



MARIO GRECH

BISHOP OF GOZO

Letter to Children
on the occasion of the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation
(1st September 2015)

Dear Children,

The summer holidays are almost at an end and soon you will be meeting up once more with your classmates and teachers at your schools.

Shortly ago I was visiting a family and our conversation turned on school. In this family there are two children, a boy and a girl, whom I'm going to call Matthew and Francesca so that their real identity remains secret. Matthew was telling his parents that this year he wanted a satchel that would be the best of the whole class. Immediately Francesca told her mother that she did not want a new satchel. Her mother was astonished as normally at this time of the year Francesca would want a new satchel from the collection of the most famous Disney character of the moment. But Francesca said to her mother, "This summer at our Museum class, our catechist told us that Pope Francis has just sent a letter addressed to all the people of the world where he drew their attention to the need of protecting the environment. 'According to the Pope,' the catechist said, 'the world is the home of all who live in it. It is we people who harm it most and it is necessary that we should stop doing so.' Immediately Matthew retorted, "Am I the Government that I should be responsible for the environment?" Francesca calmly replied, "Matthew if only each of us does his/her little part, the environment would be much better off! Among other things the catechist taught us that we should go on using things for as long as they are still good and that we should not throw away anything that is still usable." Francesca went on to say how she had already singled out a new school satchel, But when in the evening after her Museum class, she was saying her prayers, she felt Jesus telling her in her heart that the satchel she had was still good and there was no need for her to buy a new one.

Well children, what do you think? I was truly astonished at Francesca. It is not by coincidence that she is called after the saint who so loved the environment! In fact the Pope's letter to which Francesca referred is called '*Laudate Si*' because it begins with the two words 'Praised Be' from a song which this saint had written to praise God for the creation.

I am sure that most of you think like Francesca. Still I felt that I should send you this message to draw your attention to the small things that you can all do to protect the environment. I am sending it now because on the 1st September the Pope wishes us to join our Christian brothers, and other people who want to join in, to pray that all peoples of the world understand better their duty towards the creation.

As you know we are lucky to live in a truly beautiful island. Therefore our first duty is towards our island, our Gozo. One of the greatest environmental problems for our island is the shortage of water. If each of you every time you brush your teeth you do not let the water flow needlessly but turn off the tap you will be helping reduce water wastage.

It is a good thing that you start now while still young to use cars less. The exhaust from cars harms the environment. It would be so wonderful if with your parents' permission you use your bicycle or the bus. And how still more wonderful would it be if instead of spending long hours in front of your computer or tablet you go out for a walk in the open countryside.

A word now about food wastage. It is truly shameful that we throw away food when we know that so many others in other parts of the world are dying of hunger. I am mostly concerned about some students who attend Secondary Schools who throw away their home prepared lunch and then buy other food from the canteen. First of all this is a great lack of respect for their parents but still worse this is theft from the mouths of those who hardly have anything to relieve their hunger.

Once I have mentioned schools I wish to congratulate you for your commitment in favour of the environment in our schools through the Eco School project. I have been informed that nearly all schools in Gozo are taking part in this project and that most of them have been awarded the green flag. You deserve to be congratulated for this as also do your teachers and the Local Councils who help you. It is important that you all go on doing your part in Eco School. As the saying goes 'Every little bit helps.' Thus if you take used batteries to school and put them in the apposite container you are helping safeguard our soil as well as the groundwater which is very precious. If under the guidance of your teachers you take care of the plants and the trees at your school you are helping create a friendly atmosphere and also add that little bit of oxygen in the air. Through a general effort our island can become ever more beautiful.

You must know that here in our island we have since some years back promoted waste separation. You children have to set an example for us grown-ups in this. It is important that any waste that can be recycled be kept separate from other waste and that we take it out for collection in the specially designed grey bags on Tuesday mornings. Then when in the near future we start organic waste separation you will be among the first to help make a success of this scheme. I feel there is no need in my telling you that when you throw waste on the ground you will be failing in respect towards yourselves and towards the community. I felt really sad when some days ago I saw a boy in a passing car throw out a chocolate wrapper from the car window and consequently dirtying the road.

Don't forget Francesca's example. Anything that is still in good condition and clean should go on being used even if its fashion has become outdated until it is not possible to use it any longer. This applies to objects like the mobile. If the mobile still functions I don't see why it should be discarded for the latest model. And while speaking of mobiles I cannot not insist on you that you do not make wrong use of it by sending hurtful messages to others.

And this brings me to the most important point in my message. It is a good thing that we have a clean and healthy environment. But such an environment would count to nothing if we did not at the same time love one another and help those in need. In the world there is enough plenty for everybody. The problem is that this plenty is not well distributed. I cannot expect that you go to Mission lands to help the poor there when you are still so young, but it would be very good on your part if even in your young age you make it a habit to deny yourselves some little thing and then put aside the money save so you can help those in need.

Charity begins at home. So it would be ideal if you help your family in some way or other. We all use the home. So we must all give a helping hand to mum and dad to have a clean and orderly home. The same applies to school. Our classmates are our brothers, sisters. It does not make sense that you love and care for the environment and at the same time hurt your classmates, or maybe act the bully. In the world we must learn to live together as one large family. Whoever loves the environment loves life particularly human life. But above all he/she cares for the sick, the elderly and also the unborn

Finally I urge you to go on learning about Jesus and learn to love Him ever still more. To be a good Christian and also a responsible citizen is like being two faces of the same coin. If you love Jesus you love the environment. I urge you also to find time to pray during the day. There is no need to say a lot of words. It is enough to think of Jesus. He can read what is in your hearts. Even if you are still young I invite you to join us in reciting this fervent prayer coming out of the heart of Pope Francis:

*All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe
And in the smallest of your creatures
You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.
Pour out upon us the power of your love,
that we may protect life and beauty.
Fill us with peace, that we may live
as brothers and sisters, harming no one.
O God of the poor,
help us rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth,
so precious in your eyes.
Bring healing to our lives
that we may protect the world and not prey on it,
that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction.
Touch the hearts
of those who look only for gain
at the expense of the poor and the earth.*

*Teach us to discover the worth of each thing,
to be filled with awe and contemplation,
to recognize that we are profoundly united
with every creature
as we journey towards your infinite light.
We thank you for being with us each day.
Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle
for justice, love and peace.*

Given from the Bishop's Curia, Victoria, Gozo, today, Wednesday 26th August 2015.

✠ Mario Grech