

# origins

CNS documentary service

## Malta Visit: Arrival Ceremony

Benedict XVI

*"The Maltese people ... are rightly proud of the indispensable role that the Catholic faith has played in their nation's development," Pope Benedict XVI said April 17 upon arriving in Malta. The pope's two-day trip to Malta commemorated the 1,950th anniversary of St. Paul's shipwreck on the island nation. Amid a growing crisis over clerical sex abuse of minors, Pope Benedict met privately with eight victims of abuse during the trip. He also visited the grotto where tradition holds the apostle lived for the three months he was stranded in Malta, celebrated a public Mass and gathered with a large group of young people. During the arrival ceremony, the pope noted Malta's status as a crossroads between East and West, North and South, and encour-*

*"Malta has much to contribute to questions as diverse as tolerance, reciprocity, immigration and other issues crucial to the future of this continent."*

*aged the Maltese to continue serving "as a bridge of understanding between the peoples, cultures and religions which surround the Mediterranean." He also encouraged the Maltese to continue their respect for human life and for the traditional family. Abortion and divorce are illegal in Malta. The pope spoke in English; his address follows, copyright © 2010 by Libreria Editrice Vaticana.*

**J**ien kument ħafna li ninsab fostkom!"  
(I am delighted to be here with you!)

It gives me great joy to be here in Malta with you today. I come among you as a pilgrim to worship the Lord and to praise him for the wonders he has worked here. I come also as the successor of St. Peter to confirm you in the faith (cf. Lk 22:32) and to join you in prayer to the one living and true God, in the company of all the saints, including the great apostle of Malta, St. Paul. Though my visit to your country is short, I pray that it will bear much fruit.

I am grateful, Mr. President, for the kind words with which you have greeted me in your own name and on behalf of the Maltese people. I thank you for your invitation and for the hard work that you and the government have done in order to prepare for my visit. I thank the prime minister, the civil and military authorities, the members of the diplomatic corps and everyone present, for honoring this occasion by your presence and for your cordial welcome.

I greet in a special way Archbishop Paul Cremona, Bishop Mario Grech and Auxiliary

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*During his visit to Malta, Pope Benedict XVI met privately with eight victims of clergy sex abuse and promised them the church would do "all in its power" to bring offenders to justice and protect children.*

*The meeting at the apostolic nunciature in Rabat on April 18 came after a group of victims had asked to meet with the pope to tell him of their ordeal and ask for an apology.*

*Participants said the victims cried as they told their stories, and that the pope had tears in his eyes as he listened.*

*The Vatican spokesman, Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi, told journalists that the private meeting in the chapel of the nunciature lasted about 20 minutes. He said the pope, Archbishop Paul Cremona of Malta, Bishop Mario Grech of Gozo and eight male victims of abuse began the encounter kneeling in silent prayer.*

*The pope then stood by the altar and met with each victim one by one to hear his story and to speak with each privately, Father Lombardi said. The victims were in their 30s and 40s, Father Lombardi said.*

*At the end of the meeting, participants said a prayer together in Maltese and the pope blessed the victims. One victim said the pope gave each of them a rosary and promised them they would be in his prayers.*

*During his public events in Malta, the pope did not refer explicitly to the problem of the sexual abuse of minors by priests. He did make two subtle references to the problem when he spoke to journalists aboard the papal flight from Rome to Malta.*

*Speaking about the vitality of the Catholic faith in Malta, he said even when the body of the church "is wounded by our sins, God loves this church, and its Gospel is the true force that purifies and heals."*

*He then spoke of how St. Paul turned the tragedy of*

*continued from page 741*

Bishop Annetto Depasquale as well as the other bishops present. In greeting you I wish to express my affection for the priests, deacons, men and women religious and all the lay faithful entrusted to your pastoral care.

The occasion of my visit to these islands is the 1,950th anniversary of St. Paul's shipwreck off the island of Malta. St. Luke describes this event in the Acts of the Apostles, and it is from his account that you have chosen the theme of this visit: "*Jeħtieg iżda li naslu fi għira*" ["But we are to be stranded on some island"] (Acts 27:26). Some might consider St. Paul's arrival in Malta by means of a humanly unforeseen event to be a mere accident of history. The eyes of faith, however, enable us to recognize here the workings of divine providence.

Malta, in fact, has been at the crossroads of many of the great events and cultural exchanges in European and Mediterranean history, right up to our own times. These islands have played a key role in the political, religious and cultural development of Europe, the Near East and North Africa. To these shores, then, in the mysterious designs of God, the Gospel was brought by St. Paul and the early followers of Christ. Their missionary work has borne much fruit over the centuries, contributing in innumerable ways to shaping Malta's rich and noble culture.

On account of their geographical position, these islands have been of great strategic importance on more than one occasion, even in recent times: Indeed, the George cross upon your national flag proudly testifies to your people's great courage during the dark days of the last world war. Likewise, the fortifications that feature so prominently in the island's architecture speak of earlier struggles, when Malta contributed so much to the defense of Christianity by land and by sea.

You continue to play a valuable role in the ongoing debates on European identity, culture and policy. At the same time I am pleased to note your government's commitment to humanitarian projects further afield, especially in Africa. It is greatly to be hoped that this will serve to promote the welfare of those

less fortunate than yourselves as an expression of genuine Christian charity.

Indeed, Malta has much to contribute to questions as diverse as tolerance, reciprocity, immigration and other issues crucial to the future of this continent. Your nation should continue to stand up for the indissolubility of marriage as a natural institution as well as a sacramental one, and for the true nature of the family, just as it does for the sacredness of human life from conception to natural death and for the proper respect owed to religious freedom in ways that bring authentic integral development to individuals and society.

Malta also has close links to the Near East, not only in cultural and religious terms but even linguistically. Allow me to encourage you to put this ensemble of skills and strengths to ever greater use so as to serve as a bridge of understanding between the peoples, cultures and religions which surround the Mediterranean. Much has still to be done to build relationships of genuine trust and fruitful dialogue, and Malta is well placed to hold out the hand of friendship to her neighbors to north and south, to east and west.

The Maltese people, enlightened for almost two millennia by the teachings of the Gospel and continually fortified by their Christian roots, are rightly proud of the indispensable role that the Catholic faith has played in their nation's development. The beauty of our faith is expressed in various and complementary ways here, not least in the lives of holiness which have led Maltese to give of themselves for the good of others.

Among these we must include Dun Ġorġ Preca, whom I was pleased to canonize just three years ago (June 3, 2007). I invite all of you to invoke his intercession for the spiritual fruitfulness of this, my first pastoral visit among you.

I look forward to praying with you during my time in Malta, and I wish, as a father and as a brother, to assure you of my affection for you and my eagerness to share this time with you in faith and friendship. With these thoughts, I entrust all of you to the protection of Our Lady of Ta' Pinu and your father in the

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faith, the great apostle Paul.

*Il-Mulej ibierek lill-poplu kollu ta' Malta u ta' Għawdex!* (God bless all the people of Malta and Gozo!) ■

## Malta Visit: Address at Grotto of St. Paul

### Benedict XVI

*"Paul's shipwreck and his three-month stay in Malta left an indelible mark upon the history of your country," Pope Benedict XVI said April 17 in an address at the grotto of St. Paul in Rabat, Malta. The pope's two-day trip to Malta commemorated the 1,950th anniversary of St. Paul's shipwreck on the island nation. Amid a growing crisis over clerical sex abuse of minors, Pope Benedict met privately with eight victims of abuse during the trip. He also celebrated a public Mass and gathered with a large group of young people. At the grotto where tradition holds the apostle lived for the three months he was stranded in Malta the pope greeted some 250 Maltese missionaries in St. Paul's Church and called on his audience to "live out your faith ever more fully" at home, work and in society. The world needs credible Christian witness especially given the many threats facing human life, traditional marriage and the "fundamental moral truths that remain the foundation of authentic freedom and genuine progress," he said. The pope spoke in English; his address follows, copyright © 2010 by Libreria Editrice Vaticana.*

My pilgrimage to Malta has begun with a moment of silent prayer at the grotto of St. Paul, who first brought the faith to these islands. I have come in the footsteps of those countless pilgrims down the centuries who have prayed in this holy place, entrusting themselves, their families and the welfare of this nation to the intercession of the apostle of the gentiles. I rejoice to be at last in your midst, and I greet all of you with great affection in the Lord!

Paul's shipwreck and his three-month stay in Malta left an indelible mark upon the history of your country. His words to his companions prior to his arrival in Malta are recorded for us in the Acts of the Apostles and have been a special theme in your preparation for my visit. Those words — *"Jeħtieg iżda li naslu fi gżira"* ["But we are to be stranded on some island"] (Acts 27:26). — in their original con-

text are a summons to courage in the face of the unknown and to unfailing confidence in God's mysterious providence. The castaways were, in fact, warmly welcomed by the Maltese people, following the lead given by St. Publius.

In God's plan, St. Paul thus became your father in the Christian faith. Thanks to his presence among you, the Gospel of Jesus Christ took deep root and bore fruit not only in the lives of individuals, families and communities, but also in the formation of Malta's national identity and its vibrant and distinctive culture.

