



**“SO HE WENT IN TO STAY
WITH THEM”
(LK 24:29)**

**LETTER TO ANNOUNCE
THE PASTORAL VISIT IN
THE DIOCESE OF GOZO**

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It is not always easy for us to acknowledge Jesus' presence. This is particularly so during difficult and stressful times.

God is interested in our problems

Today's Gospel narrative could very well be our family's. The disciples were arguing among themselves as to who was the most important. Jesus is interested in what is going on between them and asks them: "What were you arguing about on the way?" (Mk 9:33). It is the same question Jesus poses later on to the two disciples of Emmaus on their way home embroiled in their predicament: "*Jesus himself came near and went with them*" (Lk 24:15).

After listening to what they had to say, he proffered his own elucidating their worries in the light of the Word of God. What he said made so much sense that as they approached their destination, they entreated him to linger on with them: "*So he went in to stay with them*" (Lk 24:29). And they recognised him as he broke the bread. In today's Gospel, Jesus converses with his disciples in the intimacy of their dwelling. We can recognise his presence if we invite him home and let him become one of our own.

The Bible is all about God in search of man

God is interested in us, in what we feel and in what we undergo. The Bible is all about God's wish to accompany us. From the outset God used to walk alongside Adam and Eve in the garden (Gen 3:8). God calls Abraham, Moses and the prophets to help the people understand and experience the Father's love for them. He is always looking out to hear any cries of anguish of our families (cfr Ezek 3:7).

Beyond all expectations, God has come amongst us personally in Jesus so that we could see him, touch him, listen to him and above all else, to experience his saving love. It is with good reason that Pope Francis wishes us to reflect upon our status as *pilgrims of hope* during the Jubilee Year. Jesus' stay among us is nothing else than the highest expression of the Father's hope in us!

The Gospel narratives teach us that Jesus enlightens our lives with his Word and his Event. He takes care of us to the extent that he gave up his life willingly to save us and gives us his body and blood to nourish us during our earthly pilgrimage. Jesus is the Emmanuel – God with us (Mt 1:23). And being raised up from the dead he remains with us forever: "*And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age*" (Mt 28:20).

The Parish is the *locus* of our encounter with Jesus

Jesus is alive among us today. This is not a joke but the truth! He is with us in the Word of the Gospel, in our reciprocal love, particularly in our service to the poor. He is with us when we celebrate our Patron Saints. Above all he is with us in the Breaking of the Bread during Holy Mass.

Although his presence is not tied up with a specific location or time, Jesus chose the Church so that through the Church he is ever-present in a complete manner. Our parishes, with all their limits, are the concrete places where Jesus' presence can be felt and intensified.

More than ever before, in our times when “we are called to journey together” (synodality), we should value each and everyone’s vocation in the parish. The Archpriest or Parish Priest together with the fellow priests, committed faithful and all who participate in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the children who attend catechism lessons, groups of adolescents, families who receive the sacraments, the elderly and sick of the locality, Catholics from other countries... all these form the Parish. All are called to help each other to experience Jesus’ presence, the High Priest who sanctifies through the Liturgy, the Prophet who proclaims the Good News, the Shepherd who tends the vulnerable and ailing.

The Bishop is called to confirm the communities of the faithful

The Archpriest or Parish Priest and the priests who serve in the Parish are called to listen, to welcome and help their brethren, members of the parish community, to intensify the experience of the presence of Jesus. This particular vocation pertains in a special manner to the Bishop with whom the parish priests and clergy are in communion in their apostolic mission.

To achieve this aim, from the early times of the Church, Bishops conducted Pastoral Visits in their respective communities in order to have time to listen to them, understand them and help them mature as disciples of the Lord. In the Acts of the Apostles we read how Peter, Paul, Barnabas and Timothy from time to time used to visit the communities (original parishes) they had founded.

Throughout the years our Bishops did their best so that from time to time they remained close to the clergy and the parish communities by means of the Pastoral Visit. For example, Cardinal Mario Grech, as Pastor of our local Church, conducted a Pastoral Visit throughout the Diocese between 2013-2015.

The blessing of another Pastoral Visit

Therefore, as from the coming October another Pastoral Visit will be held in our Diocese. Together with some priests and well-prepared lay persons, I will visit for a whole week every parish of our Diocese.

Throughout the week we wish to meet with possibly all who are part of the Parish. There will be a retreat for the the clergy and religious, meetings with children and their parents, with the adolescents, the young people, the couples who are preparing for marriage and their parents, the families, grandparents and the elderly, Catholics from other countries, and the sick. To achieve this aim, a specific programme is being prepared with each parish priest.

I heartfully entreat you to join me in prayers so that much spiritual and material good ensues from this Pastoral Visit to the benefit of our Parishes. It is my wish that each parish entrusts the Pastoral Visit under the protection of their respective Patron Saint.

I wish to invite the Archpriests and Parish Priests together with the clergy, the religious, the consecrated lay persons and all the lay movements in the parishes to be present during the Solemn Pontifical High Mass which will be celebrated at the Cathedral of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin on Sunday 29 September at 6.00pm to mark the official opening of the Diocesan Pastoral Visit 2024-2025.

I impart to you my Apostolic Blessing.

Given from the Bishop's Curia, Victoria, on the 16th of September 2024, the 160th Anniversary of the Foundation of the Diocese of Gozo.

Mgr Edward Zammit
Chancellor

✠ **Anton Teuma**
Bishop of Gozo