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Letter

ORDO EQUESTRIS SANCTI SEPULCRI HIEROSOLYMITANI

*The Message from
the Cardinal Grand Master*

BETHLEHEM 2009/2010

If Jesus Himself were to return to Bethlehem today, what would He find?

He would, of course, find that the place where He was born was marked by a centuries-old church which is shared by Christians of several churches – especially Catholics and Orthodox.

He would find a town filled with hotels and shops to care for the thousands of pilgrims who come to visit His birthplace – even though those hotels and shops are not as prosperous as they might be or as they once were because of the barriers to open visitation of the holy places in Bethlehem and in other parts of the Holy Land.

He would find a looming wall separating Bethlehem from Jerusalem, just a few miles away – a wall Pope Benedict XVI called the saddest thing he had seen during his visit to the Holy Land last May.



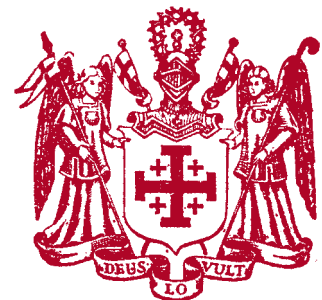
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OF JERUSALEM
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But Jesus is in Bethlehem today – in the believers who continue to live there and who are inspired by faith in Him and who are vivified by His grace; Jesus is in Bethlehem today – in the Most Blessed Sacrament; Jesus is in Bethlehem today, among the pilgrims who humbly pray at His birthplace for that peace proclaimed by the angels more than 2,000 years ago!

I would sincerely ask that Knights and Ladies of the Holy Sepulchre who make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land insist on going not only to Bethlehem but also to visit the Christian communities whom their offerings help to support in their desire to maintain a living Christian presence – the “living stones” of Christ’s Church -- in the town of His birth.

May all of the Knights and Ladies of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem experience a blessed and joyous Christmas and a New Year of peace – peace in their families, peace in the world and especially peace in that land we are privileged to call Holy!



*By Cardinal John P. Foley,
Grand Master,
Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem*



GRAND MASTER'S SERVICE OF THANKSGIVING IN ST. PETER'S BASILICA, ROME

*On Thursday, 12 November, the Grand Master of the Order,
His Eminence Cardinal John P. Foley
celebrated 25 years since his consecration
into the episcopate.*

The Cardinal was ordained as a priest on 19 May 1962 in Philadelphia (Pennsylvania, USA). After an interesting career with a strong emphasis in the field of communications he was called to Rome where, on 5 April 1984, he became President of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, a post he held for 23 years. Finally, on 27 June 2007 the Holy Father appointed him, first, acting Grand Master, then, following his promotion to Cardinal on 24 November 2007, Grand Master of our Order.

John P. Foley was appointed Titular Archbishop of Neapolis in Proconsulari on 11 May 1984. However, Cardinal Foley was prevented from celebrating on the anniversary itself because he was one of the group accompanying Pope Benedict XVI on his pilgrimage in the Holy Land. He therefore postponed the commemoration of his episcopal consecration until 12 November last – the day after his own birthday and one day before the meeting of the Grand Magisterium. The thanksgiving ceremony at the High Altar in St. Peter's

Basilica was attended by many Cardinals – including the former Secretary of State Cardinal Angelo Sodano – Archbishops and Bishops, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem and a whole host of priests. The Members of the Grand Magisterium and many other Members of the Order were very pleased and honored to take part in this solemn service of thanksgiving.

In his homily, Cardinal Foley gave thanks as follows: “I am especially grateful to God for my three-fold vocation – for the call to existence itself, to human life, in which He sustains me at all times; for the call to Christianity, to a life illumined by that blessed grace with which the Lord supports me even now with His favor; and finally, for my priestly and episcopal vocation, for those 47 years in the priesthood – 25 as an Archbishop – in which He has unfailingly upheld me and been at my side”.

The silver jubilee was brought to a fine conclusion with a reception in the Palazzo della Rovere.