Paul's apostolic labors also bore a rich harvest in the generations of preachers who followed in his footsteps and particularly in the great number of priests and religious who imitated his missionary zeal by leaving Malta in order to bring the Gospel to distant shores. I am happy to have had the opportunity to meet so many of them today in this Church of St. Paul and to encourage them in their challenging and often heroic vocation.

Dear missionaries: I thank all of you, in the name of the whole church, for your witness to the risen Lord and for your lives spent in the service of others. Your presence and activity in so many countries of the world brings honor to your country and testifies to an evangelical impulse deeply embedded in the church in Malta. Let us ask the Lord to raise up many more men and women to carry forward the noble mission of proclaiming the Gospel and working for the advancement of Christ's kingdom in every land and people!

St. Paul's arrival in Malta was not planned. As we know, he was traveling to Rome when a violent storm arose, and his ship ran aground on this island. Sailors can map a journey but God, in his wisdom and providence, charts a course of his own. Paul, who dramatically encountered the risen Lord while on the road to Damascus, knew this well. The course of his life was suddenly changed; henceforth, for him, to live was Christ (cf. Phil 1:21); his every thought and action were directed to proclaiming the mystery of the cross and its message of God's reconciling love.

That same word, the word of the Gospel, still has the power to break into our lives and to change their course. Today the same Gospel that Paul preached continues to summon the people of these islands to conversion, new life and a future of hope. Standing in your midst as the successor of the apostle Peter, I invite you to hear God's word afresh as your ancestors did and to let it challenge your ways of thinking and the way you live your lives.

From this holy place where the apostol-

*being shipwrecked on Malta into a positive opportunity when he decided to heal the sick and preach the power of Christ. Out of tragedy can come a new beginning, and "life's shipwrecks can be part of God's plan for us and they may also be useful for new beginnings in our lives," the pope said.*

*Father Lombardi told journalists aboard the plane that the pope's comments were in reference to the sex abuse crisis facing the church.*

*The Vatican released the following statement after the pope's meeting with abuse victims:*

*"On Sunday April 18, 2010, in the apostolic nunciature in Malta, the Holy Father met a small group of persons who were sexually abused by members of the clergy.*

*"He was deeply moved by their stories and expressed his shame and sorrow over what victims and their families have suffered. He prayed with them and assured them that the church is doing and will continue to do all in its power to investigate allegations, to bring to justice those responsible for abuse and to implement effective measures designed to safeguard young people in the future.*

*"In the spirit of his recent letter to the Catholics of Ireland, he prayed that all the victims of abuse would experience healing and reconciliation, enabling them to move forward with renewed hope."*

*At his weekly general audience in St. Peter's Square on April 21, the pope recalled his meeting with the abuse victims in Malta:*

*"I wanted to meet with some people — victims of abuse by some members of clergy. I shared in their suffering and, with emotion, I prayed with them, assuring action on behalf of the church."*

*The pope was greeted at Malta's airport by the president of the country, George*

Abela. Following are excerpts from Abela's address:

*"Like all the rest of Europe and the Western world, we are now facing a conflict between Christianity on one side and laicism, or secularism, on the other ...*

*"Today we face the wave of secularism which has as its starting point the strict separation of church and state: a laicist model advocating that the state should be strictly separate from religion, which is conceived as belonging exclusively to the private domain. This profane character which has developed in some European states is driving people to be laicist or even anti-Christian.*

*"However, as we all know or as we all should know, the moral foundations of a society as a whole, comprising believers, agnostics or atheists, are better served not with the falling away from religion but with the reinvigoration of the moral consciousness of the state. ...*

*"Holy Father, those of us who believe are fortified by these fundamental values enunciated by the church and though we acknowledge that church members, even its ministers, may at times unfortunately go astray, we are left in no doubt that these values have universal application and their validity transcends both time and space. It would be wrong in my view to try to use the reprehensible indiscretions of the few to cast a shadow on the church as a whole. The Catholic Church remains committed to safeguarding children and all vulnerable people and to seeing that there is no hiding place for those who seek to do harm. It is therefore the church and even the state's duty to work hand in hand to issue directives and enact legislation so that effective, transparent mechanisms are set up together with harmonized and expeditious procedures in order to curb cases of abuse so that justice will not only be done but seen to be done.*

ic preaching first spread throughout these islands, I call upon each of you to take up the exciting challenge of the new evangelization. Live out your faith ever more fully with the members of your families, with your friends, in your neighborhoods, in the workplace and in the whole fabric of Maltese society. In a particular way I urge parents, teachers and catechists to speak of your own living encounter with the risen Jesus to others, especially the young people who are Malta's future.

"Faith is strengthened when it is given to others!" (cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, 2). Believe that your moments of faith assure an encounter with God, who in his mighty power touches human hearts. In this way, you will introduce the young to the beauty and richness of the Catholic faith and offer them a sound catechesis, inviting them to ever more active participation in the sacramental life of the church.

The world needs this witness! In the face of so many threats to the sacredness of human life and to the dignity of marriage and the family, do not our contemporaries need to be constantly reminded of the grandeur of our dignity as God's children and the sublime vocation we have received in Christ? Does not society need to reappropriate and defend those fundamental moral truths that remain the foundation of authentic freedom and genuine progress?

Just now, as I stood before this grotto, I reflected on the great spiritual gift (cf. Rom 1:11) that Paul gave to Malta, and I prayed that you might keep unblemished the heritage bequeathed to you by the great apostle. May the Lord confirm you and your families in the faith that works through love (cf. Gal 5:6) and make you joyful witnesses to the hope that never disappoints (cf. Rom 5:5). Christ is risen! He is truly risen! Alleluia! ■

## Malta Visit: Mass at Granaries Square

### Benedict XVI

*"At every moment of our lives we depend entirely on God, in whom we live and move and have our being," Pope Benedict XVI said April 18 in a homily for a public Mass in Granaries Square in Floriana, Malta. The pope's two-day trip to Malta commemorated the 1,950th anniversary of St. Paul's shipwreck on the island nation. Amid a growing crisis over clerical sex abuse of*

*minors, Pope Benedict met privately with eight victims of abuse during the trip. He also visited the grotto where tradition holds the apostle lived for the three months he was stranded in Malta and gathered with a large group of young people. At the Mass in the country's largest square, Pope Benedict said, "Of all the gifts brought to these shores in the course of your people's history, the gift brought by Paul was the greatest of all, and it is much to your credit that it was immediately accepted and treasured." The pope spoke in English; his homily follows, copyright © 2010 by Libreria Editrice Vaticana.*

I am very glad to be here with all of you today before the beautiful church of St. Publius to celebrate the great mystery of God's love made manifest in the holy Eucharist. At this time, the joy of the Easter season fills our hearts because we are celebrating Christ's victory, the victory of life over sin and death. It is a joy that transforms our lives and fills us with hope in the fulfillment of God's promises. Christ is risen, alleluia!

I greet the president of the republic and Mrs. Abela, the civil authorities of this beloved nation, and all the people of Malta and Gozo. I thank Archbishop Cremona for his gracious words, and I also greet Bishop Grech and Bishop Depasquale, Archbishop Mercieca, Bishop Cauchi and the other bishops and priests present as well as all the Christian faithful of the church in Malta and Gozo. Since my arrival yesterday evening I have experienced the same kind of warm welcome which your ancestors gave the apostle Paul in the year 60.

Many travelers have disembarked here in the course of your history. The richness and variety of Maltese culture is a sign that your people have profited greatly from the exchange of gifts and hospitality with seafaring visitors. And it is a sign that you have known how to exercise discernment in drawing upon the best of what they had to offer.

I urge you to continue to do so. Not everything that today's world proposes is worthy of acceptance by the people of Malta. Many voices try to persuade us to put aside our faith in God and his church, and to choose for ourselves the values and beliefs by which to live. They tell us we have no need of God or the church.

If we are tempted to believe them, we should recall the incident in today's Gospel, when the disciples, all of them experienced fishermen, toiled all night but failed to catch a single fish. Then, when Jesus appeared on the shore, he directed them to a catch so great

that they could scarcely haul it in. Left to themselves, their efforts were fruitless; when Jesus stood alongside them, they netted a huge quantity of fish. My dear brothers and sisters, if we place our trust in the Lord and follow his teachings, we will always reap immense rewards.

Our first reading at Mass today is one that I know you love to hear, the account of Paul's shipwreck on the coast of Malta and his warm reception by the people of these islands. Notice how the crew of the ship, in order to survive, were forced to throw overboard the cargo, the ship's tackle, even the wheat that was their only sustenance. Paul urged them to place their trust in God alone, while the ship was tossed to and fro upon the waves.

We too must place our trust in him alone. It is tempting to think that today's advanced technology can answer all our needs and save us from all the perils and dangers that beset us. But it is not so. At every moment of our lives we depend entirely on God, in whom we live and move and have our being. Only he can protect us from harm, only he can guide us through the storms of life, only he can bring us to a safe haven, as he did for Paul and his companions adrift off the coast of Malta. They did as Paul urged them to do, and so it was "that they all escaped safely to the land" (Acts 27:44).

