

## **Our share in building society**

Throughout our history as a people, in an attempt to build our nation and uphold our dignity, we have taken great strides and accomplished many goals. It is impossible to refrain from commemorating the important anniversaries which our nation is celebrating this year. Many contemporary Maltese and Gozitan citizens, as well as some who lived before us, have toiled so that our country may retain the dignity and the position which it deserves, equivalent to that enjoyed by other peoples. We should express sincere feelings of gratitude towards our brethren who have laboured on our behalf throughout history in order that this may come to fruition.

Besides feeling grateful for all we have received, we should also hold a great sense of responsibility and duty towards both present and future generations, so that we too may be able to pass on to our descendants our living traditions of belief, virtues and values. However we feel that a greater concerted effort is required in order that we may become more aware of the State, to engender a wider civic sense, and not to be constrained by party politics, which often does not allow us to seek and perceive the truth. In this way, we may become more capable of respecting the dignity of every person, irrespective of one's colour, faith, social affiliation, sexual orientation - from all that which makes us different.

As a society we possess many beautiful and good qualities, especially our generosity, our aid to those who are vulnerable, and the Catholic faith which we inherited from our forefathers. All these qualities need to be cherished and strengthened because they are all virtues which enrich our patrimony. Yet at the same time, if we take a look around us, in all honesty, we cannot but acknowledge that along with the virtues, there exist also the vices, which are in sharp contrast to the picture we portray of ourselves and with which we are more at ease.

Lately, there has been an alarming increase in violence, which points to the fact that in our country, a web of organized crime may be prevalent. There has also been a rise in domestic violence and brutal attacks on elderly persons, as well as other hostilities of all sorts which render family relations difficult. This is a source of concern. We have also heard about cases of corruption which are of an almost institutional nature. Without our noticing, this is eroding the moral fibre of our society and leads people to believe that there is nothing wrong with stealing, evading taxes, taking false oath in court, and so many other factors which we are reading about almost on a daily basis. This is not a beautiful picture, yet it is also a part of the real, holistic

picture of our country. We should be troubled by all this; but instead of being scandalized and passing judgment, we should combine our efforts and do whatever is necessary, because we are all responsible for one another and for our country.

Faced with this reality, the people of God, together with other members of society, hold a great responsibility. As Christians, we all need to question how our faith, which is still so prevalent in our society, is being put into action. The Church feels wounded when society is ailing. She too feels the need for healing – the kind of healing which emanates from the mercy and grace of God, our Creator and Saviour. As the people of God, from time to time, we need to ask ourselves whether the faith which we profess and preach is actually being put into force; a force which, with God's help, will enable us to overpower evil and educate towards a culture of honesty and integrity. The time of Lent which is approaching should, in the first place, be a catalyst which encourages us to take an honest look at ourselves and the realities which surround us, in the light of the truth which God reveals to us through His Word. Secondly, with God's help and with His grace, which comes from the holy sacraments, we need to find the motivation to get started and be transformed; we cannot afford to be satisfied with the way we are.

Lent is a beautiful period which is necessary for us to stop awhile from our normal routine and reflect upon the truth about ourselves. At the start of Lent, we read that the Spirit took Jesus into the desert so that as man, he would be tempted and ultimately triumph over the temptations of Evil. In much the same way as Jesus, we also need to experience the desert, where we meet God and our inner selves, where we seek the truth about ourselves, where we discern our present position, what we expect out of life, what God is asking of us, and where we are heading.

For this reason, today, we wish to focus upon the need to be authentic in all our actions. By 'authentic' we mean that which is true as opposed to that which is false. The authenticity of each and every one of us as individuals can mark the authenticity of the society we form part of and in which we live. Sunday after Sunday during the coming Lenten season, the Word of God will appeal to us to be more authentic. Authenticity is a great virtue which we require so that we do not hide behind our own mask, which does not permit us to reveal our true self. Authenticity means that we are not afraid to admit the truth about ourselves, both individually and also as a society, even if this truth is unattractive. The worst sins in life - those which are difficult to be forgiven - are those sins which we become aware of, yet do not feel guilty about. God earnestly forgives all those who seek Him humbly and contritely.

He is unable to forgive us if we close the door to our heart. He will continue to knock, but only we hold the key.

Like other things in our life, it is easy for Lent to become a matter of routine, especially when, year after year, we repeat the same practices. Routines dampen that beautiful moment of faith which such a period of time is supposed to generate in us. During Lent, many are those Maltese people who dedicate much time and energy to beautiful expressions of external religiosity. Sadly, we note that sometimes, such expressions are merely a distraction. They should not diminish the power of the Word of God, but rather they should enhance the fact that Lent is a time for us to stir our stagnant waters. It is up to us to let God cleanse us from all external forces which distract us from that which is essential.

In the Church, at present, Pope Francis is provoking us to become a more authentic Church. He is repeatedly insisting upon the fact that we need to renew our personal encounter with Jesus Christ. He is continually inviting us to become more simple, to be a poorer Church, one which is close to the poor; in such a way we become genuine Christian communities with our doors always open and where nobody is excluded. This is a moment of grace in our history. In the face of such grace, we cannot afford to close our eyes and ears. As a Church – in our projects, in our judgments on the realities of life - it is necessary for us to become more and more a Church which is capable of serving the people, accompanying and guiding them gently, no matter who they are and from where they hail. In order to be authentic, our faith must be translated into practical choices which we make on a day to day basis: in the parishes, in families, at the workplace, in our institutions and in our interpersonal relations. This is the only way in which we can announce the Gospel with joy, the only way in which we can inspire hope in the hearts of more people and in the core of our present day history.

While expressing our appreciation to our fellow Christians and men of good will who are committed both in their private and public lives to enhancing a life of values and virtues, we wish to encourage everybody to contribute, with God's help, towards building an authentic society.

We impart upon you our Pastoral Blessing as a pledge of every heavenly good.

✠ **PAUL CREMONA O.P.**  
Archbishop of Malta

✠ **MARIO GRECH**  
Bishop of Gozo

✠ **CHARLES J. SCICLUNA**  
Auxiliary Bishop and Vicar General of Malta