

Il-Lehen tat-Tama

"THE VOICE OF HOPE"

47, Mannarino Road, Birkirkara BKR 08, Malta - www.adventist.org.mt

BY THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH IN MALTA

HOMAGE TO JESUS

CHRISTMAS CREED

I believe in Jesus Christ and in the beauty of the gospel begun in Bethlehem.

I believe in the one whose spirit glorified a little town; and whose spirit still brings music to persons all over the world, in towns both large and small.

I believe in the one for whom the crowded inn could find no room, and I confess that my heart still sometimes wants to exclude Christ from my life today.

I believe in the one who the rulers of the earth ignored and the proud could never understand; whose life was among common people, whose welcome came from persons of hungry hearts.

I believe in the one who proclaimed the love of God to be invincible.

I believe in the one whose cradle was a mother's arms, whose modest home in Nazareth had love for its only wealth, who looked at persons and made them see what God's love saw in them, who by love brought sinners back to purity, and lifted human weakness up to meet the strength of God.

I confess my everlasting need of God: The need of forgiveness for our selfishness and greed, the need of new life for empty souls, the need of love for hearts grown cold.

I believe in God who gives us the best of himself. I believe in Jesus, the son of the living God, born in Bethlehem this night, for me and for the world.

Anonymous

CHRIST'S EMPIRE

I know men and I tell you that Jesus Christ is no mere man. Between him and every other person in the world there is no possible term of comparison.

Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and I founded empires. But on what did we rest the creations of our genius? Upon force. Jesus Christ founded His empire upon love; and at this hour millions of people would die for Him.

Napoleon Bonaparte, French emperor (1769-1821)

JESUS' CHARACTER

I believe there is no one deeper, lovelier, more sympathetic and more perfect than Jesus – not only is there no one else like him, there never could be anyone like him.

Fyodor Dostoevsky, Russian novelist (1821-81)

IN JESUS WE KNOW

Not only do we not know God except through Jesus Christ; We do not even know ourselves except through Jesus Christ.

Blaise Pascal, French mathematician and philosopher (1623-62)

We wish
all our readers
a joyful Christmas
full of peace
and
a blessed New Year.

FOR THE
NEW YEAR
OFFER YOURSELF AND
YOUR FAMILY
A SPECIAL GIFT:
STOP SMOKING.

After some years of inactivity, at the request of some friends, we are going to offer again our free programme "Breathe-Free" to stop smoking. It is the first programme in the world to make you free from smoking. The program will be held in Lija, at about the middle of January 2004. If you are interested, call pastor Leonardi on 21 413 696, or 99 835 030, for more information.

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CHRISTIAN LIFE

CAN WE NOT FORGIVE?

We say “sorry” or “excuse me” several times a day when we bump into someone or when we are being a nuisance, for the simple reason that they form the basis of life in society.

If people ask for forgiveness, should we forgive? Why?

To forgive is not easy for many people, maybe for all of us. Some say that they will never forgive and mean that they will never forget. Others prefer to have nothing at all to do with the person who has committed the offence. But the Gospel says that we have to forgive, and even that, if necessary, the victim should make the first move.

Should we forgive those who do not ask for forgiveness? It seems unreasonable to our human minds, but this is what Jesus did and what we should do. When on the cross, our Lord asked His heavenly Father to forgive His torturers. They were not asking for forgiveness, but Jesus forgave them all the same. Why?

Victims who forgive their torturers, as Jesus did, are offering them an opportunity to repent. If they refuse to be converted, it will be their problem, but we would have done what we could to help.

If forgiveness is an advantage for those who are forgiven, it is also an advantage for those who take the initiative and offer forgiveness, because they can be at peace with their conscience. God is “merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin” (Exodus 34:6-7). In God there exists the same kind of bond which unites a mother and her child. If God is merciful, He expects those whom He created to show the same mercy towards one another. As Jesus said: “be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful” (Luke 6:36).

Jesus not only welcomes sinners but eats with them. As a Christian hymn says, “He came to heal and forgive.” He is the Good Samaritan that “had compassion” (Luke 10:33) for the man who was left wounded at the roadside.

Jesus’ death is the highest representation of forgiveness because, when on

the cross, He did not just forgive His enemies but offered His death as the most wonderful way to offer forgiveness to all those who would believe in Him: “this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matthew 26:28). Christ shows us the seriousness of our sin and, at the same time, God’s love and forgiveness.