More than any of the cargo we might carry with us — in terms of our human accomplishments, our possessions, our technology — it is our relationship with the Lord that provides the key to our happiness and our human fulfillment. And he calls us to a relationship of love.

Notice the question that he put three times to Peter on the shore of the lake: "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" On the basis of Peter's affirmative response, Jesus assigns him a task — the task of feeding his flock. Here we see the basis of all pastoral ministry in the church. It is our love for the Lord that must inform every aspect of our preaching and teaching, our celebration of the sacraments and our care for the people of God. It is our love for the Lord that moves us to love those whom he loves and to accept gladly the task of communicating his love to those we serve.

During our Lord's passion, Peter denied him three times. Now, after the resurrection, Jesus invites him three times to avow his love, in this way offering him healing and forgiveness and at the same time entrusting him with his mission.

The miraculous catch of fish underlined

the apostles' dependence on God for the success of their earthly projects. The dialogue between Peter and Jesus underlined the need for divine mercy in order to heal their spiritual wounds, the wounds of sin. In every area of our lives we need the help of God's grace. With him, we can do all things: Without him we can do nothing.

We know from St. Mark's Gospel the signs that accompany those who put their faith in Jesus: They will pick up serpents and be unharmed, they will lay their hands on the sick, who will recover (cf. Mk 16:18). These signs were immediately recognized by your forebears when Paul came among them. A viper attached itself to his hand, but he simply shook it off into the fire, and suffered no harm. He was taken to see the father of Publius, the *protos* of the island, and after praying and laying hands on him, Paul healed him of his fever.

Of all the gifts brought to these shores in the course of your people's history, the gift brought by Paul was the greatest of all, and it is much to your credit that it was immediately accepted and treasured. *Għożżu l-fidi u l-valuri li takom l-Appostlu Missierkom San Pawl* (Preserve the faith and values transmitted to you by your father, the apostle St. Paul). Continue to explore the richness and depth of Paul's gift to you and be sure to hand it on not only to your children, but to all those you encounter today.

No visitor to Malta could fail to be impressed by the devotion of your people, the vibrant faith manifested in your feastday celebrations, the beauty of your churches and shrines. But that gift needs to be shared with others, it needs to be articulated.

As Moses taught the people of Israel, the words of the Lord "shall be upon your heart, and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down and when you rise" (Dt 6:6-7). This was well understood by Malta's first canonized saint, Dun Ġorġ Preca. His tireless work of catechesis, inspiring young and old with a love for Christian doctrine and a deep devotion to the Incarnate Word of God, set an example that I urge you to maintain.

Remember that the exchange of goods between these islands and the world outside is a two-way process. What you receive, evaluate with care, and what you have that is of value, be sure to share with others.

I would like to address a particular word to the priests present here in this year devoted to a celebration of the great gift of the priest-

*"Holy Father, we are proud as a nation to have inherited a Christian heritage which is at the core of our historical identity, even though we are not a confessional state. We too are experiencing, like all the rest of Europe, the phenomenon of multiculturalism, but this does not mean that we have to renounce the beliefs which are our own. We still cherish a code of values, nourished by our faith, such as the cardinal value of marriage and the family. ...*

*"We treasure the inviolability of the human person and affirm our full respect for human rights and uphold the principles of social justice by providing equal opportunities for all and ensuring that everybody has access to one's basic needs. We are against human trafficking and cherish the sanctity of human life from its conception to its natural end. We believe in the values of freedom, equality and solidarity, the fundamental principles of democracy and of the rule of law.*

*"Being situated at the center of the Mediterranean, Malta is exposed to and faces the burden of illegal immigration, which is stretching our financial and human resources. In spite of these difficulties we should, however, never shrink back from our traditional values of solidarity and hospitality toward these migrants during their stay in Malta in full respect of their rights and human dignity.*

*"We have made it our mission to work for peace and prosperity in our Mediterranean region, and we refuse to countenance conflict between cultures and actively foster dialogue, including interfaith dialogue, and understanding between peoples."*

hood. Dun Ġorġ was a priest of remarkable humility, goodness, meekness and generosity, deeply devoted to prayer and with a passion for communicating the truths of the Gospel. Let him serve as a model and an inspiration for you as you strive to fulfill the mission you have received to feed the Lord's flock.

Remember, too, the question that the risen Lord put three times to Peter: "Do you love me?" That is the question he asks each of you. Do you love him? Do you wish to serve him through the gift of your whole lives? Do you long to bring others to know and love him? With Peter, have the courage to answer, "Yes, Lord, you know I love you," and accept with grateful hearts the beautiful task that he has assigned you. The mission entrusted to priests is truly a service to joy, to God's joy which longs to break into the world (cf. April 24, 2005, homily).

As I look around me now at the great crowds gathered here in Floriana for our celebration of the Eucharist, I am reminded of the scene described in our second reading today, in which myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands united their voices in one great song of praise: "To the One seated on the throne and to the Lamb, be all praise, honor, glory and power, forever and ever" (Rv 5:13). Continue to sing that song in praise of the risen Lord and in thanksgiving for his manifold gifts. In the words of St. Paul, apostle of Malta, I conclude my words to you this morning: "*L-imħabba tiegħi tkun magħkom ilkoll fi Kristu Ġesù*" ["My love is with you all in Christ Jesus"] (1 Cor 16:24). ■

## Malta Visit: Meeting With Youth

### Benedict XVI

*"God loves every one of us with a depth and intensity that we can hardly begin to imagine," Pope Benedict XVI said April 18 to 40,000 young people in Valletta, Malta. The pope's two-day trip to Malta commemorated the 1950th anniversary of St. Paul's shipwreck on the island nation. Amid a growing crisis over clerical sex abuse of minors, Pope Benedict met privately with eight victims of abuse during*

*the trip. He also visited the grotto where tradition holds the apostle lived for the three months he was stranded in Malta and celebrated a public Mass in the country's largest square. The pope told the young people gathered at the capital city's waterfront that because God loves us so much "he wants to purify us of our faults and build up our virtues so that we can have life in abundance. When he challenges us because something in our lives is displeasing to him, he is not rejecting us but he is asking us to change and become more perfect." The pope spoke in English; his homily follows, copyright © 2010 by Libreria Editrice Vaticana.*

*Żgħażaġħ Maltin u Għawdxin, jien kuntent ħafna li ninsab magħkom* (Dear young people of Malta and Gozo, I am very happy to be with you).

What a joy it is for me to be with you today on your native soil! On this significant anniversary, we thank God for sending the apostle Paul to these islands, which were thus among the first to receive the good news of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

I warmly greet Archbishop Cremona as well as Bishop Grech, whom I thank for his kind words, and all the bishops, priests and religious who are here. Most especially, I greet you, young people of Malta and Gozo, and I thank you for speaking to me of the matters that concern you most deeply. I appreciate your desire to seek and find the truth, and to know what you must do to attain the fullness of life.

St. Paul as a young man had an experience that changed him forever. As you know, he was once an enemy of the church and did all he could to destroy it.

While he was traveling to Damascus, intending to hunt down any Christians he could find there, the Lord appeared to him in a vision. A blinding light shone around him, and he heard a voice saying, "Why do you persecute me? ... I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" (Acts 9:4-5).

Paul was completely overcome by this encounter with the Lord, and his whole life was transformed. He became a disciple and went on to be a great apostle and missionary. Here in Malta you have particular reason to give thanks for Paul's missionary labors, which spread the Gospel throughout the

Mediterranean.

Every personal encounter with Jesus is an overwhelming experience of love. Previously, as Paul himself admits, he had "persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it" (Gal 1:13). But the hatred and anger expressed in those words was completely swept away by the power of Christ's love. For the rest of his life Paul had a burning desire to carry the news of that love to the ends of the earth.

Maybe some of you will say to me, St. Paul is often severe in his writings. How can I say that he was spreading a message of love? My answer is this. God loves every one of us with a depth and intensity that we can hardly begin to imagine. And he knows us intimately, he knows all our strengths and all our faults. Because he loves us so much, he wants to purify us of our faults and build up our virtues so that we can have life in abundance.

When he challenges us because something in our lives is displeasing to him, he is not rejecting us but he is asking us to change and become more perfect. That is what he asked of St. Paul on the road to Damascus. God rejects no one. And the church rejects no one. Yet in his great love, God challenges all of us to change and to become more perfect.

St. John tells us that perfect love casts out fear (cf. 1 Jn 4:18). And so I say to all of you, "Do not be afraid!" How many times we hear those words in the Scriptures! They are addressed by the angel to Mary at the annunciation, by Jesus to Peter when calling him to be a disciple and by the angel to Paul on the eve of his shipwreck. To all of you who wish to follow Christ as married couples, as parents, as priests, as religious, as lay faithful bringing the message of the Gospel to the world, I say, do not be afraid!

