

Pastoral Message for Advent 2014

Welcoming the Light of Jesus

I greet you, people of God of the beloved Diocese of Malta, at the beginning of Advent 2014. As the Apostolic Administrator of Malta, until a new Archbishop is appointed, it is my privilege to address you at the onset of this important season which prepares us for the great feast of Christmas, the celebration of the birth of the infant Jesus. At this particular moment in time, I wish to share with you some heartfelt reflections.

First of all, once again I wish to join those thousands of people who have recently expressed their gratitude for the great gift which God bestowed upon us in the person of Archbishop Emeritus Paul Cremona O.P. On Sunday 23rd November, in the evening, at St John's Co-Cathedral, I had the opportunity to thank dear Archbishop Emeritus publicly on your behalf for his beautiful witness of evangelic joy, and of the meekness and humility that are present in the heart of God. It is our desire that the presence of Monsignor Cremona among us will continue to serve as a witness to goodness, as a light that shines in the darkness of this world.

Several people have expressed their heartache when they see signs of frailty in priests. Their heartache is also the heartache of the Church.

You are able to acknowledge that we priests are people made up of flesh and blood who, at times, falter in the course of our pilgrimage. Our sins are considered to be grave when they are to the detriment of others. Our sins cause great suffering: they are a humiliation to us all and they confound many of you. I wish to enhearten you and pass on a word of encouragement to everyone - not just to my brothers in the priesthood, but to you all, dear Christians, people of God.

We are not only committed to fighting the phenomenon of sexual abuse of the innocent, but also to prevent similar situations from occurring. For this reason, in order to enhance the initiatives of the Church in this area, we are concluding a four-year process during which we have revised the procedures regulating cases of sexual abuse. I wish to announce that we are setting up a 'Safeguarding Commission' with new members and new procedures, with emphasis on building a community and an environment where we will all do our utmost to prevent abuse;

in cases where abuses occur, they will be investigated and judged within the shortest time possible, according to our country's legislation and Church law. The new procedures consolidate the Church's commitment to offer any psychological and spiritual assistance which the victims may require. I need the cooperation of each and every one of you, in order that abuses may be reported and stopped, and in order that any dangerous situations may be detected and averted.

In all humility, I beg forgiveness for all those things which could have wounded some of our brothers and sisters, and I commit myself to do my part in order that, together with the other Bishops and Religious Superiors, we may uphold our duty to safeguard our flock to the best of our abilities, and as far as we are able to.

It is not my intention to dwell simply upon the dark moments of sadness, because, after all, during Christmas, we also share beautiful experiences. Even in the darkness of winter, when the nights are longer, we put up Christmas lights to brighten our surroundings. In much the same way, we place our faith in the child Jesus who is the light of the world, and who enters the darkness in order to be a strong ray of hope for each and every one of us, especially for those who are passing through difficult and despairing times.

As we do every year, in our streets and homes, we illuminate the Christmas tree and put lights around the figure of the infant Jesus, to recall that He is the light which overcomes all darkness. At Christmas, we draw closer to Jesus as the Light of life. Let us then during this Advent, receive him through the Sacraments, in Confession and the Eucharist, and by listening to the Word of God. In a particular way, let us see Jesus in those brethren who need our help, so that through our charity, Jesus may be a light for them as well. May I thank in advance the people of Malta for their generosity during this holy season.

It is such a lovely thing to celebrate Christmas in solidarity with others and not just on our own. The most beautiful decorations which embellish our streets and our society are the strong sense of solidarity and compassion which we offer to our fellow brothers and sisters.

As the Church in Malta awaits its new Archbishop, may I take the opportunity to ask for your prayers. In the coming months, I shall be committed towards being with you and being there for you, just as I promised two years ago when I was appointed Auxiliary Bishop of Malta. Together with you, I wish to thank God for his constant

help, for the beautiful witness of Archbishop Emeritus Cremona and together with you, I pray that we will have a shepherd in accordance to the heart of God.

During this Advent we shall celebrate the coming of our Lord as the Saviour who will free us from our sins. He is also coming as the Emmanuel, 'God-with-us', God's gift of a living presence among us. As we celebrate Christmas, let us also be a beautiful presence for one another. During this festive season, I ask you therefore not to forget the sick, the elderly, and all those who require our presence and our time as the greatest gift. I invite you to be God's presence for one another, a presence of love, of forgiveness, of mercy, compassion and solidarity.

I impart upon you my pastoral blessing.

Today, 24 November 2014, Liturgical Feast of St Andrew Dung-Lac, Priest, and his friends, the Vietnam martyrs (On the Second Anniversary of my Episcopal Ordination).

✠ **Charles Jude Scicluna**

Titular Bishop of San Leone

Apostolic Administrator of Malta