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Address by His Grace Mgr. Paul Cremona O.P.
Archbishop of Malta
To His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI
On the Occasion of His
Pastoral Visit
ST. PAUL'S GROTTTO, RABAT – MALTA
17th April 2010.

Your Holiness,

After having been received officially by His Excellency the President of the Republic of Malta, on behalf of the Maltese people, I welcome you officially on behalf of the diocese of Malta and the diocese of Gozo. Your Holiness, it is a great honour and a unique spiritual experience to have you among us, the faithful of these two islands. On a personal note, may I wish you, along with the children who sang for you in front of the Presidential Palace, a Happy Birthday.

Holy Father, now you are in the midst of your flock and this flock welcomes you as its Shepherd in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Grotto of Saint Paul reminds us of the stay of the Apostle Paul on our island and also, according to tradition, of the place where he was imprisoned. Our faith came not only from a shipwrecked Paul but also from an imprisoned Paul. The preaching of the Word came to us through Saint Paul, clothed in poverty, but reflected in the inner spiritual strength of him who preached it. This is also part of the inheritance of our Faith.

The fact that Divine Providence led Paul to come to our islands remains a source of wonder to us. Today we give thanks to Divine Providence and to Your Holiness for having chosen to visit us.

We still wonder why the miracle of the viper happened in the first stage of Paul's stay on the island, as a sign that he had to accompany this miracle with his preaching. Likewise, Your Holiness comes to us with a similar specific mission. We are about to listen to your first message just a few hours after landing on our Island. Holy Father, we are awaiting for your word to confirm us in our faith.

One thousand nine hundred and fifty years ago, the Maltese had to gradually discover who Saint Paul was. After the miracle, "they changed their way of thinking, and began saying that he was some god" (Acts 28,6). Holy Father, in our hearts we already know who you are. You are our Supreme Shepherd representing the Lord Jesus Christ in our midst.

At that time, the Maltese had to discover gradually the exact nature of the faith that Paul was preaching. They learnt about Our Lord Jesus Christ and his Gospel. Holy Father, today we are ready to receive the Word from you who has already enriched the Church with your theological reflections and now, as Supreme Pontiff, with your Magisterium.

As written in the Acts of the Apostles, when the Maltese received the Word from Paul, the initial pagan community became a Christian Community with a mission; a missionary community imbued with the power of Pentecost. Paul left it in their hands to nurture the Word so that the seed of this Word which he sowed in these islands, would grow and bear fruit. Listening to the Word, each of the islanders who accepted the Word, became himself or herself, the seed, which in turn had to be planted and grow. When Saint Paul left the Island, he entrusted the Maltese Community with the growth of the seed which he had sowed. That is what they faithfully did. Their faithfulness, and that of other generations of Maltese that followed, permitted it to be transmitted down to us uninterruptedly.

Through the ages, many Maltese felt the call to imitate Saint Paul even in his Missionary vocation. Today on this very particular event, our special invitation was for our brothers and sisters who left our islands to spread the Good News throughout the five continents. Today, many hundreds of Bishops, priests, members of Institutes of Consecrated Life and lay persons, married and single, from these islands are a living presence of the Universality of the Church in these countries.

Holy Father, we are waiting with great anticipation for your message, to confirm us in our faith and also to guide us in this new mission of sharing our faith with others who have drifted away from the Church even on these Islands.

✠ Paul Cremona O.P.
Archbishop of Malta