You may well encounter opposition to the Gospel message. Today's culture, like every culture, promotes ideas and values that are sometimes at variance with those lived and preached by our Lord Jesus Christ. Often they are presented with great persuasive power, reinforced by the media and by social pressure from groups hostile to the Christian faith. It is easy when we are young and impressionable to be swayed by our peers to accept ideas and values that we know are not what the Lord

truly wants for us. That is why I say to you: Do not be afraid but rejoice in his love for you; trust him, answer his call to discipleship, and find nourishment and spiritual healing in the sacraments of the church.

Here in Malta you live in a society that is steeped in Christian faith and values. You should be proud that your country both defends the unborn and promotes stable family life by saying no to abortion and divorce. I urge you to maintain this courageous witness to the sanctity of life and the centrality of marriage and family life for a healthy society. In Malta and Gozo, families know how to value and care for their elderly and infirm members, and they welcome children as gifts from God. Other nations can learn from your Christian example. In the context of European society, Gospel values are once again becoming counter-cultural, just as they were at the time of St. Paul.

In this Year for Priests, I ask you to be open to the possibility that the Lord may be calling some of you to give yourselves totally to the service of his people in the priesthood or the consecrated life. Your country has given many fine priests and religious to the church. Be inspired by their example and recognize the profound joy that comes from dedicating one's life to spreading the message of God's love for all people, without exception.

I have spoken already of the need to care for the very young and for the elderly and infirm. Yet a Christian is called to bring the healing message of the Gospel to everyone. God loves every single person in this world, indeed he loves everyone who has ever lived throughout the history of the world. In the death and resurrection of Jesus, which is made present whenever we celebrate the Mass, he offers life in abundance to all those people.

As Christians we are called to manifest God's all-inclusive love. So we should seek out the poor, the vulnerable, the marginalized; we should have a special care for those who are in distress, those suffering from depression or anxiety; we should care for the disabled and do all we can to promote their dignity and quality of life; we should be attentive to the needs of immigrants and asylum seekers in our midst; we should extend the hand of friendship to members of all

faiths and none.

That is the noble vocation of love and service that we have all received. Let it inspire you to dedicate your lives to following Christ. *La tibzġħux tkunu ħbieb intimi ta' Kristu* (Do not be afraid to be intimate friends of Christ).

Dear young people, as I take my leave of you, I want you to know that I am close to you and I remember you and your families and friends in my prayers. ■

## Malta Visit: Young People Ask Pope for Guidance

### Five Maltese Youths

*Before Pope Benedict XVI addressed 40,000 young people in the Maltese capital of Valletta April 18, five young Maltese men and women spoke to the pope about their hopes, doubts and fears as well as the contradictions they sense within the Catholic Church. The first young man on stage spoke on behalf of young people such as homosexuals, substance abusers, or children of broken or dysfunctional families who may feel marginalized by the church. He told the pope, "We should be treated with more compassion — without being judged and with more love." He asked, "How can we believe that God accepts us unconditionally when his own people reject us?" The next speaker, a young woman, spoke on behalf of Catholics who are active members of the church. She said faithful Catholics, "as a group, feel excluded by society." The next to speak were a young man and woman preparing to be married within the church. They said they want to have a marriage that is guided by God's own spirit, and yet they are afraid "that life offers too many hurdles for us to live our married lives in God's light." The last young person spoke on behalf of all the young men and women preparing for consecrated life. He said God's call to live one's life completely for the Lord stirs up feelings of both happiness and despair. He said that consecrated people are often not taken seriously by members of society, especially at a time when there*

*is heightened attention to "priests who fail other persons." The young people's remarks follow.*

*Leader:* Your Holiness, as young people, we believe that the church's richness lies in the fact that it brings together a great diversity of people, not only with regards to age, language and culture but also in the variety of expressions of Christian living, in our different perspectives on life and the meaning which we give to the mystery of Jesus Christ in human history. Today in our meeting with you, Your Holiness, our desire is to make manifest this plurality in the church in Malta. We are here because we hold in our hearts a sincere wish to seek and discover the truth.

We believe that this communion of faith finds expression in the power of the Holy Spirit. Our hearts encompass our different lives and personalities. It is our desire that through God's presence among us, our personal lives as well as the social life of the church will experience a new creation.

We are one church, an inclusive church, a church that listens. Thus, as the young man who approached Jesus Christ asked, "Good Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" we, the Maltese and Gozitan young people, as well as our friends from other countries who are present here with us today, turn to you, Your Holiness, master, and confide our thoughts to you.

*First speaker:* Your Holiness, I wish to speak on behalf of those young people who, like me, feel they are on the outskirts of the church. We are the ones who do not fit comfortably into stereotyped roles. This is due to various factors among them: either because we have experienced substance abuse; or because we are experiencing the misfortune of broken or dysfunctional families; or because we are of a different sexual orientation; among us are also our immigrant brothers and sisters; all of us in some way or another have encountered experiences that have estranged us from the church.

Other Catholics put us all in one basket. For them we are those "who claim to believe yet do not live up to the commitment of faith." To us, faith is a confusing reality, and this causes us great suffering. We feel that not even the church herself recognizes our worth.

One of our deepest wounds stems from the fact that although the political forces are prepared to realize our desire for integration, the church community still considers us to be a problem. It seems almost as if we are less readily accepted and treated with dignity by the Christian community than we are by all other members of society. We understand that our way of life puts the church in an ambiguous position, yet we feel that we should be treated with more compassion — without being judged and with more love.

We are made to feel that we are living in error. This lack of comprehension on the part of other Christians causes us to entertain grave doubts, not only with regards to community life but also regarding our personal relationship with God. How can we believe that God accepts us unconditionally when his own people reject us?

Your Holiness, we wish to tell you that on a personal level — and some of us, even in our respective communities — are persevering to find ways in which we may remain united in Jesus, who we consider to be our salvation.

However, it is not that easy for us to proclaim God as our Father, a God who responds to all those who love him without prejudice. It is a contradiction in terms when we bless God's holy name, while those around us make us feel that we are worth nothing to him.

We feel emarginated, almost as if we had not been invited to the banquet. God has called to him all those who are in the squares and in the towns, those who are on the wayside and in the countryside; however, we feel he has bypassed our streets. Your Holiness, please tell us what exactly is Jesus' call for us. We wish you to show to us and the rest of the church just how valid is our faith and whether our prayers are also heard. We too wish to give our contribution to the Catholic community.

Your Holiness, what must we do?

*Second speaker:* Your Holiness, I speak on behalf of those young people who are on a journey of faith and are close to the church.

When we look around us, we can see an active church that embodies a strong sense of commitment. It is true that on our part we may not always be as inclusive as we should, and we do not always listen with respect to one another, yet

the truth of the matter is that we too, as a group, feel excluded by society.

We are among hundreds of young people who try to put into action the enthusiasm that we feel for our faith. For us, the church represents that space in society which is openly accepting of God. Although it is easier to proclaim our faith rather than to live it, we are committed to keeping the presence of the church as alive as possible in our society; yet at the same time we know that by pledging ourselves to the church, we are consciously estranging ourselves from our contemporary culture.

At times the thought crosses our minds that our work may be insignificant, that the Catholic community has merely attained the status of a movement. We give up on our dreams of being one community, and we feel that it is our faith itself that impedes us from entering further into dialogue with society.

Although we pray that God's kingdom may come about, that all of creation may be united as one, we still feel that our hopes are in vain. Although we try to live according to God's will, we feel that this is a fruitless exercise because our efforts do not reach far and beyond the peripheries of our society.

The enthusiasm we hold in our hearts comes into conflict with our doubts and apprehensions: that we may have to abandon our efforts like an unfinished building, which although founded on strong foundations, is far too expensive to complete. A heavy responsibility bears upon us as we strive to be not only the promise of the future for the Catholic community but being the protagonists of the presence of God's kingdom.

It is our sincere desire that our endeavors lead the people of God in the right direction, but we must ensure that the path is being followed. We wish to see our dedication bearing fruit: that it is, in reality, renewing the church and not simply going down in the annals of history. We believe that by the work we perform in our parishes, in schools, in our groups and movements, in our voluntary service both locally and abroad, we are truly giving witness to Jesus Christ in our lives. We wish to leave our mark on the church even as we are young.

Your Holiness, what must we do?

*Third speaker:* Your Holiness, we are a young couple about to get mar-

ried, and we speak on behalf of young people whose vocation is married life and family.

We believe that, as mature Christians, we are called to live our faith and our vocation within a society and a culture that is not at all accommodating. This is of grave concern to us, because the more time passes, the more difficult it is for us to live up to the commitment of our choices as Christians. We do not wish our choice to be an automatic or natural one; we do not wish to be Christians simply because our ancestors were; neither do we wish this for our children.

We have taken a commitment to live intimately with God through the grace of our marriage. We choose to be married before God because we believe that our family will be guided by God's own spirit. But we must admit that family life is not easy in this day and age.

We are conscious that our choices are made against a background of a culture in which the concept of family is undergoing radical change: We firmly believe that family values go further than simply being a group of people united as members of the same family. Our difficulty lies in rearing a united and happy family in a fragmented culture.

It is indeed hard to make a lifelong commitment to one's spouse and children, to share our life together, when it is just as easy to live a single life. We are not only referring to the material demands which society puts on a couple, for example, the need for both spouses to work in order to support the family financially, but also to the culture of individualism, which causes confusion in our life. We feel that it is an impossible feat to realize our ideals.

