

Letter of His Lordship Mgr. Mario Grech  
Bishop of Gozo

On the occasion of the Diocesan Mission  
2008-2009

**“The Love of Christ urges us” (2 Cor 5: 14)**

Dear brothers in the Ministerial Priesthood,  
Dear brothers and sisters in the Consecrated Life, and in Baptism,

We all pass very often from the same experience which the Twelve went through in the Gospel which we have just heard (Mt 14, 22-23): we feel we are in the darkness of the night, in a boat which is in the middle of a stormy sea, fighting against the waves and the wind.

**“There was a headwind”**

The story of each and every family is made up of both beautiful and ugly experiences. Sometimes, the experience of suffering becomes so strong that it does not counterbalance with the sense of hope or of a better life.

Some of our families are in stormy circumstances because of difficulties in their relationships as couples. Very often in circumstances such as these the children, from quite an early age, live in a situation where they fear they are going to lose somebody who is dear to them.

There are many young people who like the apostles feel they are lost in the darkness of the night, and while they look for their own freedom they find themselves becoming victims of drink, drugs and other low instincts which alienate them from themselves, from others and from God. How precious is the suffering of the parents and their families when they do all in their power to see their children happy!

Many are those families which are suffering under the weight of illnesses of the body or of the mind, some of which have no hope of being cured.

**“He went towards them, walking on the sea”**

The Gospel which we have just heard tells us that in spite of the darkness, the waves and the wind, when Jesus got into the boat, the storm ceased! Jesus often wants to meet the person when he is struggling against the stormy waves of life.

Jesus gives the water which takes thirst away to the Samaritan woman who was trying to fill her heart with those loves which were outside of her own family (cf. Jn 4, 1-42). Jesus takes away the emptiness of the adulterous woman and forgives her (cf. Jn 8, 1-11). He blesses the little children and embraces them even when they feel refused by adults (cf. Mk 10, 13-16). He gives new life to various young people, like the daughter of Jairus (cf. Lk 8, 49-56) and the son of the widow of Naim (cf. Lk 7, 11-16).

The suffering and death of Jesus himself give a new significance to all the experiences of mankind, even to those experiences which man cannot understand or finds it difficult to accept. Through the event of the Resurrection of Jesus, mankind's destiny is changed; in Him all types of suffering and death are destroyed.

Sometimes, how much we would like to hear the Word of Jesus: *“Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid!”* How much we would like Jesus to get into our boat so that the wind may stop!

### **“Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid”**

While the stormy seas were a challenge and a source of fear for the Twelve, it served Jesus as a way to arrive beside them. But they did not recognize him, they thought he was a ghost! It was his Word of courage that helped them to meet him! And when they recognized him, they were also invited to walk on the stormy seas!

As we have already told you in the Pastoral Letter for the Opening of the Pauline Year, I would like to invite you again to open your hearts to the beauty of Christ. I would like to tell you once again, especially during this year, to open the doors of your families so that you can hear, taste and live the invitation of Jesus: *“Take courage, it is I, do not be afraid!”*

This invitation of Jesus is taking a concrete form in the Church in Gozo through the proposal of the Diocesan Mission. In the parish feasts that we have celebrated until now, and in those we are about to celebrate, I am asking you to open your hearts altogether for this grace of the Holy Spirit.

What do we understand with *Diocesan Mission*? It is a time of grace in which we as Christians of the island of Gozo recognize that we are “chosen”, “called” and “sent”. We recognize that we have been “chosen” as beloved children of God the Father; “called” to love like Jesus who gave himself on the cross; “sent out” so that with the power of the Holy Spirit, through our words and through our lives we share this love with everybody.

What does it consist of? The Diocesan Mission will be celebrated along this coming pastoral year; it will therefore begin in October and it will continue until the summer of next year, with the hope that it will continue to bear its fruits in the future years. It will be divided into four times: a time of hearing and formation, a time of mission and announcement, a time of conversion and celebration, and a time of thanksgiving and proposals.

The time of hearing and formation will begin in October and will continue until the first week of December. During this period, priests, religious and lay people will stop to hear the Word of God and prepare themselves to be sent out.

During Advent and Christmastime, we will live the coming of Jesus among us as a man. With the celebration of the solemnity of Epiphany, we will begin the time of mission and announcement. Jesus who came among us as a man and appeared to the nations “will appear” to our families through the visits of missionaries in all the homes of our parishes.

The third phase of the Diocesan Mission will begin on the 25<sup>th</sup> of February, with Lent. As in other years, during this time Christians, young and old, are called to hear the Word of God in the exercises, in prayer, in penance and in almsgiving. In this way the seed planted by the missionaries in the families will continue to be watered and renewed.

The Diocesan Mission will come to its climax with the celebration of the glorious mystery of the death and resurrection of the Lord. After opening the doors of their families to the missionaries and through the Lenten exercises, and after a time of penance and conversion, the Christians of our diocese will celebrate together with the Lord Jesus the victory over death.

Easter will introduce a time of thanksgiving and proposals. Through the blessing of the families, the parish priests of the diocese will urge all Christians to become men and women of the Word and of the Eucharist.

**“Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you across the water”**

Peter looks at Jesus and makes an act of trust in Him, and the same water which initially was a challenge becomes for him the way that leads to the experience of freedom and the greatness of God. When we look at Jesus, he gives us the power to walk in the darkness of night and on the stormy waves of life! Peter’s experience will instill courage in us; with Jesus on our side, we can continue to walk along the troubles of life without fear of drowning.

Through the experience of the Diocesan Mission, the Church in Gozo would like to take our hand in order to step out of the boat in spite of the storms we may be walking in and follow Jesus. The Church in Gozo would like to help us keep our gaze fixed on Jesus so that our trust in Him would be bigger than the fear of the waves around us. Through the Diocesan Mission, Jesus brings out his hands and lifts us up when like Peter we feel we are about to drown.

So I would like to urge all of you to accept wholeheartedly the grace of this Diocesan Mission. I encourage all priests and religious, male and female, to let God’s grace work in them and become a source of enthusiasm to all the diocese’s faithful. I invite the members of all the Catholic movements and groups to recognize that they are the chosen ones called to be sent out to announce the Good News of Jesus to the families of the diocese. I encourage also all the families of good will so that when the opportune time comes, they will open the doors of their homes, but most of all the doors of their hearts to that the Lord may enter.

I shall put this Diocesan Mission under the protection of Joseph and Mary of Nazareth. Joseph, whose parish feast we have just celebrated last Sunday, and Mary assumed into heaven, whose mystery we are about to celebrate this coming Friday, will teach and help us to accept the Lord Jesus as one of ours.

Given from the Bishop's Curia, Rabat, Gozo, today, 6<sup>th</sup> of August 2008, Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord.

Mgr. Saviour Debrincat  
Chancellor

+ Mario Grech  
Bishop of Gozo