**Postcard from Malta**

The almost full blue supermoon rising behind the aeroport terminal greeted our arrival in Malta, accompanied by a welcoming blast of heat, and a volley of fireworks. Bags deposited at the hotel, promenading Valetta by night enticed us out. Lively and hospitable, it was immediately evident Malta wears its heart and faith for all to see, with open churches everywhere (365 was the taxi driver’s estimate, 400 Fr David’s for a population of around 500,000). Each patronal feast sees the surrounding streets colourfully festooned by the youth of the parish, in a week-long vibrant celebration. Our own morning prayer was followed by a dignified Eucharistic thanksgiving in St Paul’s Anglican cathedral. Fr David referring to Anglican heritage in Malta spoke of the novelty for C of E clergy of being a tiny minority (1.3%) in a country where over 80% are Roman Catholic, gratefully noting the warmly hospitable ecumenism attributable he thought, to both similarity and lack of threat.

Absorbing Maltese culture, we were expertly guided at sites ancient and modern, attracting temporary additions to our number but, sad to say, the CITI pace is evidently not for everyone! We discovered that throughout the Maltese islands stone-age peoples offered animal sacrifices in megalithic temples sometimes marking the sun cycles of solstice and equinox. Statuary and etched stone spirals suggest worship in celebration of fertility and continuity of life. Elsewhere, convent cloisters offered cooling calm austerity which gave way to the extravagance of the Knights of St John’s Grand Masters’ palace, in turn yielding to the gilded opulence of St John’s cathedral. Here even Caravaggio’s ascetic saints John the Baptist and Jerôme were subjected to lavish gilt frames. Valetta’s grid and Mdina’s winding streets, azure seas and Dingli cliffs, catacombs and gardens, gondolas and sailboats, cruise liners and ferries all proudly commended, did not disappoint.

For three days we basked in the warm embrace of Malta - balmy weather, glowing sunsets, friendly people, and her Malti language of Arabic etymology. We savoured local delicacies - apéritif cocktails, wine and lager, fresh seafood, heaped platters, sun kissed salads, prickly pear, breads, pastries, and rose sculpted gelatos, drinking in Maltese life. All too soon, it was time to say ‘*is-saħħa*’, or as our guide was instructed we might put it at home, ‘*sláinte*’. Whichever the language, *arrivederci*!