



THE CHURCH IN MALTA

COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE
Archdiocese of Malta

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**HOMILY BY H.E. CARDINAL VINCENT NICHOLS, ARCHBISHOP OF WESTMINSTER,
FOR THE EPISCOPAL ORDINATION OF MGR CARMELO ZAMMIT**

Archbishop Charles, thank you for your invitation to celebrate this episcopal ordination. It is a privilege for me to be here and to learn about the riches of these Islands, and to have the opportunity to greet the people of Malta and of Gibraltar, who are watching this ceremony on television.

At the heart of our ceremony of ordination of Mgr Carmelo Zammit to the Order of Bishops stands a very powerful prayer. We pray to God as 'Father of mercies and God of all consolations' to 'pour out upon this chosen one that power which is from You, the governing Spirit whom you gave to your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, the Spirit given by Him to the holy apostles who founded your Church in every place to be your temple for the unceasing glory and praise of your name'.

It is a prayer which expresses our faith, not only in our loving Heavenly Father and in the power of His Spirit, but also in His Church, the Catholic Church, which stands in the line of apostles from its beginning to this day. This prayer reaffirms our sense of purpose in the Church in every place: that of giving glory and praise to God.

Today we make this prayer, gathered from this community of Malta, from Gibraltar, from Great Britain, from different Churches, different faiths. We make this prayer in the company of Our Blessed Lady, Mother of the Church, whose birthday we celebrate today.

In making this prayer we ask of God a great and wonderful gift: that Mgr Carmelo leave this Cathedral a changed man, a man on whom has been bestowed the astonishing gift of becoming a bishop, a successor of the apostles, a man endowed with new power and authority, a man now bound to Christ more deeply than ever before. In my humble experience, ordination as a bishop brings with it a more radical change in life than even the change brought by ordination as a priest.

And so, Mgr Zammit, our prayers are both for you and with you, today and always.

We have just heard words written by St Paul to his beloved companion, Timothy. To me it is astonishing to think that the feet of this great apostle graced this island, maybe coming as close as a cave in nearby Rabat. I am sure he looks on this moment with his powerful gaze and his prayer.

He speaks to us unambiguously. He speaks of this gift of God, given through the laying on of hands, as a summons to witness to Christ and to bear hardship willingly. In this we are to rely solely on the power of God, knowing that his grace comes to us freely, never because of anything we have done. So let's be clear: being a bishop is not a promotion, it is not a consequence of success, but a gift, a calling, a new step on the pathway of holiness, given for God's own purpose and in His own grace. Being a bishop is not a new opportunity to put one's own plans into action. It is a call to serve.

Yes, this grace for which we pray is the gift of a 'governing Spirit'. But it is the Spirit of Jesus and therefore the governance to which it gives rise must be that of Jesus. And in the Gospel today, Matthew tells us what that means. Governance in the name of Jesus has no trace of the patterns of this world's ways - 'lording it over them', 'making their authority felt'. Rather this governance is a primacy of service. Jesus said, 'anyone who wants to be first among you must be your slave'. This is the governing Spirit of episcopal office for which we pray today.

Shortly, Mgr Carmelo, you will make the promises of a bishop. They start with promises that you accept all the duties concerning faithful teaching and unity with our Holy Father Pope Francis. They are also equally emphatic in duties towards the poor and to strangers and to all who are in need. With these promises you undertake to 'seek out the sheep who stray and to gather them into the fold of the Lord'. And these promises make clear that you will only be able to fulfil them 'in cooperation with the priests and deacons who share your ministry'.

So at this point, I would like to offer a particular greeting to those priests, deacons and lay people who have made the journey from Gibraltar to be with you as their new bishop. These are the ones whom you promise so solemnly to work with in close cooperation. Indeed, a favourite theme of Pope Francis is that of the 'closeness' which must exist between a bishop and his priests. In a bishop, he says, 'the priest must feel he has a father'. He continues: 'If we take this paternity away from priests, we cannot ask them to be fathers. And thus the sense of God's paternity is removed. The Son's work is to touch human miseries: spiritual and corporal. Closeness. The Father's work: to be father, a Bishop-father'. In these words of Pope Francis is your calling.

The Diocese of Gibraltar, to which you are now being called, is a remarkable place, as you know so well. In its history, tradition and location it is, in many ways, a microcosm of Europe with all the dramas, dangers and opportunities. The most ancient name of Gibraltar is 'Calpe', found now only in its Latin motto yet, I understand, is coming from the Phoenicians, its first

inhabitants. The name Gibraltar comes from Islamic sources: 'Gibel Tarik' and its history bears all the marks of long conflicts and changes of rulers.

My own visit to Gibraltar left powerful impressions on me: impressions of being at the gateway of Europe, of being in a place where people of different histories have found ways of living together, perhaps most powerfully demonstrated in the hidden Jewish cemetery which is on the south side of the Rock, looking away from the hostility to which those people were subjected.

To be bishop of such a place is, I believe, a privilege and a challenge. It is to be responsible for an outpost of Europe, a place where all that Europe strives to stand for is first to be met. The great Spanish writer, Ortega y Gasset, wrote that civilisation consists above all in the will to live together. That is what I found in Gibraltar.

It is more important than ever for the Church in Europe, and therefore in Gibraltar, to proclaim and practice those values and qualities that lie at the heart of European civilisation. These are truly fundamental values, that underpin derived values such as democracy and individual freedom, the rule of law and tolerance, important as they are. We must live and proclaim deeper values: the inalienable dignity of the person, from conception to natural death; the equality in dignity of every person; the freedom to live and seek truth and love. Flowing from these values come the duties of accountability, the importance of deferring pleasure, the readiness to serve and the sense of vocation in life, beyond profit and earthly inheritance. These values are not freestanding. They are not self-evident or self-justifying. Among us in Europe, they derive from their Judeo-Christian roots and they will be sustained only within the context of our beliefs about human nature, the purpose of life and society. It is our task to proclaim them and to remember other words of Ortega y Gasset that hatred is the one feeling which leads to the extinction these values.

A highlight of my brief visit to Gibraltar was to go to the shrine of Our Lady of Europe, standing literally on the edge of the continent, and recently having celebrated its 700th anniversary. Today we pray for her maternal intercession, that this precious continent of Europe and its heritage, to which we are all committed, may not lose its way or cease to live by its finest values. We pray that our witness, and the witness of this new bishop, will draw many to Christ in Whom is the fullness of our humanity and Who alone can save us from our fears and from the contradictions within us.

May Our Lady of Europe bless this son of Malta as he makes his journey to his new home. He has been called to the mouth of this Mediterranean Sea, whose waters carry day by day both such tragic loss of life and heroic generosity of service. May Our Blessed Lady bless your episcopal ministry and strengthen us all to fashion anew our witness to the Gospel and to the peace which is its gift, in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.