



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II TO THE EQUESTRIAN ORDER OF THE HOLY SEPULCHRE

Thursday, 2 March 2000

1. It is a great joy for me to welcome you, dear Knights, Ladies and Ecclesiastics who represent the worthy Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem. You have come to Rome from the five continents to celebrate your Jubilee. My cordial greetings to you all!

With brotherly affection I thank Cardinal Carlo Furno, who has expressed the sentiments you share. In his words I learned of your desire to carry out in a suitable way your order's specific service to the Holy Land. It is an important mission: thanks to your generous spiritual and charitable efforts on behalf of the Holy Places and the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, much has been done to enhance this precious heritage of historical memorials preserved in the Holy Land. Contemporary society, which is technologically advanced but in greater need than ever of values and spiritual reference-points, looks to them with renewed interest.

2. Your equestrian order, which began a few centuries ago as an "Honour Guard" for the care of Our Lord's Holy Sepulchre, has enjoyed the particular attention of the Roman Pontiffs. It was Pope Pius IX, of venerable memory, who in 1847 reconstituted it in order to encourage the re-establishment of a Catholic faith community in the Holy Land. This great Pope restored your order's original function, but with a significant difference: the custody of Christ's tomb would no longer depend on the force of arms, but on the value of a constant witness of faith and solidarity towards Christians residing in the Holy Places.

This is still your task today, dear Knights and Ladies of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem. May the celebration of the Jubilee help you to grow in the fervent practice of your faith, in exemplary moral conduct and in generous collaboration on Church activities at the parish and diocesan level. May the Holy Year, which is a time for personal and community conversion, see each of you intent on fostering and deepening the three characteristic virtues of the order: "zeal for self-denial in this society of affluence, generous commitment to the weak and defenceless, and a courageous struggle for justice and peace" (*Directives for the Renewal of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem in View of the Third Millennium*, n. 18).

3. There is an ancient and glorious bond between your chivalrous confraternity and the place of Christ's Sepulchre, where the glory of the Resurrection is celebrated in a most particular way. This is the very focal point of your spirituality. To renew this millenary bond and to make your Gospel witness ever more living and eloquent, you have written new guidelines for your work within the framework of your order's Statutes. You know, in fact, that the beginning of a new millennium demands an updated interpretation of the rule of life for your particular service. For you, as for every Christian, a fresh appreciation of Baptism, the basis of all Christian life, is crucial. This requires careful reflection on the Catechism and the Bible, a serious review of life and generous apostolic zeal. Thus you will be open to today's world without losing the spirit of the order, whose desired renewal depends above all on the personal conversion of each individual. As your motto says: "*Oportet gloriari in Cruce Domini Nostri Iesu Christi*": we must glory in the Cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Let Christ be the heart of your life, of your every project and programme, both as individuals and as an association.

4. Dear brothers and sisters, in a few weeks, God willing, I too will have the grace of visiting the Holy Sepulchre. Thus I will be able to pray at the place where Christ offered his life and then regained it in the Resurrection, giving us the gift of his Spirit.

Dear Knights, Ladies and Ecclesiastics of the order, I am also counting on your prayers for my pilgrimage, for which I am already grateful. I entrust you all to the motherly protection of Our Lady Queen of Palestine. May she help you in your special task "of assisting the Church in the Holy Land and of strengthening the practice of the Christian life in her members" (*Directives*, op. cit., n. 3).

May the Holy Family protect you and your families. May the consoling certainty that Christ died for us and is truly risen shine in each of your hearts. He is alive: yesterday, today and for ever.

With these sentiments, I gladly impart a special Apostolic Blessing to each of you.

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