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**EMBARGO**

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**WELCOME ADDRESS BY HIS LORDSHIP MARIO GRECH**

**BISHOP OF GOZO**

**VALLETTA WATERFRONT**

**SUNDAY 18<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2010**

Your Holiness,

I greet you in the name of our Country's and our Church's cherished treasure, the young people of Malta and Gozo. Being our present and future, they are our most priceless resource. Their numerous presence here this evening uplifts us, but at the same time reminds us of our grave responsibility in their regard. It would indeed be a pity if the questions which percolate in their hearts were not properly addressed.

Their impressive turn out for this special encounter with you as the Vicar of Christ on Earth confirms their search for an answer to a deeply-rooted religious question: *Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?* (Mk.10, 17)

Although in our country inheritance is a matter of high priority and causes undue tension within families, nowadays the Christian faith is no longer automatically passed on from one generation to the other. Even though the transmission of faith from parents to offsprings or from one religious community to another is still of vital importance, it has become positively more common that the choice to let God in one's life is increasingly achieved as a result of a personal search and choice.

In the process of this religious search, many of our young people have found themselves in a process of continuous *spiritual migration*. The craving for God leads them from one spiritual experience to another which although exciting does not quench this thirst. Additionally this

search by young people is characterised by a separation of the ethical from the religious aspects – perhaps there is a growing tendency to consider religion as a feel-good sentiment which does not involve an interior spiritual and ethical journey which leads man to better himself in his relationship with God and with his brethren.

So today, more than ever before, the question of the rich young man of the Gospel becomes even more pertinent: *Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?*.

Your Holiness, while I assure you that this young generation has a healthy attitude to life like that expressed by the rich young man who approached Jesus, and that their questions are authentic; it may be that some of these young people need support and encouragement more than others because:

- like the rich young man of the Gospel, some may have built a false sense of security in their rigid observance of the law and ritual norms and refuse a loving commitment to God and neighbour, even at a high personal cost. In such cases there is the hazard that belief turns into an empty religiosity, a matter of culture and tradition rather than a choice of life;
- like the rich young man of the Gospel, compelled by the materialistic culture and the pressures of our modern economic system, some are finding it taxing to make choices which would guarantee them a *treasure in Heaven*;
- like the rich young man, since human nature is proud and nourishes illusions of self-sufficiency and autonomy, some do not easily understand that they should allow God to infuse their life with His love by surrendering themselves to Him in complete trust and like St. Paul declare that *the love of God compels them on*.

Good Teacher, Your Holiness, notwithstanding all this, our young people are full of life and are keen to hear from you a word of encouragement to help them live with dignity. Unfortunately, sometimes they place their confidence in other teachers because they think that these can offer them a better way of life, but they are invariably betrayed.

In spite of those who militate to eradicate our trust in you, we are convinced that Your Holiness has the words of eternal life because you bring us face to face with the incarnated Word; with Jesus Christ who is eager to cast his loving gaze on us all. As you yourself rightly state in your first encyclical, *being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty ideal, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction. (Deus caritas est, n.1)*.

*Mgħallem tajjeb, x'għandna nagħmlu biex nirtu l-ħajja ta' dejjem?*

Good Teacher what must we do to inherit eternal life?