At the same time, we cannot just renounce the modern way of life, most especially because of our children. We feel hemmed in between two separate realities. On the one hand, we wish to live our married life as mundanely as possible, without putting our children at a disadvantage; on the other hand we are not altogether convinced that contemporary lifestyle gives stability to our family — which also works against the interest of our children.

In our hearts, we are skeptical toward the idea of simply trusting God to provide for our daily needs. We fear that our children are being raised in a more com-

petitive world than the one we grew up in. We are not sure about our own interpretation of God's providence: whether it is totally gratuitous or whether it is a form of compensation for our wisdom and prudence in raising our children. We feel that our culture encompasses a wide panorama which incorporates different forms of life. We wish to persist with our idea of the family; however, we fear that life offers too many hurdles for us to live our married lives in God's light.

We are not just expecting a reward at the end of our earthly lives. We believe that the grace of God's presence in our married life will sustain our family as we develop and grow together. We ask you to help us discern the signs of the Spirit in our marriage. Help us to see that it was God himself who called us to our vocation as married couple, even before we invited him to be part of our marriage. Show us the way to live our married life as a calling from God.

Your Holiness, tell us, what must we do?

*Fourth speaker:* Your Holiness, I stand here on behalf of my friends who are on the road to discerning our vocation to the priesthood or to the consecrated life.

We firmly believe that God's call to man should be a most extraordinary experience, although at times strange, that one can live. It is a call that at one and the same time creates a state of happiness and of despair.

Together with other young people here with us, we have listened to and heeded the call to serve through the ministry of the priesthood and the consecrated life. Courageously we are taking small steps toward our ministerial ordination in order to look after and care for God's people. It is a people whose desire is to live as fruitfully as possible in our modern world — a people who are not building walls, but rather seek to build bridges. Yet our vocation seems strange to those members of society who do not form part of our circle.

Many times when we try to integrate ourselves in other areas outside the church, we are not taken seriously. It is our desire to grow closer to those people who have distanced themselves from God, yet how are we to touch those hearts which are cold and suspicious?

Maybe by the standards of the collec-

tive consciousness of our culture, the church seems to be a restraining force, a force that goes against the grain in life. And the priest often seems to be a personification of this negative force. We must admit that the church has passed through phases and episodes that are not easy to explain or justify once seen through the eyes of the eyes of today's open-minded mentality. Today we also hear of priests who fail other persons. But it seems almost as if this admission of our shortcomings is not worth anything, and we are still held at arm's length by some people.

We do not feel that it is just that we are held responsible for the mistakes made by a few others — that we too are measured by the same yardstick — especially since we are trying to live out the implications of our vocation in a faithful manner. Yet at the same time we are aware that this forms part of our calling. With trepidation, we beg God for forgiveness of our sins and to save us from danger, because we realize that to a great extent, although we may have to face difficult situations, we do not wish to endanger others.

Yet we need to take the necessary steps forward even though we may not always be convinced about our wider role as pastors. Why should we continue to follow the sheep who seeks another flock? Why should we leave the flock where we are made welcome? We desire to be sustained in our mission as priests because our church should be prepared to make everybody welcome, to find a place for everyone who needs it.

We believe that in the name of Jesus Christ we should invite new people to discover God, to look after the hearts of all persons, not only Catholics. Yet to do this we need to put ourselves in the shoes of the Shepherd who leaves his flock to go after one single heart. We wish to integrate ourselves into a society that does not reserve a place for us.

Your Holiness, what must we do?

*Leader:* Your Holiness, we ardently await your message of hope, a message that in the years to come will help us to recognize better the true face of the Divine Master — Jesus of Nazareth. ■

## The Pillar of Fire: Christ Present in the Darkness

### Archbishop Quinn

*Jesus' words to his "very troubled and confused disciples" before his passion and death offer guidance today at "a perilous and critical point in the life of the church," Archbishop John R. Quinn told participants in the National Federation of Priests' Councils convention April 13. The retired archbishop of San Francisco spoke during the annual NFPC meeting April 12-15 in Houston. Archbishop Quinn said that priests are "the ones who meet the angry or confused or troubled people at the Sunday Masses in your parishes and missions" and the ones "whose hearts break at the anguish of our people over the robbed innocence of their children." He called U.S. priests today "a body of men who do not seek praise or acclaim and who walk faithfully with the Lord in a time of searing and seismic testing." He said upheaval in the church might make priests today ask the question broached by Jesuit theologian Father Karl Rahner years ago: "Why would a modern man want to become or to remain a priest today?" Archbishop Quinn said that "the deepest and most enduring reason why a modern man would want to become and to remain a priest is the person of Jesus Christ. ... If our love for Jesus Christ is truly genuine, then there must stir within us the desire to be like him." Archbishop Quinn's address follows.*

I am here to pay tribute to you, the priests of the United States. You stand on the front line. You meet the angry or confused or troubled people at the Sunday Masses in your parishes and missions. You have to try to answer their questions about the worldwide crisis caused by priests and bishops around the world.

You are the ones out there in the parishes whose hearts break at the anguish of our people over the robbed innocence of their children. And you weep inside over the desecration of something so beautiful, so cherished as the

priesthood is to all of us. You are the ones who meet the children and the families and try your best to walk with them in their search for peace and healing. You are there where the wound is.

I know that all over this country, in small towns and large cities, there are priests who stay up all night in a hospital waiting room with a distraught family whose teenage daughter lies near death from a motorcycle accident. I know that there are priests in rural dioceses, like the priests I knew in Oklahoma, who drive hundreds of miles both ways to one or several mission churches on Saturday evenings and then have three Masses on Sundays with baptisms, counseling, youth groups and parish gatherings in the afternoon and evening.

I know that there are priests, like so many articulate and well-read priests I know in San Francisco, whose constant thought is how they can respond better and more effectively to the needs of their people.

You are the priests who have persevered when your heart sank over an admired and gifted classmate who was removed from ministry because of allegations of abuse. You are the men who worked generously and in a spirit of faith to cooperate with and support your bishop even when, at times, that may be difficult.

You are the men who have defended and held on to the church in the face of anger, bitterness and controversy. You are the men who have seen the parishes and schools and hospitals close and disappear but have resolutely served the people in living faith.

You are the priests who, unseen and unknown to anyone, slip quietly away for an hour of prayer to make intercession for the church and for the world and in that encounter have discovered the only — and the real reason — to persevere. Brothers, you are the priests of the United States, a body of men who do not seek praise or acclaim and who walk faithfully with the Lord in a time of searing and seismic testing.

We are at a critical point in the life of the church. Here and there commentators are beginning to compare it to the magnitude of the crisis of the Reformation. This is not the place to raise these cosmic issues. But I do believe it is the place to raise the ques-

tion every priest must confront today. It is the question first raised by Karl Rahner: "Why would a modern man want to become or remain a priest today?"

This great theologian tackles the question with stunning simplicity. He begins by saying that for him, it is not the great works of the church in the service of justice and peace, the great universities and the great movements and programs. "Rather," he says, "I still see around me living in many of my brother priests a readiness for unselfish service carried out quietly, a readiness for prayer, for abandonment to the incomprehensibility of God, for the calm acceptance of death in whatever form it may come, for the total dedication to the following of Christ crucified."

Then this great scholar mentions those who inspire him to persevere as a priest: "I think of my friend, Alfred Delp, who with his hands chained in a concentration camp, signed the paper of his final vows. I think of a brother priest who for long hours in the confessional listens to the pain and torment of unimportant people. ... I think of a brother priest who assists daily in a hospital at the bedside of death. ... I think of a brother priest who as a prison chaplain proclaims over and over the message of the Gospel with never any sign of gratitude.

"I think of the brother priest who (in a parish) with tremendous difficulty and without any clear evidence of success plods away at the task of awakening in just a few people a small spark of faith, of hope and of charity. These and many other forms and acts of renunciation, known to God alone, are still what is decisive in the priesthood."

But there are men like these who have lived in and come from our own American dioceses. Think of Emil Kapaun, a priest of Wichita, Kan. In a prison camp in Korea he stole food from the commissary at night for his starving men, knowing that he would be shot on sight if discovered.

Depression and futility gripped many of the men in his unit. A Protestant chaplain with a wife and children at home was severely depressed, and Emil knew he would die if something didn't change. He deliberately said things to make him angry, knowing that the

experience of anger would bring him out of himself. It worked, and the man lived to return to his family.

Emil tried everything to keep the men positive and hopeful. The men who got dysentery he carried on his shoulders to the latrine and cleaned them. Eventually he got phlebitis and the guards took him off to die — the last thing his men heard was Emil assuring the guards he held no animosity or hatred for them.

Stanley Rother, whose bishop I was at one time, was a priest of Oklahoma City. He volunteered for the mission we had in Guatemala. He served the people with great dedication, teaching them their faith and instructing them in the social doctrine of the church. He carried on his ministry as priests he knew and worked with were murdered. His own catechists and parish leaders were abducted and murdered.

