

PASTORAL LETTER

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CHERISHING WHAT IS BEAUTIFUL AND GOOD

Every year, on the Second Sunday of Lent, the Church proclaims the Gospel narrative of Christ and his three chosen disciples, that took place on a high mountain. We call this event the experience of the Transfiguration.

The Gospel according to Saint Mark narrates that “Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart by themselves; and he was transfigured before them, and his garments became glistening, intensely white”. Saint Mark makes the interesting observation that they were white “as no fuller on earth could bleach them” (Mk 9, 2-3).

In the prayer of the Church, the experience of the Transfiguration overcomes the fear and the scandal of the cross in the hearts of the disciples. As he prays on the mountain, Jesus appears in all his splendour, in his glory as the Son of God made man. On Mount Tabor, Jesus appears as the Good Shepherd that draws people to him because of his intimate beauty. The Good News that we have welcomed are glad tidings. Following them we place the Lord of life at the centre of our hearts. He desires what is best for us.

This year, we, your Bishops, are inviting you, beloved members of the people of God on these islands, to discern in the light of the Transfiguration, the call we have received to cherish beauty and goodness in our lives. It is from this perspective that we also see this year in which our capital city, Valletta, is a European Capital of Culture.

The extraordinary beauty of Jesus

When faced with the extraordinary splendour of Jesus, the disciples felt a strong sense of nostalgia for all that is good and beautiful, to the extent that Peter exclaimed to Jesus, “Master, it is well that we are here; let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah” (Mk 9, 5). Peter wanted to set up these dwellings for Jesus and for the prophets Moses and Elijah, in order to be able to enjoy this beautiful experience permanently.

Saint Mark the Evangelist writes, “He did not know what to say, for they were exceedingly afraid” (Mk 9, 6). The fear of these disciples, Peter, James, and John, is the fear of those who realise that they are in the presence of the Lord. However, the word of Jesus fills them with courage; he tells them not to be afraid, but rather to move closer to him and deepen their conviction and determination to be his disciples.

The call to be children of light

In the Transfiguration, Jesus reveals himself as the “Light from Light”. Saint Paul the Apostle invites us to be children of light. If Jesus the Son is the light, then it follows that we must also be children of the light. “Let no one deceive you with empty words” admonished Paul in his Letter to the Ephesians (Eph 5, 6). And he continues, “For once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light – for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true, and try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them” (Eph 5, 8-11).

As we reflect on these words by Paul, it is easy to understand that the call to live these glad tidings as children of the light, means that we make sure that our culture is founded on the right choices worthy of the adoptive children of God. “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you...Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us” (Eph 4, 30-32; 5,1-2). With these words in his Letter to the Ephesians, Saint Paul wants to encourage us. As we seek and yearn for all that is beautiful, good, and true in our lives, we are also striving to be children of light.

This Easter, especially during the beautiful liturgy of the Holy Vigil, the light of Christ that will originate from the Paschal candle, will be passed on from one candle to the next. This little candle will remind us of this call to be children of light. Our flame might be small, but it can give solace and respite in every environment where darkness reigns, where there is despair, where there is sadness. As we meditate on the beauty of Jesus on Mount Tabor, our message must fill each and everyone one of us with great courage, with renewed hope. This is what makes us disciples of the Lord. Indeed, Pope Francis writes in *The Joy of the Gospel*, “Being a disciple means being constantly ready to bring the love of Jesus to others, and this can happen unexpectedly and in any place: on the street, in a city square, during work, on a journey” (127).

As we celebrate our Mediterranean culture within the framework of European culture, we also rejoice in the call we received at the very beginning of the proclamation of the Gospel to all nations to be children of light, to be attracted by the beauty of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who on Good Friday lays down his life for us and on Easter rises again for us.

The invitation to listen to the Word of God and fulfill it

“And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, ‘This is my beloved Son, listen to him!’ And suddenly looking around they no longer saw any one, but Jesus only” (Mk 9, 7-8). The heartfelt words of the Father are an invitation to recognise in Jesus the only begotten and beloved Son of God. But it is also an invitation to hear the word of Jesus and try to apply it in our lives. The Lenten Talks organised in our parishes are another opportunity to listen to the Word of God and understand its meaning for us today. We encourage you to take part in this experience of the Word in our churches.

At times we fail to take the word of Jesus to heart and become lukewarm in our faith. As we listen to the words of Saint Paul, our father in faith, encouraging us to forgive each other and be merciful towards one another, in order to be the beloved children who walk in love, we also recall that we are called to be holy and blameless before the Lord (see Eph 1, 4).

At the Transfiguration, the disciples look up and see no one else except Jesus. As we seek beauty around us and in each other, our gaze will fall on Jesus as we recognise him in our neighbour, if we make his presence felt among us, because he himself said, “For where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them” (Mt 18, 20).

Let us pray so that the grace granted to us in prayer and in the meditation of the beauty of Jesus, enlighten our soul and fill us not only with love of neighbour but also with hope in the future. May the thirst that each one of us has for the beauty that never ends, help us in our Lenten journey towards Jesus, especially in the Sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist.

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI writes that “Jesus’ garment of white light at the Transfiguration speaks of our future as well” (*Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*). By virtue of our Baptism, we have put on the garment of light with Christ and thus we too became light. As we long to celebrate the Eastertide liturgy that recalls our Baptism and our vocation to be children of light, let us pray so that we, as Christians, be the presence that heralds the good tidings of Christ to everyone.

We cordially impart our Pastoral Blessing.

Today, 10th February 2018, Solemnity of Saint Paul.

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