

## Pope in Malta: Church 'wounded by our sins'

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By JOHN L. ALLEN JR.

*Luqa, Malta*

Pope Benedict XVI alluded to the sexual abuse crisis only briefly and indirectly during his short flight from Rome to Malta this afternoon, with a reference to how the church is "wounded by our sins," but its gospel remains "the true force that purifies and heals."

Benedict XVI is visiting Malta April 17-18, marking the 1,950th anniversary of St. Paul's famous shipwreck on the small Mediterranean island described in the Acts of the Apostles. Like many parts of the Catholic world, Malta has recently been rocked by a local sex abuse scandal, and Benedict arrives facing questions about his own handling of sex abuse cases both in Germany and in the Vatican.

In another apparent reference to the crisis, the pope also picked up on the shipwreck theme, saying that Paul's experience is a reminder that shipwrecks can be part of "God's project" and lead to "a new beginning in our life."



Benedict also raised the issue of immigration, which is a core social

concern in Malta, which shoulders a major share of the European burden for welcoming African immigrants.

Vatican spokesperson Fr. Federico Lombardi had asked journalists to submit questions in advance of the trip for Benedict XVI, and said that the pope's brief remarks this afternoon represented his "synthetic" response. Benedict spoke for roughly four minutes.

The following is a rush transcript of Pope Benedict's remarks on the plane to Malta, which were delivered in Italian.

### **Lombardi:**

Thank you Holy Father. We are very grateful to have you with us at the beginning of this trip. This way we can offer you good wishes for the two anniversaries in these days, that of yesterday, your birthday, and that of next Monday. The Holy Father received the questions that some of you presented and which express the expectations that many have at the beginning of the trip. He has prepared a brief reflection on the basis of your expectations. We will not follow the process of other trips, with questions and answers and questions and answers. The Holy

Father will give us his synthetic remarks. Thank you, Holy Father, and have a good trip

**Pope Benedict XVI:**

Dear friends, good evening. Best wishes for a good trip, without this dark cloud that's hanging over parts of Europe. [Note: A reference to the clouds of volcanic ash that delayed or cancelled scores of flights in Europe today.] So, why this trip to Malta? There are many reasons. First, St. Paul. The Pauline Year for the universal church has ended, but Malta is celebrating 1,950 years since the shipwreck, and this occasion once presents us with the figure of the Apostle to the Gentiles and his message which is still authentic and important for today. I think one can synthesize the essential point in words he himself used at the end of the letter to the Galatians: "Faith expressed in charity." This is something important also today, that faith, a relationship with God, transforms itself into charity.

I also think the memory of the shipwreck says something to us. For Malta, the opportunity to have the faith was born with the shipwreck. We can also think about how the shipwrecks of life can be part of God's project for us, and be useful for a new beginning in our life.

The second reason is that it makes me happy to be in the midst of a lively church like the one in Malta, with a deep sense of tradition still today, full of faith, in the middle of our world and responding to the challenges of our times. I know that Malta loves Christ, and loves his church which is his body, even if this body is wounded by our sins, it still loves this church and its gospel, which is the true force that purifies and heals.

The third point is that Malta is a place where waves of refugees arrive from Africa and knock on the doors of Europe. This is a great problem of our time, and naturally it can't be resolved just by the island of Malta. All of us have to respond to this challenge, first of all so that people can live a dignified life in their own land, and on the other hand so that these refugees can also find space for a dignified life here. It means responding to a great challenge of our time, and Malta reminds us of these problems. It also reminds us, as you know, of the force of charity, which allows us to respond well to these challenges. Thank you.

**Lombardi:**

Thank you, Holiness, and have a good trip. We'll accompany you with our work and our information.

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