

## OPINION

# One hundred days later

Fr Hector Scerri

The routine of our usually uneventful lives is at times marked with significant experiences... With or without a camera, such happenings remain etched within our memory. Then, within this category of special events, there are some which form part of the collective memory of a large group, indeed, at times, of a whole people. The recent visit of the Holy Father to our country, one hundred days ago today, fits this description very well.

A deep and tangible joy filled the hearts of many. A letter published locally on May 27 expressed this in crystal clear terms: 'The faces of all the Maltese, high and low, young and old, radiated pure joy. This was joy of a different sort from that seen on faces after election victories or achievements in sports, or fiestas. For one thing, it cut right across the nation and united the nation.'

It is hoped that the imprint those twenty-nine hours the Vicar of Christ spent upon our soil will have a long-lasting effect.

The bishops have again reminded us about this last Sunday. Events come and go. Papal pilgrimages are no exception. I sincerely hope that the enthusiasm and jubilation experienced last May will be outlived by something more profound, something that will go to the very marrow of Maltese society. Otherwise those events would be an experience lost. An experience not reflected upon is a wasted one.

It would indeed be useful for Maltese Catholics to re-read the four speeches delivered by the Holy Father, and in their light and with a spirit of discernment read the signs of the times which characterise our society in 2001.

Trying to do something practical in one's personal life, in the Church and, in the long run, doing something positively worthwhile as a society would be the precious legacy of those unforgettable moments of May 8-9.

Even more so, this year such a useful exercise takes place as the local Diocesan Pastoral Synod has moved to a new and important phase last June. It is certainly not the case of chasing after rainbows.

This is a special moment of grace in the life of the local Church. In his speech on the Granaries, the Holy Father referred to the diocesan synod which was inaugurated in September 1999.

He described it as an initiative that 'will help to foster the Second Vatican Council's vision of the Church as a communion of the whole People of God, a vision which the new evangelisation demands of Maltese Catholics'. Thought-provoking words indeed!

The baptised faithful, members of the Church that is in Malta, are being called once again to reflect on their vocation as



living stones, knit together with bonds of communion and love.

The themes for discussion in the Synod assembly represent a wide spectrum of concerns and are the fruit of the wide consultation during the synod's preparatory phase.

It would certainly not be inappropriate to look back at the recent and the not-so-recent past with gratitude for the many graces received both by the local Church as a community as well as by its members in their personal lives.

Like the mighty events taking place in the Upper Room at the first Pentecost in Jerusalem, now is the moment not only to cherish again past memories and evaluate them, but also to build upon the foundations once laid. It is the time to burst out of the Upper Room and proclaim the eternal freshness of Christ's message.

It is time to renew our commitment to take heed of the Lord's command and sail into deeper waters and, there, cast our nets. This asks for a vibrant courage and a whole-hearted confidence in the Lord.

Pope John Paul's conclusion to his homily at Floriana offers some thought-provoking invitations... Words which echo in the hearts of many and which constitute a summons to do something very concrete: Malta,

Malta! You have received so much... As you move into the future, be faithful...! Follow Christ with undivided heart, and never be afraid to speak up for the truth that saves and the values that lead to life!

This becomes a reality insofar as the members of the Church open their hearts and minds to the action of the Holy Spirit. The chief protagonist of the Synod is always the Holy Spirit.

A real and efficacious discernment of the signs of the times can only take place under his guiding light. Whatever the magnitude and the effects of the experiences we undergo, and whether we are in the doldrums or in the furious forties, it is encouraging to recall these words by the Apostle of the Gentiles: 'Let us exult, too, in our hardships, understanding that hardship develops perseverance, and perseverance develops a tested character, something that gives us hope, and a hope which will not let us down, because the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us' (Rom 5,3-5).

An inspiring modern-day parallel to Paul's words is found in the inspiring thoughts written by Cardinal John Henry Newman (1801-1890): 'Therefore, I will trust Him... If I am in sickness, my

sickness may serve Him; in perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him... He does nothing in vain... He may take away my friends. He may throw me among strangers. He may make me feel desolate, make my spirits sink, hide the future from me. Still, He knows what He is about' (Meditations and Devotions). Encouraging words, especially when experiencing the storms of life!

Fellow Christians in Malta, this is the time to stand up and be counted! Let us put aside any dregs of stifling pessimism which cloud our vision! Yes, far from falling prey to a false complacency or a shallow ingenuousness, we are to be realistic and true to our vocation. Yes, we are all being called to live our prophetic vocation, today, in these circumstances.

That is why we are to wide open our hearts and minds to the Spirit who enlightens us as we seek to read the signs of the times. Finger on the pulse... an eye for detail... an ear ready to listen to welcome and unwelcome messages... but always ready, indeed courageously facing all odds, disproving the prophets of doom, and always ready to give an answer to people who ask us the reason for the hope that fills our hearts (see 1 Pt 3,15).

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