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PASTORAL LETTER FOR LENT 2019

DO NOT BE AFRAID TO TAKE MARY HOME

We are a nation that loves the home. Rightly so, for marvellous stories are woven within its four walls: stories of delightful families, stories of great generosity; incredible stories of parents sacrificing everything for their children, particularly when a child has special needs; stories of heroism in the face of a grave illness.

Then there are homes where stories have been written that you wish never occurred: (elderly) parents abandoned by their children; open wounds inflicted by domestic violence or abuse; or heartbreak caused by a failed marriage. There are persons who even had to move because gossiping by neighbours became unbearable. Then there are homes stricken by abject poverty. There are homes where death has trod and plucked the life that had only just started to bloom like a rose.

In such situations, we recommend Saint Peter's words to the crippled beggar at the Temple gate: "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk!" (Acts 3:6). When we invite Jesus to enter our homes, his presence works wonders. This is what transpired when Jairus called Jesus to his home because his daughter was seriously ill.

We are not surprised that there are people among us who think they are not worthy to receive Jesus in their homes. For there are many who assume that when Jesus walks in our street he passes us by! But the story of Zaccheus not only abundantly illustrates that Jesus also enters the home of the public sinner shunned by everyone, but he even invites himself in! Jesus does not enter because everything is in order, but rather order ensues once Jesus enters our dwelling! Christ died for us "while we still were sinners" (Rom 5:8). Hence Saint John writes, "we love because he first loved us" (1 Jn 4:19). Commenting on this passage, Saint Augustine says that Christ, beautiful in loveliness surpassing the sons of men, loved us when we were foul and unlovely.

The spouses of Cana

To those who struggle to welcome Jesus in their home, we offer them this advice with love and humility: emulate the bride and bridegroom at Cana and do not be frightened to take Mary home. For wherever Mary goes, she takes Jesus with her. She helps us taste the goodness of the love that Christ has for everyone, but most especially for persons who are stunned to see their house “collapse” all around them.

The calamity that had nearly befallen the wedding party at Cana when the wine was running out, can also beset our homes when a serious crisis strikes: for example, when there is discord among siblings, when a parent loses employment, when a member of the family is stricken with drug addiction, when fidelity in marriage is dented, when the future of the family is on shaky ground, when religious practice dwindles down and thus it contributes to the collapse of the foundations of faith, and other challenges.

The serenity in our homes is put at risk when worrisome situations in the society we inhabit take hold and flourish, such as the erosion of trust in institutions, the lack of respect for human life from conception, poverty, destruction of the environment, corruption, and other issues.

It goes without saying that for us believers, the adverse issues afflicting our Church today, the siege mentality, the resistance to change as indicated by Pope Francis and scandalous examples, also find an echo in our homes.

Moments of trial

In such disquieting situations, we need to listen to the crucified Jesus repeating the invitation he made to John while indicating him to Mary: “Here is your mother”, and like John we take Mary home. Mary, then, points to Jesus and tells us: “Do whatever he tells you” (Jn 2:5). Pope Francis says that Mary in our homes “is not an optional accessory”, but willed by Jesus himself.

In the home of Nazareth, there might have been instances where Mary and Joseph did not immediately understand each other. We can also imagine that there might have also been disagreements between the parents and their son as when he was lost in Jerusalem. For such reasons, Mary understands families going through moments of tension owing to discord between couples or between parents and their children.

The home of Nazareth is also familiar with crises of faith, because we were told that Mary, as well as Joseph, were at first confused by God’s demands of them. Hence,

Mary's place is also in homes where the occupants are going through the dark night of faith and thus are struggling with God.

When Mary spent three months living in Elizabeth's house, who knows the many tales she heard from the elderly couple who spent their lives berated by people's gossip because they could not have children. Mary understands couples who are facing difficulties to start a family.

In the stillness of her home, Mary learnt the high price of her maternity when she was told many times that her son Jesus is "a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (Mt 11:19), or when she overheard her neighbours declare that Jesus "has gone out of his mind" (Mk 3:21). In the light of these experiences, Mary understands parents whose children are slandered and insulted, and stands shoulder to shoulder with families tormented by illness and mental fatigue.

Mary, who accompanied her Son on the road to Calvary, knew full well of the betrayal of Judas, the denial of Peter, and the desertion of Jesus by his close friends and disciples. Thus she understands couples broken by betrayal and treachery.

Mary, who stood by the Cross, is close to families crucified by suffering.

Mary, who after the death of Jesus was behind closed doors with the Apostles in the Upper Room, comes to the aid of those who are, for one reason or another, housebound and cannot find the courage and hope in themselves to go forward.

The Blessed Virgin of Ta' Pinu

Last Wednesday we celebrated the beginning of Lent. Throughout this season, with the help of the Word of God, prayer, penance and acts of mercy, we prepare ourselves for the great feast of Easter. Just like Jesus rose from the dead on that day and went to meet his disciples who were gathered together behind closed doors because they were afraid of the Jews, it is the greatest desire of our heart that this Easter Jesus enter and dwell in our homes. Just as Mary was present in the disciples' home, let us not be fearful to take her with us, in our own homes, so that she will help us prepare for the visit of the Resurrected Christ.

We felt moved to put Mary front and centre before you today because this year we are commemorating the 400th anniversary of the painting of Our Lady of Ta' Pinu. In 1883 Karmni Grima and Franġisk Portelli heard a voice coming from this very painting. On that day, Our Lady instructed Karmni to pray three Hail Marys in honour of the three

days her body reposed in the tomb before she was assumed into Heaven body and soul. In other words, woven in the story of the National Sanctuary of Ta' Pinu we find the events of the Easter of Christ and the Assumption of Mary. If this painting could speak, how many tales would it recount of the wonderful experiences of Easter that took place within the walls of so many of our homes! We are glad that the image of Our Lady of Ta' Pinu is found in so many homes, for where there is Mary, there is Jesus. And where there is Jesus there is life that overcomes death, the grace that frees from sin, the hope that lifts sadness, forgiveness that binds the wounds of the brokenhearted, the joy that banishes sorrow, the peace that ends all hostilities. When we remember that the Rosary is the prayer most precious to Mary, a prayer that leads us to meditate on Jesus, we invite all our families to pray this beautiful prayer often.

We cordially impart our pastoral blessing.

✠ **Charles J. Scicluna**
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✠ **Mario Grech**
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