BACKGROUND OF PAPAL VISITS IN MALTA

The possible visit of Pope Benedict XVI in Malta will be the third visit of a Pontiff in our country. During the four years of his Pontificate, Pope Benedict XVI made twelve Apostolic Visits outside Italy. In September this year, His Holiness will also visit the Czech Republic.

The first Pope to visit Malta was John Paul II in May 1990. Held between the 25th and 27th May, this visit was the Pope's 48th Apostolic Trip outside Italy in the first 12 years of his Pontificate. John Paul II was elected Pope on the 16th October 1978.

On the 8th May 2001, His Holiness visited Malta once again as part of his Pauline pilgrimage during which he also visited Greece and Syria. On the second and last day of his visit, His Holiness beatified Dun Ġorġ Preca, Nazju Falzon and Adeodata Pisani.

Pope Benedict XVI has been invited by the Bishops of Malta and the President of the Republic to visit Malta on the occasion of the 1950th anniversary of St. Paul's shipwreck, which according to tradition occurred in 60 A.D. Large celebrations were held in Malta in 1960 to commemorate this centenary.

Last year, Pope Benedict XVI declared a year dedicated to Saint Paul, known as the Pauline Year. In Malta, the diocese of both Malta and Gozo organised various initiatives during which the faithful were encouraged to reflect on Saint Paul. To end the Pauline Year, Pope Benedict XVI sent his delegate to Malta, Cardinal Ennio Antonelli, to preside over the Eucharistic celebration held outside St. John's Co-Cathedral.

St. Paul's shipwreck in Malta is of utmost importance to all Christians, particularly to the Maltese since it is mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 28, 1-2: "Once we had come safely through, we discovered that the island was called Malta. The inhabitants treated us with unusual kindness."