



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

GENERAL AUDIENCE

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[Multimedia]

Apostolic Journey to Malta

Last Saturday and Sunday I traveled to Malta: an Apostolic Journey that had been planned for quite some time. It was postponed two years ago due to Covid and its consequences. Not many people know that, despite being an island in the middle of the Mediterranean, Malta received the Gospel very early. Why? Because the Apostle Paul was shipwrecked near its coasts and was miraculously saved along with all those who were on the ship with him — more than 270 people. The book of the Acts of the Apostles recounts that the Maltese welcomed all of them, and uses the words: “with unusual kindness” (cf. 28:2). This is important, do not forget this. I chose these very words — *unusual kindness* — as the motto of my Journey because they indicate the path to follow, not only to face the phenomenon of migrants, but more generally, so that the world might become more fraternal, more liveable, and might be saved from a “shipwreck” that menaces all of us. For we are all — as we have learned — in the same boat, all of us. Viewed from that horizon, Malta is *a key place*.

Above all, it is so *geographically*, due to its position in the centre of the Sea between Europe and Africa, that also bathes Asia. Malta is a sort of “rose of winds”, where peoples and cultures meet. It is the perfect place to observe the Mediterranean area from a 360-degree perspective. Today we often hear about “geopolitics”. But unfortunately, the dominant logic is the strategies of the most

powerful countries to affirm their own interests, extending their area of economic influence, or ideological influence, and/or military influence. We are seeing this with the war. In this framework, Malta represents the rights and power of the “small” nations, small but rich in history and civilization that should lead toward another logic — that of respect and freedom — the logic of respect and also the logic of freedom, of the coexistence of differences, opposed to the colonization of the most powerful. We are seeing this now. And not only from one side: also from others... After World War II, an attempt was made to lay the foundations of a new era of peace. But, unfortunately — we never learn — the old story of competition between the greater powers continued. And, in the current war in Ukraine, we are witnessing the impotence of the United Nations Organization.

Second aspect: Malta is a key place regarding the phenomenon of *migration*. [In the John XXIII reception centre](#), I met numerous migrants who landed on the island after terrible voyages. We must never tire of listening to their testimonies because only this way can we emerge from a distorted vision that is often circulated in the mass media, and recognise the faces, the stories, the wounds, the dreams and the hopes of these migrants. Every migrant is unique. He or she is not a number but a person. Each is unique just like each one of us. Every migrant is a person with dignity, with roots, with a culture. Each of them is the bearer of a wealth infinitely greater than the problems that [welcoming them] can bring. And let us not forget that Europe was made of migrations.

Certainly, welcoming them must be organised — this is true — and supervised; and first, long before, it must be planned *together*, at an international level because the phenomenon of migration cannot be reduced to an emergency; it is a sign of our times. It should be read and interpreted as such. It can become a sign of conflict, or a sign of peace. It depends on how we take it; it depends on us. Those who gave life to the John XXIII Centre in Malta made the Christian choice. This is why it is called “Peace Lab”: a peace laboratory. But I would like to say that *Malta in its entirety is a peace laboratory!* The entire nation, through its attitudes, its own attitudes, is a peace laboratory. And it can realize this, its mission, if it draws the sap of fraternity, compassion and solidarity from its roots. The Maltese people received these values, together with the Gospel. And, thanks to the Gospel, they will be able to keep them alive.

For this reason, as Bishop of Rome, I went to confirm that people in the faith and in communion. In fact — the third aspect — Malta is a key place from the perspective of *evangelization* as well. Many priests and religious, but even lay faithful, left from Malta and from Gozo, the country’s two dioceses, to bring their Christian witness all over the world. It is as if Saint Paul’s passing through there left his mission in the DNA of the Maltese! For this reason, my visit was above all an act of gratitude — gratitude to God and to his holy, faithful people in Malta and Gozo.