Told that he was on the death list, he was urged to return to Oklahoma, which he did. But there only a short time, knowing clearly that it would mean certain death, he decided to go back to Guatemala. He told his parents, "The shepherd can't run. I have to go back."

All over this country there are men like that. All over this country there are priests putting their hand in the hand of Christ and giving themselves to him each day in humble, strenuous and unsung service.

Jack Isaacs was a San Francisco priest. He was very gifted and widely read (in a letter to me he once cited the 15th-century author, Pico della Mirandola). Seeing that he was extremely talented, I asked him if he would like to be sent for higher studies. He said he would prefer to work in a parish, and preferably a poor parish.

He asked to go with the St. James Society and spent five years in the altiplano. There he lived in a remote and difficult place for five years. There was no electricity, and it was difficult to live in such an altitude and in such isolation. But he embraced it and invested himself in the service of the people.

When he came home, he asked to go to an extremely poor parish where there was no rectory. I told him that we would get a condominium for him. But he insisted on living in the one-room sacristy attached to the church so as to

live more like the people he was serving. At the age of 50 he died of cancer, and when I left his mother after visiting him the day before he died, I said to her, “You are the mother of a saint.” Jack Isaacs was an American priest.

Peter Lynch had been a priest over 50 years in the San Diego and San Bernardino dioceses. He was sitting at a discussion table with a group of priests at a meeting on ministry in today’s world. One younger priest said to him, “Pete, if you were starting over as a priest today what would you do different?” He said, “I would pray more and be easier on the people.”

Last week I was at the Maryknoll house near San Francisco. A priest, 85 years old, had just left to go to Yucatan to celebrate the Holy Week liturgies twice each day in the main parish church and in an outlying mission church.

Father Joseph Guetzloe, a Divine Word Father, was pastor of a Japanese community in San Francisco. When the Japanese were forced to move to segregation camps during World War II, Father Guetzloe asked to go with them. He voluntarily spent all the war years there with his people.

A young priest, ordained one year, wrote to me about his experience during that first year and said, “I have been looking for the lack of success in the lack of technique and finding it in the lack of holiness.”

Priests like these are in every diocese in this country. I have worked as a priest and bishop with priests in three dioceses, given retreats for priests in every part of this country, worked with priests from all states of the union in connection with my work in the bishops’ conference, and I can tell you that there are humble, faithful, priests expending their talents and energies in serving Christ and his people everywhere in the United States. I have seen them.

Even so, we know that we have come now to a perilous and critical point in the life of the church and in our own lives. The cataclysmic avalanche of the sex abuse scandal is a profoundly troubling experience for every priest. It touches not only the perpetrators and those so gravely hurt by them. But it is now engulfing the papacy itself and eroding the leadership and credibility of the bishops in the church. It forces us to ask the question of Karl Rahner,

“Why would a modern man want to become or to remain a priest today?”

How can an American priest persevere in the midst of such a shattering trial? How do we priests and how does the church persevere in time of severe trial?

Karl Rahner gave one answer he found in the lives of brother priests. The authentic Catholic spirit, however, must also seek the way on a darkened path by turning to the word of God. And for me one of the most powerful answers as to how we persevere in crushing trials is found in the last discourses of Our Lord in the Gospel of John, Chapters 14 through 17.

These words of Jesus are spoken to a troubled church and to very troubled and confused disciples. They were at the breaking point. Everything they knew was changing. They had an ominous sense of disintegration and loss. It was dark, and they were in a dark night themselves.

In many ways we are those disciples and we are that church now. But the Lord Jesus shows to them and to the church a path in the time of darkness and of crisis. He begins by giving them a forthright commandment: “You are not to let your hearts be troubled.” This is not an exhortation. It is a command.

As the Lord unfolds his message, he explains that in the trouble and the crisis they confront, where disaster seems inevitable and there is no solution, with the Father and the Spirit, he will be with them. The basis of their trust is not that everything will turn out well. The basis of their trust and their power to persevere will be the unshakable truth that the Spirit will be in them, and will be another Paraclete.

The Paraclete — this means that he will be near them, close to them. He will be in them, and he will heal their radical loneliness because he will be with them forever. They will never be alone again no matter how impossible the situation seems to be.

The Lord Jesus goes on to command them to abide in him, in fact, to abide in his love. To *abide* is to persevere, to remain, to continue, to endure — not in his power or his wisdom. The command is to abide in his love, to be fixed in his love as a spoke in its hub. To know that he loves us, to experience and to believe that he loves us, is with us, is within us.

This is how the Bible teaches us to persevere in darkness and in trial. This is perseverance coming from deep inner springs of living water found only in a life of serious and faithful prayer.

Perseverance comes from a deepening interior communion of persons — of the priest with Jesus Christ crucified and risen, a union of love in the service of life. Perseverance comes from the deepening experience and conviction that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are giving themselves to me in eternal and infinite love. Indeed, St. Teresa says that prayer is being with him whom we know loves us. This kind of prayer is the ground of perseverance in trials.

And so, I come back again to the question, “Why would a modern man want to become or to remain a priest today?” The deepest and most enduring reason why a modern man would want to become and to remain a priest is the person of Jesus Christ.

In the depths of every authentic priest echoes the word, “Do you love me more than these?” These times and our situation lead us in a powerful way to confront that question. In some ways it is the only question that really matters.

If our love for Jesus Christ is truly genuine, then there must stir within us the desire to be like him. We see this in Paul, “My one desire is to know Christ Jesus and the power of his resurrection, and to share his sufferings in growing conformity with his death” (Phil 3:10). St. Augustine said that the essence of religion is to imitate him whom we adore. To love is to be like.

We priests and the Catholic Church are in a moment of humiliation and some degree of helplessness. We are that man in Psalm 63: “O God ... I seek you, my soul thirsts for you, ... as in a dry, weary land where there is no water.”

This is why I firmly believe that this is one of the best times to be a priest. It is a time for us, like the apostles in Acts, to give thanks that we are counted worthy to suffer something for Christ. It is not a time for us to be the martyr-victim but the martyr-witness. If anything is emphatic in the Gospel of John it is that the Lord Jesus freely, knowingly and willingly invested himself in the mystery of the cross. This is surely a

time when every true priest is invited to freely and humbly embrace what Christ Our Lord freely accepted.

We priests and the whole church are being called to evangelical humility and to a purer faith. It is time for us to embrace this providential call with robust generosity and with a solidarity that binds us together as priests in a uniquely difficult period of our history.

In light of all this, I would like to make some observations. First, the great temptation of the people of God in the Bible is to doubt God's power. Exodus says, "The Israelites quarreled and tested the Lord, saying, 'Is the Lord with us or not?'" (Ex 17:7).

Abraham and Sarah doubted. Moses doubted. Peter doubted. Thomas doubted. It is our temptation now. We ask, "Is God going to do anything about this?" "Is there any way to heal this?"

The besetting temptation is to set limits to providence. "Could God be working in a situation like this?" It takes a very firm and living faith to be able to grasp and internalize the truth spoken by St. John of the Cross at a similar time of disaster for the church. He said, "The Lord in every age has always revealed the treasures of his wisdom and his Spirit. But in these times when the face of evil bares itself more and more, so does the Lord bare his treasures more" (*Sayings of Light and Love*, 1).

For St. Bernard, John the Baptist is the great image of the priesthood in the Gospel. He is the friend — the friend of the Bridegroom. An important role of the friend of the Bridegroom was that he was responsible for the joy of the guests at the wedding feast.

This is how Christ presents himself in the resurrection accounts — he is the minister of consolation: He consoles Mary at the tomb, he consoles the disciples locked in fear in the upper room, he consoles Thomas in his doubts. This is our role as priests — to console the holy church of God in a time of intolerable pain and suffering.

We are called to be the ministers of consolation and of evangelical hope. And so once more the question, "How do we persevere in such a catastrophic situation? What makes it possible for us to be the ministers of consolation to the weeping church?" Many things could be said but I mention a few here.

I was a seminarian when Fulton

Sheen was ordained a bishop. I was choir director for the Mass and had to go early to the church to get things set up. When I arrived an hour or so before the Mass, I saw in the empty church Fulton Sheen sitting alone and silent in a small side chapel before the Blessed Sacrament. This example I commend to you, dear brothers, at an exceedingly painful time — to drink the waters of hope and endurance, of patience and perseverance from the pierced heart of the One who knows what it is like to be me. I recommend that you give an hour each day to personal prayer — to being with him whom we know loves us.

It is in this kind of prayer that the Holy Spirit can impart interior peace which enables us to endure in the face of overwhelming and unsolvable problems. This kind of prayer imparts the fortitude and the living hope that makes us begin again each day and enables us to give to others the consolation we receive.

Paul puts it this way, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the utterly merciful Father, the God whose consolation never fails us! He consoles us in all our troubles, so that we in turn may be able to console others in any trouble of theirs and to share with them the consolation we ourselves receive from God" (2 Cor 1:3-4).