The greedy person wants material things more than spiritual ones, but it shouldn’t be so. When the people brought the paralyzed man to be healed, the first thing that Jesus did was not heal his body but his heart: “Your sins are forgiven,” He told him (Matthew 9:2). The only possible way of moving forward is along the path of forgiveness and Jesus gave us the good example and teaching. “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain



God is a forgiving father and we should learn from His example.

mercy,” He said (Matthew 5:7). Blessed, we can say, are they who are able to forgive, for they “will be forgiven” (Luke 6:37).

Jesus regards forgiveness as a blessing. One of the best known parables which shows God’s love is the story of the merciful father whose son abandoned him, dilapidated his heritage and his own life (Luke 15:11-32). His departure is described as breaking his relation with the father, but still there was room for him to recover his previous state. “But when he came to himself, he said ‘... I will arise and go to my father, and will

say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.’ And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’”

The father knows that his child is hurt and does not ask him of his past. He doesn’t rebuke him but receives him with love and offers him again all his privileges as a son of the household. He does not desire to humiliate him. God never desires to humiliate those whom He has created.

Our lives are a long journey back to the father’s house, the house of love. God loves us and waits for us along life’s journeys: “and He ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.”

How often should we forgive?

“Then Peter came to Him and said, ‘Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.’” (Matthew 18: 21-22). Peter knew quite well that he must forgive; but how often? I guess that when he said “seven times” he imagined that he was being generous. But God has a better perspective for His children. Forgiveness shouldn’t be just something we do once in a while, but the continuous attitude of our hearts.

God freely forgives and welcomes us into His kingdom. Let’s have the same attitude in front of others: “And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors. ... For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:12,14,15).

Miss Rosalie Chetcuti

CHRISTIAN TESTIMONY

JESUS HAS TAKEN MY LIFE

Last part: My ministry in Malta

I came to Malta six years ago, in September 1997. For seventeen years I had served as a pastor and a professor in Florence (Italy) where the Seventh-day Adventist Church operates a theological seminary. For five years I had been its dean too.

Coming to Malta was a very big change, especially for my wife and my son, then just twelve years old. As pastors we do not always remain with the same church but, after some years, we move to another community so that each one may take advantage of the different attitudes and gift of different ministers. For us this is quite normal and we accept it as part of our call. When we reach the new community we become at once engaged in the usual activities of a pastor, but for the family it is different because everything is new to them, they do not know people and risk, for some time, to feel out of place and alone.

Thank God, little by little, new friends arrive and we start to feel at home again in the new place. This also happened when we reached Malta even if, this time, the situation presented new challenges.

To begin with, we are abroad and even if many Maltese people understand Italian, usually we have to use a language that is not ours, and you feel stupid when you cannot express yourself correctly. But it was nice to see that every time we tried to speak English people answered in Italian. Evidently our accent and our mistakes betrayed us as Italians, but, at the same time, their way of answering gave us the impression of being among kind people trying to help us feel at home.

Our main problem was to understand people, their way of thinking, their spirituality and culture, so that we might establish better relationships. We just knew that we and Maltese people share the same Mediterranean culture and temper (my wife and I are Sicilians), but I was realizing that Malta is probably the most Catholic country in the world and jealous of her identity. It is still amazing to me seeing, at any religious feast, so many Vatican flags: you might think you are not in Malta, but in Rome (even if in Rome I never saw one).

Being the representative of a different minority Christian church, I wondered

how the people would receive me and my family. The first Saturday (or one of the first) I spent with my new congregation, after the service, as I went out in the street I received a stone on my head. I had to go to the health centre to have some medication. Later on I realized that probably, that stone had fallen from the old facade of the opposite building, and jumped on a balcony before getting on to my head; but when it happened, I couldn't find any better explanation than feeling I was the object of a starting persecution.

I am a very apprehensive person, which shouldn't be, especially for a Christian who trusts in God, but it is my way of taking life and my ministry seriously. I do not worry at all for my salary or for my future, but I worry a lot for the people I have to serve. So, not knowing the Maltese laws, and the attitude of the people, I was continuously asking myself what was the best way for me to behave. I wished to have friends, outside the local Adventist community, who would receive and help me. It was not easy at first, for some I asked to meet, didn't even consider my request, but little by little we can say that we have found wonderful open friends that help us feel at home. May God bless each one of them.

Why should I be in Malta?

There are already so many priests and pastors who can take care of the spiritual needs of the population! Why one more? What is the contribution that I can offer as a Seventh-day Adventist Pastor?

First of all, I am a human being and, as such, I believe that I have to love all other human beings, whatever their race, religion, culture, wealth are. I was born in Catania, Sicily, but I know that I am a citizen of the world and all human beings are my fellow brothers and sisters.