Nevertheless, the wind of secularism, of a globalized pseudo-culture based on consumerism, neocapitalism and relativism, blows there as well. Therefore, it is time for the new evangelization

there too. Like my predecessors, the visit that I made to the [Grotto of Saint Paul](#) was like drawing from the spring so that the Gospel might flow through Malta with the freshness of its origins and revive its great heritage of popular religiosity. This is symbolized in the National Marian Shrine of Ta' Pinu on the island of Gozo where we celebrated an intense moment of prayer. There I heard the heart of the Maltese people beat. They have an immense trust in their Holy Mother. Mary always brings us back to the essentials, to Christ crucified and risen. And this for us, to his merciful love. Mary helps us to revive the flame of faith by drawing from the Holy Spirit's flame that animates generation after generation to the joyful proclamation of the Gospel, for the joy of the Church is to evangelize! Let us not forget that expression of Saint Paul vi : the vocation of the Church is to evangelize; the joy of the Church is to evangelize. Let us not forget this because it is the most beautiful definition of the Church.

I take this opportunity to renew my gratitude to the President of the Republic of Malta, so courteous and brotherly: thanks to him and to his family; to the Prime Minister and the other Civil Authorities who welcomed me with such kindness; as well as the Bishops and all the members of the ecclesial community, to the volunteers and to all who accompanied me in prayer. I would not want to neglect to mention the John XXIII Centre for migrants: and the Franciscan Friar there, Father Dionysius Mintoff who runs the Centre. He is 91 and continues to work like this, with collaborators from the diocese. He is an example of apostolic zeal and love for migrants which is very much needed today. Through this visit, we sow, but it is the Lord who makes [things] grow. May his infinite goodness grant abundant fruits of peace and every good to the dear Maltese people! Thanks to the Maltese people for such a human, such a Christian welcome. Thank you very much.

Appeal

Recent news of the war in Ukraine, rather than bringing relief and hope, confirms new atrocities, like the massacre in Bucha: ever more horrendous cruelty even against defenceless civilians, women and children. They are victims whose innocent blood cries to Heaven and implores: put an end to this war! Silence the weapons! Stop sowing death and destruction! Let us pray together for this...

And yesterday, precisely from Bucha, they brought me this flag. This flag comes from the war, precisely from that war-torn city, Bucha. And also here, there are some Ukrainian children with us. Let us greet them and pray together with them.

These children had to escape and come to a foreign land: this is one of the fruits of war. Let us not forget them, and let us not forget the Ukrainian people. It is hard to be uprooted from your own land due to war.

Today is International Day of Sport for Development and Peace, declared by the United Nations. I turn to the men and women of sport so that through their activity, they may be active witnesses of fraternity and peace. With its values, sports can carry out an important role in the world, opening the way to harmony among peoples, as long as it never loses its capacity for gratuitousness — sports for the sake of sports — and it does not become commercialized — the amateur aspect typical of true sports.

Special Greetings:

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, especially the groups from Denmark and the United States. May our Lenten journey bring us to celebrate Easter with hearts purified and renewed by the grace of the Holy Spirit. I invoke upon each of you, and your families, joy and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Lastly, as usual, my thoughts turn to *the elderly*, to *the sick*, to *young people* and to *newlyweds*. I invite you to live the imminent arrival of Holy Week with intense participation in the Mystery of the redeeming love that will be recalled in it. May the light of the Son of God, crucified and risen, guide you to the witness of his truth, which opens the mind of young people, brightens the hearts of the sick and the elderly and supports the mutual love of spouses. I offer my blessing to you all.

Summary of the Holy Father's words:

Dear Brothers and Sisters: Following my recent [Apostolic Journey to Malta](#), I renew my thanks to the President and civil authorities, to the Bishops and faithful, and to the many volunteers for their generous welcome. In the Acts of the Apostles, we read that Paul, after his shipwreck off the island of Malta, was received there with “unusual kindness” (28:2). This spirit of welcome and charitable concern shown by the Maltese to the Apostle and his companions should inspire our own response to the complex issue of migration today, which is not simply an emergency but a sign of our times. Malta is at the forefront of these efforts, as [I saw at the “John XXIII Peace Lab” Centre](#). There we were reminded that migrants bring with them unique stories and have a wealth of gifts to offer. At the [Grotto of Saint Paul, I prayed](#) for a renewal of the missionary spirit that has always distinguished the Church in Malta. Our [prayer meeting at the National Marian Shrine of Ta' Pinu in Gozo](#) reflected the strong devotion of the Maltese people to Our Lady, who always brings us back to what is essential: to Christ crucified and risen and to the joy of the Gospel with its saving message of God's merciful love for our human family. May God bless Malta and its people

with prosperity and peace.

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