Creator's Spirit. As a community of faith, hope and love, it is necessary that we as Catholics examine those aspects of our religious practice that are tainted by rivalry, envy, a superiority complex, pride, arrogance, prejudice, hatred and fear. This sour fruit does not come from God. As St Paul teaches us, "the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal. 5:23). These human qualities which are God's gifts, create in us a sense of respect towards the dignity and integrity of every person we meet.

A concrete witness to love

As a faith community, we are living in a society that, while appreciating its ancient roots, embraces a diversity of cultures, languages, races and religions. This is a golden opportunity for us all to witness to love, which is the universal language that everybody can understand. If prejudices and hatred lead to exclusion, destruction and murder, love leads to the building anew of the family of man. Man was created to enter into a relationship of love with God and men, whoever they are, of whatever race or colour. This love, a gift from God, is the foundation of an inclusive society where the fundamental rights of every human being, whoever he is, are respected and protected. Instead of pointing fingers at others, we Catholics should take the initiative and continue building bridges which go forth from our hearts and extend beyond and above the abyss of racism, of all kinds of prejudice and fear of all that is foreign, that is, all forms of xenophobia.

In our history as a nation, we have been through bad times when frequent attacks from outside meant slavery and destruction. Today, after so many centuries, we cannot adopt the same defensive attitudes. People coming to live among us, in search for a better life, are not our enemies but become partners in our prosperity and enrich our cultural heritage. Foreigners living in our country are human beings like us who have the same human dignity and the same fundamental rights we enjoy. If these people have not yet met Jesus Christ, what will they say when they meet us, the family of Jesus, and hear us talking about Him? What will they say when they see how we live our faith in Jesus? And above all, what will foreigners who live here say about our faith when they see how we treat them, what wages we pay them, what accommodation we offer them?

In the last 50 years, the Church in Malta has pioneered work to help immigrants, refugees and foreigners. For this we thank the Holy Spirit.

Almost two thousand years ago, our forefathers welcomed the Lord's Apostle, Paul of Tarsus. The governor or protos of the island, Publius, not only hosted 276 people for three days but also saw to it that, three months afterwards, when Paul and those who were with him set sail for Syracuse on their way to Rome, they had on board all that they needed. Paul, the prisoner and foreigner whom we welcomed among us, proclaimed Jesus to us, healed all the sick people on the island and God used him to bless Malta, the Mother who gave us her name (*I-Omm li tatna isimha*), with that most gracious light (*bl-oñla dawl*), the Light of Jesus Christ.

Today it is our mission to witness to this Light in front of these our brothers who are living among us and with us. Today, let us pray to the Holy Spirit to enlighten our minds and hearts with light, zeal and His love for everyone, including all the foreigners living among us.

We impart on you our pastoral blessing.

✠ **Charles J. Scicluna**
Archbishop of Malta

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Auxiliary Bishop of Malta