HOLY LAND PROJECTS

In September the Members of the Grand Magisterium's Holy Land Commission visited the Holy Land. They gained a picture of the progress made with the 2009 Projects and saw for themselves the proposals made for 2010. Then, at the meeting of the Grand Magisterium held on 12 November last, the President of the Commission, Dr. Christa von Siemens, reported the results of the visit and outlined the hopes for 2010:

“Building projects are sometimes criticized on the grounds that it would be better to provide humanitarian aid. In my opinion, however, they are a powerful instrument in the realization of our aims, which – amongst others – include creating the basis for places where Christians can live as a community, as well as guaranteeing opportunities for a Christian education and upbringing. That is why these Projects are often largely concerned with the renovation – and sometimes the construction – of churches, schools, presbyteries, parish halls and convents.

In 2009 the following Projects were underway:

- 1. The Kindergarten and school at Hashimi in Jordan;*
- 2. The school at Fuheis al Alali in Jordan;*
- 3. The school at Madaba, also in Jordan;*
- 4. The school at Bir Zeit, Palestine;*
- 5. The Beit Jala seminary, again in Palestine*
- 6. The processional pathway at Deir Rafat (Israel).*

At the time of our visit none of the Projects were fully finished. Delays were caused by technical

problems and the slowdown of work during the fasting month of Ramadan. Nonetheless, all the Projects should be completed by the end of October.”

Mme. von Siemens then presented the list of Projects for 2010 proposed by the Latin Patriarchate: the actual choices are still to be decided since appropriate investigations and considerations have to be undertaken first. However, in order to give readers of the Newsletter a preliminary idea, we print the whole list below, with her comments:

“The Projects proposed for 2010 are:

- 1. Renovation of the school at Naour in Jordan. This involves reinforcement of the building, the removal of ground water, refurbishment of the kindergarten and of the sanitary installations.*
- 2. The school and presbytery at Al Wahadneh in Jordan: the Project comprises renovation of the three existing classrooms and the construction of a new storey for two additional classrooms and a small multi-purpose hall. Should the foundations prove too weak for the extra storey then a separate building will be considered. Consideration will also be given to transferring the kindergarten.*



3. *Kerak School, Jordan. The kindergarten needs to be returned to the ground floor beneath the Sisters' convent. The free space thus created will then be converted into additional classrooms. All the rooms will require renovation. There are further plans for the construction of a central heating plant and a makeover of the school playgrounds.*
4. *Church at Aqaba in Jordan. Construction of this church and a parish hall must be completed within two years: that is the opinion of the Latin Patriarchate, because there is a notable increase in the population of Latins following the rapid social development in the Free Trade area around Aqaba.*
5. *Extension of the school at Rameh in Northern Israel: an extension should be built on a plot of land already owned by the existing school in order to give students from Rameh and the surrounding area the possibility of an education up to the level of high-school finals.*
6. *The Rosary Sisters' convent at Reneh, Northern Israel: there is a lack of individual private space for the nuns and the sanitary installations are antiquated, so the whole first floor requires renovation.*
7. *The seminary at Beit Jala in Palestine: both the theater and the sanitary installations on the ground floor are in need of renovation.*
8. *The Patriarchate. The Project consists of refurbishing several offices, including the catechism office, as well as two additional rooms for two priests. In addition, the bell tower and the electronic carillon apparatus are both in need of renovation and modernization.*

Allow me to make a few personal observations on the Projects.

1. *"The attachment between the Christian minority and their church buildings is much stronger in the Holy Land than in the western world. Here the churches are a place where Christians share their joys and sorrows and where they can get together after Sunday Mass. People therefore remain true to their own parish, church or school, even when this involves a long journey, for example when they have moved house. It is their church, school, etc. For them, such places represent an identity, a hope, and they should receive just as much care as those of the other religions.*
2. *A good education is extremely important to people, especially our Christians. When, for personal reasons, we recently visited a well-known school in Northern Germany one of the school governors pointed out the significance of education as a contribution to peace. I am always impressed by how, with such limited means, young people in the Holy Land are taught about the great questions of our time such as the environment, human rights or, indeed, peace. Drawings are made, texts "nailed together", sometimes even home-made books are produced, which are then displayed and used in the schools.*

In conclusion, Mme. von Siemens quoted from the speech made by Queen Rania of Jordan to students at Yale University:

"In our interconnected world, there are no zero sum games. We win or lose together. We all have a stake in peace and justice – for all of us are diminished by their absence. Let us work together in the Middle East, and around the world, to make peace come true, for good."



