

NEWSLETTER

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Qualities of a nation

The Lenten Pastoral Letter published on the 17th of February 2024 entitled *"Five blessings for our country"* is the object of this article. At a time of growing interna-

tional turmoil, we

would like to reflect on this letter, briefly revisiting those values which distinguish us as a nation.

Our bishops reflected on five qualities which the national poet Dun Karm Psaila weaved into our national anthem. As we reflect on these five qualities one observes that the national anthem is not as outdated as some would like us to think. Rather, it puts us to shame as we realise how as a nation, we do not live up to these qualities.

These qualities go beyond any one belief system. They are faith agnostic as they speak of "sound judgement", "mercy", "health", "unity" and "peace".

Sound Judgement

"Wisdom and acting responsibly means setting aside self-interest in our decision-making. Wise people and responsible leaders take decisions that take everyone into consideration, including those who shall follow us."

How many of our leaders really think about the legacy they will hand over to future generations? A leader failing to act to preserve our national identity, cultural heritage, and environment; and failing to sustainably support the weak and vulnerable is building on shaky ground. We have outdated laws riddled with loopholes and complex bureaucratic processes that undermine the very idea of sound judgement – which laws end up serving the privileged few at the expense of the common good.

Mercy

"Our love needs to be compassionate. This is encompassed in the word 'mercy'. Being merciful means helping another in time of need, but it also means that your heart should always beat for your neighbour's heart. Being merciful also means that—rather than judging, condemning, and destroying others on media and social media—you opt to see in every person the humanity we share that truly makes us brothers and sisters. In a world where it is extremely easy to crush and 'discard' people through our words and actions, it would be good to ask how we Christians can be witnesses to the mercy of God, which, without ignoring the truth, always seeks to raise up those who are oppressed by the hardships of life."

Are we merciful towards our neighbour when we exploit migrants that came to our shores seeking a better life? When we allow unscrupulous contractors to pick people off the road like 'prostitutes' to perform undocumented work in unsafe conditions.?

How are we merciful when workers injured on the worksite are left by the roadside, or threatened if they report injury? – and excuse this because the injured party is a migrant and of a different skin colour.

How are we merciful when honest hardworking people like Kusi Dismark are kicked out of the country after 13 years, having been given the impression that they can stay legally in Malta. Honest and hardworking people, are slapped with a populist pleasing "its' the law" argument; a law applied mercilessly with the vulnerable but not with the wealthy and influential in society who have done and still do far worse offences?

Health

"At times, we should also pause for a moment from our rushed daily routines and look around us. There may be a colleague going through a tough time; a neighbour whose health has deteriorated; and a mother or father who have lost their job. Stopping to notice, listen, speak to, and accompany someone who is suffering could be the greatest gift of charity during this period of Lent."

We need to be available to our neighbours. When was the last time you had an honest conversation with the neighbour next door? We sometimes live in a trance of denial, thinking that all is well and rosy, and fail to hear our neighbour's 'cry for help'. Life is not about the next expensive purchase, or holiday; it's about being present to those around us.

Unity

"Unity which stems from our mutual respect and commitment to work together. This means pulling at the same rope, despite not always agreeing about everything."

Are we a united country, or a country of factions where unity exists in the tribe I belong to and that's it?

"Let us also pray for unity among the people of our nation which this year celebrates 60 years of independence and 50 years as a republic. To advance as a society, we need to urgently rediscover the art of respectful dialogue. Dialogue, especially on a political level, is often considered a sign of weakness. Sometimes, we tend to prefer people who drown out the voices of others through verbal attacks, ridicule, and hurtful language. Yet the quality of political debate is invariably poorer when we engage with each other in this manner. With such negative attitudes, the common good can never be served and we will certainly never achieve unity."

Peace

"Peace does not merely emanate from our words or our lips. It must come from the heart. You cannot offer peace to another person if you do not have peace in your heart ... you can be the richest person in the world in material terms, but if you do not have peace in your heart, you are a pauper."

In recent years we have seen a senseless rush to wealth. Having the means to live a decent life is to be encouraged but a mentality of wealth for the sake of wealth must not.

A wealth for the sake of wealth mentality destroys the very fabric of our society. It promotes a fragmented society that is at war with itself. In a society where 'wealth' becomes the ultimate end, leading the nation becomes a nefarious self-serving act rather than an enlightened world view aimed at building a better and just future for all.

Be the change you want to see be that change today!



We are well into Lent with Easter Sunday round the corner at the end of the month - although judging by supermarket treats on sale one is easily led to think that Lent and Easter are one and the same.

Lent is, a time of preparation six and a half weeks before Easter which sees its beginning on Ash Wednesday, a solemn reminder of human mortality and the need for reconciliation with God.

This year Lent began on the 14th of February which interestingly coincided with Valentine's day. Lent leads us to celebrate the greatest of all gifts of love, which as St. John the evangelist writes "A woman/man can have no greater love than to lay down her/his life for her/his friends" (Jn 15:13)

Lent is a season of prayer, penance and charity. It is a period of preparation to celebrate the Lord's Resurrection at Easter. During Lent, we

- **Seek** the Lord in prayer especially by reading Sacred Scripture
- **Serve** by being charitable especially with your time
- **Do Penance** as a means to practice self-control especially towards others

Lent is a calling to a true inner conversion of heart as we seek to follow Christ more faithfully. And all we do, whether its abstaining from luxurious items or things we like, doing acts of charity, or spending more time in prayer and reflection must have this objective in mind. During Lent we recall the waters of baptism in which we were also baptized into Christ's death, in which we died to sin and evil, and began new life in Christ.

Lent is a time of hope and renewal. Let us sincerely reflect on who we are today as a person, as a people, as a nation. Let us with God's grace start a process of healing and re-discovery of that which really makes us human.



Open discussion on "The 'ejja ejja' culture" report

On the 22nd of February, along with other NGOs we met with the Justice and Peace commission to hear first hand the research outcomes and action plan of the report. During this open discussion we had the opportunity to discuss the outcomes and to listen and contribute to on how the recommendations outlined in the document can be brought to life.

ZHN Website

Our movement has an online presence at www.zhnmalta.org. Here you will find all our publications and more information about the movement.