And so, in a difficult time we should not forget that the great works of God have been accomplished in darkness. The people fled Egypt in the darkness, they crossed the Red Sea in the darkness, the Lord Jesus was born in Bethlehem in the darkness of night, he gave us the Eucharist and the priesthood in the darkness of the Last Supper, he died on the cross when the Gospel says "darkness covered the earth." He lay in the darkness of the tomb. On the third day, he rose again in the darkness, and the empty tomb was discovered "early in the morning while it was still dark." God is at work even in the darkness.

What John of the Cross describes as the dark night of the soul has in our time become the dark night of the church. John explains that the dark night is a bewildering experience; it strips away all the visible supports. It brings a helpless, sinking feeling. But it is only truly the dark night when it is accepted as coming from God and borne in faith.

The believer and the church who

pass through the dark night in faith are led to the loss of everything secondary and to discover that God is not who they thought he was and they are not who they thought they were. It is the discovery that God is beyond everything we can articulate or conceive, and it is the experience that we do not control God. The dark night is dark because God is infinite light overwhelming our limited capacities. It is in the experience of the dark night that the believer and the church come to know that God is all. This dark night of the church is a divine pedagogy teaching us painfully that we are incredibly poor and utterly dependent on God.

It is precisely in this situation of diminishment and suffering that we are brought to a new understanding of one of the most important truths of the Second Vatican Council, and it is with these words of *Gaudium et Spes* that I leave you:

"The church firmly believes that the key, the center and the very purpose of all human history is found in her Lord and Master. She believes that beyond all changes there are things which do not change and which have their ultimate foundation in Christ, who is the same yesterday, today, yes, and forever" (No. 10). ■

## **Trials Will Leave Priesthood, Church Stronger**

**Msgr. Rossetti**

*The U.S. priesthood and the Catholic Church itself will emerge from today's crises stronger than ever, said Msgr. Stephen Rossetti, an expert in treating psychological and spiritual difficulties, especially among priests. Msgr. Rossetti spoke April 13 at the annual convention in Houston of the National Federation of Priests' Councils. Although a look at the news gives the impression that the priesthood "is dispirited, discouraged and disintegrating," Msgr. Rossetti said two studies he conducted of 4,000 priests between 2002 and 2010 show that "priests like being priests; they find great satisfaction*

*in their lives.” He said, “Rather than disintegrating under the pressure and stress of our day, it appears to me that our priests are becoming stronger,” he said. “As the public negativity rises and the chorus of naysayers crescendos, I believe our priests and church are actually the better for it,” he added. Msgr. Rossetti, a clinical associate professor of pastoral studies at The Catholic University of America in Washington, was president and CEO of St. Luke Institute in Silver Spring, Md., from 1996 until October 2009. The institute is a residential treatment center for priests and religious with addictions or psychological disorders. Msgr. Rossetti was accepting the NFPC’s Touchstone Award, presented annually to a priest “whose service in the Gospel of Jesus Christ exemplifies the purpose and goals of the federation.” Msgr. Rossetti’s address follows.*

I am grateful to the National Federation of Priests’ Councils for all it has done to further the health and welfare of the priests of this country. I feel honored and grateful for this Touchstone Award and receive it on behalf of all those I have ministered with these past years, especially at St. Luke Institute here in the U.S. and St. Luke’s Centre in England. The men and women in these centers have dedicated their labors to the care of priests and religious and continue to do so with great expertise, love and compassion. I was privileged to minister in their midst for over 17 years.

On this occasion as you and I reflect upon the state of the priesthood, I am reminded of these words:

“In the daily exercise of our pastoral office, we sometimes have to listen, much to our regret, to voices of persons who, though burning with zeal ... in these modern times they can see nothing but prevarication and ruin. They say that our era, in comparison with past eras, is getting worse. ... We feel we must disagree with those prophets of gloom, who are always forecasting disaster as though the end of the world were at hand.”

With these words, Pope John XXIII began the Second Vatican Council, and they are as true today as they were 48 years ago. Reading the newspapers and the blogs today, one gets the impression that the priesthood is dispirited, discouraged and disintegrating. Priests

are described as being depressed and lonely. They are believed to be unhappy with the imposition of celibacy and unhappy with their bishops. Who would want to become a priest today under such conditions? Who indeed.

But is it really true? As I go from diocese to diocese around this country (and I have been to most of them), I spend considerable time with our priests. I listen to them and I pray with them. We share drinks and a meal. We recreate together, perhaps dubbing a few golf balls or seeing the local sights. And, of course, we gather around the altar as brothers in love with the Lord and with the people.

Despite the very real challenges and sufferings of our day, contrary to public image priests do *not* seem to be an unhappy lot. In fact, we spend much of our time together laughing, sharing hopes and challenges, and speaking of the priesthood with reverence and gratitude. Of course, the problems of today are real and of true concern to our priests. But I do not sense they are overcome or in any way defeated by them.

In our day the public persona of the priesthood comes largely to us from the media and from the loudest, often shrill, voices that attack our ears. They prophesy doom. But we should not look to the media to give us an accurate reading into the state of the priesthood. Bad news sells, and the media are driven to increasingly upping the emotional ante with a rising crescendo of tragedy. As a psychologist, this strikes me as an addiction, and like all addictions, it must lead to self-destruction if not overcome.

Nor should you and I necessarily listen to today’s loudest voices for an accurate reading of the times. They often speak in shrill tones and blog us with their own unhappiness and anger. What they say speaks more about themselves than about our priests.

Rather, to understand the state of the priesthood today, there is really only one place to look. That place, of course, is with the priests themselves. Instead of *telling* priests how they should feel, we ought to *ask* them. My goal these past few years has been precisely that. I have tried to get in touch with the “silent majority,” the multitude of our priests whose thoughts and deeds never make the front page.

Most of them do not have a blog; their

telephones cannot surf the Internet, and they still think that “Tweet” is something a bird does. When we speak directly to priests who minister day to day in the Lord’s vineyard, enduring the heat of the day, what emerges is a more balanced picture of the joys and the struggles of a very human life, yet filled with faith and courageously lived.

During the last eight years, from 2002 to 2010, I have been conducting two large studies of priests, surveying over 4,000 of them. What has emerged are some very clear conclusions. These findings demonstrate basic truths about the state of priesthood, and they are confirmed in other studies such as those sponsored by NFPC and other statistical sources.

The data consistently affirm that *priests like being priests; they find great satisfaction in their lives*. They are strong in faith and dedicated in their work. In their lives as priests and men of faith, they find much contentment and peace. One might even use the phrase “a life of quiet joy.” The happiness of the priesthood is one of the best kept secrets of our time.

Actually, the results of my surveys were quite stunning. When asked in a confidential anonymous survey if they were happy as priests, 92 percent said yes. And when asked about their morale, 89 percent said it was good and over 81 percent said they are proud to be a priest today. This is enormously high.

Again and again, researchers find similar results. For example, in the 2001 NFPC survey spearheaded by Dean Hoge, 94 percent said they were happy as priests. This satisfaction rate would likely match up well with any walk of life.

And are priests unhappy with their bishops? Contrary to popular opinion, 77 percent said they had a good relationship with their individual bishops, and 81 percent supported his leadership. Any leader of an organization would be thrilled with such approval ratings.

Perhaps one of the most maligned realities, especially in these days of the blanket media coverage of clerical misconduct, is the priestly commitment to celibacy. But 78 percent of the priests said they feel *called by God* to live a celibate life. Similarly, 75 percent said that, despite its challenges, celibacy has been a grace for them. While this is not 100

percent, it is a strong finding and suggests that celibacy is not the onerous burden as it is portrayed.

Sure, it is difficult, but so is marriage. When I watch the real challenges my married brothers face, I find myself admiring their strength and thinking that, all in all, celibacy is certainly no more difficult; perhaps it is less so. But most important, the large majority of priests are prospering in their celibate lives and believe that God himself has called them to this celibate way of living and loving.

Some people have bristled when hearing about these high rates of priestly happiness and say, "Well, priests *should* be unhappy. They are overburdened with work; they receive less public support than ever; the media are filled with clergy scandals; and society is becoming more atheistic and unchurched." Fair enough. We priests are well aware of such challenges. Indeed, in my survey 42 percent of priests report being overwhelmed with the amount of work they have to do. So what is it that priests have to be so happy about?

Ah, now this is the nub of it. Why would someone be happy with a celibate life, little pay, long hours and a regular drubbing in the press? Now they are even after the Holy Father, and it will be a long road for him up Calvary. So, why are our priests reporting such high levels of satisfaction? What can help us to understand this apparent anomaly?

Then, I searched into the spiritual lives of our priests and was again edified by the results.

Here we have some initial clues to the countercultural joy of our priests. Almost unanimously, they report a direct and strong connection with God. Ninety-three percent feel a sense of closeness to God; 97 percent report a relationship to God that is nourishing; 95 percent feel that God loves them personally and directly; and 97 percent report feeling from time to time a joy that is a grace from God.

We say that a priest is a man of God. Indeed, he is. Our priests are living out this reality, and it is making a difference in their lives.

Our society wants to be happy. They want to find joy. But they are increasingly frustrated. They cannot find it on the Internet, in casual sex and hooking up, in drugs or alcohol, or making millions

of dollars. Pope Paul VI, in his wonderful little exhortation *Gaudete in Domino*, spoke about the lack of joy in our society today. He said there is often much material wealth and prosperity but people simply cannot find joy. He said, "This is the reason for our message. ... Joy comes from another source."

