

PONTIFF LOOKS FORWARD TO MALTA VISIT

Invokes Prayers of St. George Preca

VATICAN CITY, APRIL 12, 2010 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Benedict XVI is looking forward to his visit the Maltese Islands this Saturday and Sunday, said the Pope's secretary of state.

Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone affirmed this in a message publicized Saturday, in which he extended the Pontiff's greetings to the people of Malta.

"In the days of preparation that remain, His Holiness asks you to pray that his visit will be a time of spiritual renewal for the whole Church in Malta and Gozo," the message stated.

It affirmed that "Malta has remained staunchly faithful to Christ over many centuries, and has done much to defend the faith, both at home and abroad."

"The Holy Father knows how much you are attached to your great heritage, and he invites you to deepen this attachment as a living reality and as a truth that is always relevant, notwithstanding the fact that, in today's society, this carries the risk of being opposed, ignored or forgotten," Cardinal Bertone affirmed.

He added, "At a time when the Maltese people celebrate with particular joy the 1950th anniversary of St. Paul's arrival on their shores, the Holy Father commends all of you to the intercession of that great apostle and missionary, who tirelessly proclaimed the good news of the crucified and risen Lord to the people of the Mediterranean."

"And in this year when the universal Church is celebrating a Year for Priests," the cardinal noted, "he urges you in particular to value the great gift of the priesthood and to support and pray for your priests, so that they may grow in gratitude to God and in fidelity and enthusiasm for the ministry."

"He commends them and he commends all of you to the intercession of an outstanding Maltese priest, St. Ġorġ [George] Preca, to whom, in a special way, he entrusts his forthcoming visit," the prelate said.

St. George (1880-1962) was a Catholic priest in Malta who founded the Society of Christian Doctrine, an organization of lay catechists.

He was proclaimed the first Catholic saint from that nation, and was canonized on June 3, 2007 by Benedict XVI.

Cardinal Bertone told the Maltese people that the Holy Father is asking "the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, venerated with particular devotion at your National Shrine of Ta' Pinu, to look down in love upon all the people of Malta and Gozo and to intercede for them with the One she was privileged to bear in her womb, the Savior of the World."

"With these sentiments," the message ended, "His Holiness cordially imparts his Apostolic Blessing to all the people of Malta and Gozo, as a pledge of joy and peace in the Risen Lord."

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