HOW MANY MEMBERS DOES THE EQUESTRIAN ORDER OF THE HOLY SEPULCHER ACTUALLY HAVE?

Only the figures submitted by the Lieutenancies can provide the year-on-year variations.

The question often arises as to the size of our Order in terms of its membership. It is impossible to give a precise number on a daily basis because the Lieutenancies hold Investitures throughout the year, yet every year there are also many Knights and Ladies who make the journey to their eternal home. Nonetheless, at the end of each year, each Lieutenant is required to make report on his area of jurisdiction, including the number of active Members at that time. Therefore, the latest figures we have date back to the end of 2008.

According to these reports, at 31 December last year the Order had a total of 25,835 Members. Of these, 14,432 (i.e.56%) were Knights of all grades, 8,159 (32%) were Ladies and 3,244 were religious (approx. 12%).

Their geographical distribution is interesting: around 12,500 or almost 48% of the members are resident in the United States. If we take North America to include Canada and Mexico, then the figure rises to more than 52%.

The USA is the only area where the Order has more Ladies than Knights.

In Europe the largest membership – 5,946 – is found in Italy. Naturally.

The biggest Lieutenancy is that of Central Italy and Sardinia, with a total of 2,590 Members. Next come two US Lieutenancies: USA-Southwestern with 2,540 and USA-Eastern with 2,306 Knights, Ladies and religious.

The major language group within the Order comes from the English-speaking regions and totals approximately 14,400 members.

Whenever we wish to publicize our Order we can state proudly that we have a worldwide membership and that our organization is truly international. The Christians in the Holy Land, too, must feel comforted that there are Christians all over the globe whose thoughts are with them, who want to help them and who remember them in their prayers.



THE INTERNET IS IMPORTANT TO THE ORDER

In an interview with “The Record”, Perth’s Catholic newspaper, on the occasion of the West Australian Investiture on 27 September, His Eminence the Cardinal Grand Master made the following comment on the Catholic media:

“They also need to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the internet and stay abreast of the technology of communication”.

Is there any greater difference between the generations than their familiarity (or otherwise) with the internet? Practically none. Children are totally at ease with this medium, students use it for their studies and one can no longer imagine a working environment where it is not present; even day-to-day correspondence increasingly takes place by e mail rather than letter. Yet many older people still regard the internet with skepticism.

So what use does our Order make of this means of information and communication?

Investigations show that 21 Lieutenancies have their own homepages. The Order’s own homepage in both Italian and English can be accessed via the Vatican website.

But what use do we make of the internet? For example, the Order’s Newsletter is designed for distribution via the internet and each issue is e-mailed to every Lieutenancy in at least one of our five working languages (Italian, English, German, French and Spanish). It is then for the individual Lieutenancies to decide how to forward the Newsletter, though of course the aim is for every Member of the Order to receive the information it contains as quickly as possible. But can this kind of communication happen in the opposite direction?

Many Lieutenancies post each fresh Newsletter on their own homepages straight away. In addition, all the earlier Newsletters can be

obtained in all available languages from the Order’s website.

Nonetheless, it emerges that far too few Members are aware of the Newsletter. Perhaps some places lack the technical equipment or administrative facilities for its distribution; or perhaps the names of those Members who have e-mail are not known. Several Lieutenancies actually publish personal e-mail addresses in their membership registers. From these we see that in Austria 79.1 % of the Knights and Ladies can be reached by e mail. Of those who have not provided an e mail address only 3.5% were born after 1950. Presumably the ratio is similar in many other Lieutenancies.

Confirmation of these thoughts on the use of the internet comes from the Holy Father: in mid-November this year, Pope Benedict XVI addressed participants at the Plenary Assembly of the Presidents of Episcopal Media Commissions of the Council of European Bishops’ Conferences (CCEE) on the new possibilities provided by the internet. The internet culture should be a “topic of great contemporary relevance” for Church communication.

Surely, then, all our own Lieutenancies should consider the possibility of using this electronic means of communication to the full, including how they can best become aware of their Members’ e mail addresses and how best to manage and make use of such contacts.

