



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO MEMBERS OF THE CONSULTA OF THE
EQUESTRIAN ORDER OF THE HOLY SEPULCHRE OF JERUSALEM**

*Clementine Hall
Friday, 16 November 2018*

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I welcome you at the conclusion of the Consulta of the Members of the Grand Magisterium and of the Lieutenants of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem. I greet and thank Cardinal Edwin O'Brien, Grand Master, and the Pro-Grand Prior, Bishop Pierbattista Pizzaballa; I greet the Members of the Grand Magisterium, along with the Lieutenants of the nations and of the places where the Order is present. And with you I greet the whole family of Knights and Dames from all over the world. My gratitude goes to all of you for the many spiritual and charitable activities you carry out for the benefit of the peoples of the Holy Land.

You have gathered for the work of the Consulta, the general assembly that is held every five years at the See of Peter. Here in the Vatican, you are, in a certain way, at home, as you constitute an ancient Pontifical institution under the protection of the Holy See. Since the last Consulta of 2013 the Order has grown in its membership, in its geographical expansion with the creation of new peripheral divisions, in the material assistance that it has offered the Church in the Holy Land, and in the number of pilgrimages made by your members. I thank you for your support of beneficial pastoral and cultural programmes and I encourage you to continue your commitment, alongside the Latin Patriarchate, in addressing the refugee crisis which in the last five years has prompted the Church to provide a significant humanitarian response throughout the region.

It is a good sign that your initiatives in the field of training and health care are open to all, regardless of the communities they belong to and the religion they profess. In this way you help

pave the way to make Christian values known, to the promotion of interreligious dialogue, mutual respect and mutual understanding. In other words, with your commendable commitment, you too offer your contribution to build the path that will lead, as we all hope, to the achievement of peace throughout the region.

I know that this week you have turned your attention to the role of local managers, or lieutenants, present in more than 30 nations and zones of the world in which your Order is active. Certainly, the continuous growth of the Order depends on your unceasing and ever renewed effort. In this regard, it is important not to forget that the principal aim of your Order lies in the spiritual growth of its members. Therefore, any success of your initiatives cannot be separate from appropriate religious formation programmes addressed to every Knight and every Dame, so that they may consolidate their own indispensable relationship with the Lord Jesus, especially in prayer, in meditation on the Sacred Scriptures and in furthering their knowledge of the doctrine of the Church. It is a task, especially for you leaders, to offer the example of an intense spiritual life and true following of the Lord: in this way you can render a valid service of authority to those under your leadership.

Then, with regard to your mission in the world, do not forget that you are not a philanthropic entity committed to promoting the material and social improvement of recipients. You are called to place the evangelical love of neighbour as the central and final aim of your works, to bear witness everywhere to the goodness and care with which God loves everyone. Admission into your Order of Bishops, Priests and Deacons is not entirely an honour. It is part of their duties of pastoral service to assist those among you who have a role of responsibility by providing opportunities for community and liturgical prayer at every level, continuous spiritual opportunities, and catecheses for ongoing formation and for the growth of all members of the Order.

Before the entire world — which too often averts its gaze — lies the tragic situation of Christians who are persecuted and killed in ever increasing numbers. In addition to their martyrdom of blood, there is also their 'white martyrdom', such as that which occurs in democratic countries when freedom of religion is limited. And this is the everyday white martyrdom of the Church in those places. I urge you to always associate prayer with the work of material aid to people who are so harshly tried, to constantly invoke Our Lady, whom you venerate with the title of "Our Lady of Palestine". She is the caring Mother and the Help of Christians, for whom she obtains from the Lord strength and comfort in sorrow.

May the icon of Our Lady of Persecuted Christians, which I will soon bless and which you will all receive to take to each of your Lieutenancies, accompany your journey. Together let us invoke Mary's concern for the Church in the Holy Land and, more generally, in the Middle East, along with her special intercession for those whose life and freedom are in danger. I accompany your valuable and tireless work with my Blessing, and I ask you, please, to pray for me. Thank you.

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