Second, I am a Christian and as such I offer the gifts I received from the Lord to give hope, comfort, and, possibly, instruction to people who are in need of it. I do not

want that they may become like me but better than me. I hope they may learn that they have a loving Father Who wishes to look after them, and give them strength for their present life, hope for their future, and knowledge on how to pass from the first to the second with joy and with His blessing.

Third, I am a Seventh-day Adventist pastor, and as such I represent a specific understanding of God's will. I honestly believe that there are people in all Christian communities, and outside the Christian world too, who sincerely love God according to their conscience and knowledge. I admire, respect, and honour them. The Seventh-day Adventist Church is in debt to many people from other different churches: they helped us discover important Biblical truths that we received with joy, they gave us testimonies that helped us get organized and better serve our neighbours, and we are still open to receive teachings, reprove, advise on everything that can help us be better Christians. At the same time, we humbly believe that we have a special message to share with everybody, and we would be happy to have an opportunity to share with them what we believe is the truth of God.

I do not pretend that people must agree with me. I would just like that they listen, just a little, to know and understand what I believe, and form their own personal opinion.

My home and my heart is always open to people, I would like to discover that there is a little place for me in the hearts of others too. Who knows? Maybe some of you will call me and offer me an opportunity. May God bless those who will, and especially those who will not.

Pastor Giovanni Leonardi

New Year's Eve Thanksgiving Service

As it is already tradition, we will celebrate the passage from the old to the new year with a thanksgiving and prayer service. Pastor Leonardi and His wife Gianna will be happy to share with you this special moment. If you would like to join them and their friends, the appointment is for Wednesday the 31st from 5.30 to 6.30 P.M. at "Andoria," Giovanni Barbara Street, Lija. If you wish so, give them a call. Tel. 21 413696 - 99 835 030.

MISSION STORY

FROM ALCOHOL TO JESUS

Valli faced a huge problem. For years her husband had been falling ever deeper into alcoholism. Often she suffered great pain from his drunken blows, and Valli and her children tried to escape his drunken wrath. When an evangelistic meeting was advertised in her village she decided to attend.

This was a difficult decision because the political party that administered her village was determined that everyone should support the national religion. Her attendance brought extra burdens to her personal life. Those who attended were forbidden to draw water from the village well. Valli had to walk more than a mile (two kilometres) to fetch water. However, as she began to experience a new outlook on life, the long hike for water became bearable.

As Valli surrendered to Jesus, her life took on new directions. Old ways of

thinking and acting disappeared. The Holy Spirit was performing a spiritual miracle in her life. Her drunkard husband began to see these changes in his wife and was impressed by the power of the God that Valli so often referred to.

Out of the depths of discouragement Valli's husband accompanied his wife to the evangelistic service. His life began to change. When the couple's six adult children saw what was happening to their parents, they too began to attend. Now the entire family has been baptized.

Villagers were deeply impressed by the power of Jesus to change lives. The prejudice against Christians began to wane. Then a 6-year-old boy fell ill. The family could not afford medical care, so they turned to the visiting teachers for help. The team gathered around the child in earnest prayer, and he was healed. The boy's miraculous recovery changed the attitude of the people in the village. Attendance at the



When Jesus enters a family, He brings with Him joy and peace.

meetings grew, and as the meetings progressed, a baptismal group was organized.

Today there is a new church with 70 believers in the village.

J. H. Zachary

IT'S TO YOU! YOU CAN BE A GLASS OF WATER OR THE SEA

A man was feeling continuously oppressed by the difficulties of life and went to groan with a famous religious teacher.

"I can't stand it any longer! This life is unbearable."

The teacher took a handful of ashes and told the man: "These are your sufferings."

Then he let them fall into a glass of clean water that was on the table. At once all the water became dirty and turbid. The teacher threw it away.

Then he took another handful of ashes, the same as the previous, and showed it to the man. He went to the window and threw the ashes into the sea. In a moment the ashes were dispersed in the water but the sea remained as clean as before.

"See?" the teacher said, "Every day, it is to you to decide if you wish to be like a glass of water or like the sea."

Everybody can face difficulties. Jesus gives us strength and wisdom to face them with courage and peace. And He doesn't leave us to bear them alone, for he bears

them with us. He said: "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30).

NEW ADDRESS FOR THE
"DISCOVER"
BIBLE CORRESPONDENCE COURSE

If you are a student of the "DISCOVER" Bible Correspondence Course, most probably you have an envelope with the old address "Cultural Centre 'The Voice of Hope', P.O. Box 7, Hamrun". Please, if you wish to use this envelope and enjoy the free businesses reply service, just change the old address into "Adventist Centre, 47, Mannarino Road, Birkirkara BKR 08". Thank you so much.



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