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Cardinal Giovanni Angelo Becciu celebrates Holy Mass on the Feast of the Nativity of Saint John the Baptist, patron of the Sovereign Order of Malta

Cardinal Giovanni Angelo Becciu, prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints and special delegate to the Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of Saint John of Jerusalem, of Rhodes and of Malta, celebrated Holy Mass this morning in the Roman Church of Saint Mary in Aventino, on the Feast of the Nativity of Saint John the Baptist, patron of the Order of Malta. The following are extensive extracts from the homily he delivered during the celebration.

The devotion of the members of the Order of Malta to Saint John the Baptist is an ancient tradition. He has always been seen as an exemplary figure, not so much for his ascetic features, but rather for his style, his mission. A style and a mission more current than ever, and which can be outlined as follows: he was never in the centre, but rather was one who is always in an adjunct position that leaves space for Christ; his is a strong and eloquent appearance, but one that ensures silence before the voice of the Lord Who comes; his is a true greatness before God, but which makes itself small, diminishes, so that Christ may grow. And then his moral attitude: the boldness of a frank word, the disdain for evil and selfishness as a manifestation of his passion for God and for his neighbour, his awareness of having to pay for every word he said, his extraneousness to men of power. Finally the single, sole desire that inhabited him: *to see the actions of the Messiah realized.*

The memorial of the figure of John the Baptist cannot leave us indifferent; it is a valuable occasion to renew to wish to inspire our personal life and our work in the Church and in the world by he who placed himself at the service of Jesus, preparing the way for Him. It is up to us, today, to find the intelligence and strength to prepare a way for the Lord, so that it may be possible to perceive His presence within the Church and therefore within our Order. Faced with an increasingly secular world, a society that removes Christian values, we believers, and in a special way those who publicly display their membership to an ecclesiastical Order such as that of the Order of Malta, is called to give credible and attractive responses with their own witness of life. The world, poor in relation to God, thirsting for truth, is in need like never before of people who show the path to find a saved life, a life with meaning. We must all be aware that belonging to the Order of Malta is not a privilege, it is not an honorific title to revel in before the world, but it is a gift from God, to be received with gratitude and humility. The gift of the economy of salvation is always accompanied by the entrustment of a mission. A baptized person cannot keep the faith for himself, but must enable others to participate in it. A member of the Order of Malta cannot contemplate himself and the successes he has achieved, but rather must make daily efforts to assimilate

the charism and to let himself be consumed by the concern of living consistently with its specific characteristics: the *tuitio fidei* and the *obsequium pauperum*. Dear brothers, we cannot waste God's gifts, we cannot squander the work of God that has been consigned to us. Before God we must ask ourselves if each one of us contributes to ensuring that the Order of Malta mirrors in its essentiality the original charism and if the reforming effort in process is aimed at making visible also in its organizational structures the mission that the Lord has entrusted to it. A mission that must count on transparent, generous, unbiased people, faithful to the Church and impassioned about God.

The Order carries out numerous charitable and aid activities throughout all the world, and may be justly proud of this. If I may, I will remind you that through such activities you are called to be precursors and sentinels on the confines of the modern deserts of humanity. In imitation of Saint John the Baptist, banish from your heart the temptation to use them to obtain consensus around you; these must serve to indicate always and only Jesus Christ as the sole reason for your mission and the only hope for the world. In this way your witness will be truly authentic, profound, and credible in a Christian way.

Let us ask the Lord for the gift of perseverance, to bear witness to faith in Christ with words and gestures of hope and of charity. We are all asked, every day, in the various existential environments – family, work, places of encounter and leisure – to be joyful witnesses of the gifts of the risen Jesus and above all of the new life that He has given us in His resurrection. May this be your constant desire! This I wish for you from the heart, as I thank you for your valuable service to the Gospel and to the Church, enriched with your steadfast faith to the Holy Father, for whom we wish to pray in this Holy Mass, as a sign of filial devotion to His person, and of sincere adhesion to his Magisterium.