Indeed it does. It was one of the gifts that Jesus promised, "That my joy might be yours and your joy might be complete."

And then Pope Paul rhetorically asked, "What is the source of Jesus' joy?" He finds the answer in John's Gospel: "If Jesus radiates such peace, such assurance, such happiness, such availability, it is by reason of the inexpressible love by which he knows that he is loved by his Father."

I have seen the truth of this statement in the lives of countless priests treated at St. Luke Institute. Many of them came through our doors feeling broken and hopeless. They would often say to me that they know that God loves and forgives other people, but they could not experience it in their own lives. Instead, as one cleric said, "I feel like the good news applies to everyone else but me."

However, in the course of living in our healing community, surrounded by love and compassion, they open up to others and to God. They come to taste the transforming love of a God who was always with them. Then they themselves begin to experience the joy and peace that only God can give.

To the modern ear I know this sounds a little trite and a little unbelievable — God giving us joy. This precisely is the challenge of Christianity today. It is part of our faith that our God is not a remote God, pulling the strings from a distance but closer to us than we are to ourselves, filling us with his life and goodness if only we give him a chance. We claim this relationship is real and dynamic, here and now.

I do not think our greatest challenge to the faith of our day is explicit atheism, à la Christopher Hitchens. This vocal minority protests loudly that there is no God and no afterlife. The Shakespearean oft-quoted line might be applicable, "The lady doth protest too much, methinks."

But the real danger is all around us; it is the apparent lack of interest, reluctance. People are just not interested.

God and religion do not blip the radar screens of their lives. They are what I call "functional" atheists.

A few months ago, I was underneath London, down in the Tube, as they call it. It was mobbed. As I looked out over the great crowd, I was suddenly struck with the idea that here were thousands of people who, it seemed to me, likely had not a thought of the living God on their minds. This, the most important reality of our lives, and I saw no evidence that he was of any concern.

They were absorbed with other things, not necessarily bad things, but with newspapers, iPods, the latest novels or gazing at dozens of advertisements plastering the walls. But it seemed there was nary a thought about a dynamic loving Presence who makes all such stuff appear as a bit of straw, as St. Thomas himself experienced.

What is pressing upon us, you and me, who preach and teach in the name of the church, is the need for a new evangelization. Pope after pope has called for it in the last few decades, but their summons have fallen on deaf ears. I think we are too caught up at times in our own internecine conflicts in the church to mobilize our energies and to strike out into the unchurched world.

Actually, the surveys also showed that the rift in our church and priesthood is one of our priests' greatest concerns. When asked if the "lack of unity of the priesthood" was a concern to them, 48 percent said yes. This is high. It is time for us to stop the internal bickering.

Satan is never happier than when we are cutting each other down. Now that we are doing his work for him, I imagine the Ole Boy taking a siesta down in the islands. It is time to put our energy into breaking through the modern secular consciousness; people want to be happy and we have the key.

Despite these challenges, the excessive workloads and fissures in our priesthood, priests are not disconnected and lonely people. Eighty-eight percent said they had good priest friends, and 93 percent affirmed that they had good lay friends as well.

*Another source of our priestly happiness and joy is in our relationships with the people and with our brother priests.* These relationships of love and communion find their deepest and fullest expression as we gather together around

the eucharistic table and celebrate the feast of joy.

This helps us to understand the results on the Maslach burnout scales I gave the priests. We all know that there is too much to do these days. But when given standard burnout measures, priests actually scored markedly *less* burned out than the general population.

Rather than disintegrating under the pressure and the stress of our day, it appears to me that our priests are becoming stronger. It reminds me a bit of the famous incident when Mark Twain responded to rumors of his death, "The report of my death," he said, "is an exaggeration."

As the public negativity rises and the chorus of naysayers crescendos, I believe our priests and church are actually the better for it. We have always said that it is the blood of martyrs that strengthens the church. Truly, the more the church suffers, the stronger it becomes.

I have found this true in my own life. I would not wish to relive the past years, especially the seven years from 2002 to 2009. None of us could ever have envi-

sioned the pain and suffering of those years. It is good not to know some things in advance. But I must say that something has changed in me and, I think, in our church, and both for the better. It is hard to describe. But a few words pass through my mind like patience, wisdom, compassion, humility. These cannot be bought but only suffered into.

We believe that all things ultimately serve God's will. Everything is taken up into God and transformed so that it inevitably propels all toward its consummation in Christ. The church has suffered greatly, some due to its own mistakes. But the shrill tone and tenor of the attack that continues to this day suggest a darker force at work as well. At the same time, paradoxically, we have made one large step toward the kingdom. God's will must and is being accomplished.

I thank God for having been given the grace of these past years. They have been an unexpected blessing. Although frankly I hope that he has some gentler plans for the days ahead.

I thank you for this recognition. I take it as a recognition for the selfless giving

of so many people who love, help and support our priests.

And whatever the future holds, I am proud to be a priest and to minister shoulder to shoulder with such faith-filled men. A better band of brothers one could not ask for. With them and in them, I find happiness and hope. ■

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## June 2-4

Catholic Media Convention. Sponsor: Catholic Press Association of the U.S. and Canada. Theme: "Spreading the Good News Byte by Byte." Marriott New Orleans. New Orleans, La. [www.catholicpress.org](http://www.catholicpress.org)

## June 2-4

Regional Consultation on Migration with bishops and staff responsible for the pastoral care of migrants from the U.S., Central America, the Caribbean and Canada. Sponsor: U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Committee on Migration. USCCB Headquarters. Washington, D.C. [www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org)

## June 2-5

National Association for Lay Ministry Annual Conference. Theme: "The Christian Steward: The Call, the Cost and the Way." Radisson Hotel Pittsburgh, Green Tree. Pittsburgh, Pa. [www.nalm.org](http://www.nalm.org)

## June 3-6

College Theology Society Annual Convention. Theme: "Religion, Economics and Culture in Conflict and Conversation." University of Portland. Portland, Ore. [www.collegetheology.org](http://www.collegetheology.org)

## June 4-6

Pope Benedict XVI visits Cyprus. [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va)

## June 7-11

Study Week: "Reclaiming and Renewing Our Mission: A Pastoral Think Tank for Priests." Sponsor: Vatican II Institute for Clergy Formation. St. Patrick's Seminary. Menlo Park, Calif. [www.stpatrickseminary.org/vatican-ii/study-week-2010.html](http://www.stpatrickseminary.org/vatican-ii/study-week-2010.html)

## \*June 9-11

Annual Diocesan Information Systems Conference. Toronto Marriott Downtown Eaton Centre Hotel. Toronto, Ont. [www.discinfo.org](http://www.discinfo.org)

\*signifies new entry

## On File

Pope Benedict XVI has named Bishop Thomas G. Wenski of Orlando, Fla., 59, as archbishop of Miami and accepted the resignation of Archbishop John C. Favalora, 74, who has headed the archdiocese since 1994. The pope also named Chicago Auxiliary Bishop Thomas J. Paprocki, 57, as bishop of Springfield, Ill. Archbishop Wenski will be installed June 1. Bishop Paprocki will be installed June 22.

A retired Vatican cardinal said the late Pope John Paul II had approved his congratulatory letter to a French bishop who refused to report a sexually abusive priest to police. Spanish newspapers reported that Colombian Cardinal Dario Castrillon Hoyos told an audience at a Catholic university in Murcia, Spain, April 16 that he consulted with Pope John Paul and showed him the letter. He said the pope had authorized him to send the letter to bishops worldwide. Cardinal Castrillon wrote it in 2001, when he was head of the Vatican's Congregation for Clergy. "I congratulate you for not denouncing a priest to the civil administration," Cardinal Castrillon wrote to Bishop Pierre Pican of Bayeux-Lisieux. "You have acted well and I am happy to have a colleague in the episcopate who, in the eyes of history and of all other bishops in the world, preferred prison to denouncing his son, a priest." The priest was later sentenced to 18 years in prison for multiple counts of sexual

assault. The bishop was given a three-month suspended sentence for not reporting the abuse in violation of French law.

At least two U.S. bishops have taken actions to indicate their disapproval of the support some women's religious communities and the Catholic Health Association gave to the final version of health care reform legislation. Bishop Lawrence E. Brandt of Greensburg, Pa., has directed diocesan offices, parishes and the diocesan newspaper not to promote the "vocation awareness program of any religious community" that was a signatory to a letter urging members of the House of Representatives to pass the health reform bill. In Providence, R.I., Bishop Thomas J. Tobin asked the Catholic Health Association to remove the diocesan-sponsored St. Joseph Health Services of Rhode Island from its membership rolls, saying that CHA leadership had "misled the public and caused serious scandal" by supporting health reform legislation that the bishops opposed. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops reiterated its decades-long support for providing access to health care for all but expressed regret that health care reform came with the possibility of expanded abortion funding and urged vigilance that an executive order by President Barack Obama would, as promised, ensure no federal funds will be spent on abortion.