



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF POPE LEO XIV

TO MEMBERS OF THE SOVEREIGN MILITARY ORDER OF MALTA, ON THE OCCASION OF THE CELEBRATION OF THE SOLEMNITY OF SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST

I am particularly glad to address this message of mine to you on the occasion of the celebration of the solemnity of Saint John the Baptist, Patron of your religious Order, which bears his name.

The Church thanks you for all the good you do, where there is a need for love, in sometimes very difficult situations. I also thank you for the commitment to renewal you have been carrying forward for several years, for greater fidelity to the Gospel, in close and cordial collaboration with the Cardinal Patron, whom I have reconfirmed in his office. Continue in this direction!

We can say that Saint John the Baptist, ever since his birth, fulfilled the mission he received from God to be the herald of Jesus. He did this with radical austerity throughout his life. His idea of the Messiah at the beginning was still too closely linked to that of a rigorous judge (cf. *Mt* 3:7-12). Jesus helps him to change his perspective, to convert, first when he presents himself to Him asking to be baptised, humbly mingled among many penitents (cf. *Mt* 3:13-17). After this manifestation, John indicates Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (cf. *Jn* 1:29, 36). Following his invitation, two of his disciples become disciples of Jesus (cf. *Jn* 1:37). And the Baptist, by giving his life in the affirmation of the truth, becomes a witness to Jesus, who is the Truth.

Saint John the Baptist, your heavenly Patron, must illuminate your life and mission, which you are called to fulfil in the Church by the action of the Holy Spirit.

Your Order has as its purpose the *tuition fidei* and the *obsequium pauperum*. Two aspects of a single charism: the faith that is propagated and protected in loving dedication to the poor, the marginalized, all those who are in need of support, and the help of others. Do not limit yourselves to meeting the needs of the poor, but announce to them God's love with the word and witness. If this were lacking, the Order would lose its religious nature and would be reduced to being a

philanthropic organization.

The love that each one of us must offer to others is that which places itself at the level of the one who receives it, just like Jesus, who put himself at our level, in solidarity with the despised, with those whose life is taken from them because it is considered to have no value (cf. *Lk* 10:29-37). Therefore, Jesus can receive an answer of love from us, because in stooping to us he communicates his love to us, which we can return to Him in gratitude. So it is with the poor man. If we love him by putting ourselves on his level, the love we communicate to him returns to us in gratitude, made not of humiliation, but of joy.

This is the *tuition fidei*, because by doing so, you transmit faith in God as love in a concrete way, offering the experience of his closeness.

To protect and conserve faith, the apostle Paul shows us how we can equip ourselves: to wear the armour of God to resist the devil's schemes; to gird one's loins with the truth; to put on the breastplate of righteousness; to grasp the shield of faith, with which to extinguish the flaming arrows of the Evil One; to take up the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (cf. *Eph* 6:11-18).

Certainly, for many praiseworthy good works that your Order carries out in various parts of the world. You need many means, also economic, and many forms of mediation. But it is always necessary to be careful to consider means only as such, functional for achieving their purpose.

However, to achieve a good end, the means must be good; in this area temptation can easily present itself under the guise of good, as an illusion of being able to achieve the good ends one proposes with means that might later turn out not to be in conformity with God's will. Jesus too was tempted in this, when the evil one "showed him all the kingdoms of the world in their magnificence" (*Mt* 4:8), and promised to give them to him, if he adored him. But then Jesus would no longer have been the suffering Servant of God, who in humility divested himself of every earthly power in order to conquer, with love, the love of man. Jesus reaffirms God's supremacy, even in this particularly insidious temptation, and does not sell himself to the power of this world. If he had given in to temptation, Jesus would have adopted illicit methods and would not have achieved the goal the Father had set for his mission. The Order of Malta, throughout history, has adopted different means according to the contingencies, but these must be examined in their current validity to achieve the goal of *tuitio fidei* and *obsequium pauperum*.

Throughout the centuries, the Order has become increasingly relevant in the international sphere, a very special type of sovereignty, with prerogatives in this sphere that must necessarily be functional to the aim of *tuition fidei* and *obsequium pauperum*. If such prerogatives were to be used by you, by allowing yourselves to be drawn into worldliness, perhaps without being aware of it, precisely because of the illusion that worldliness implies, you would run the risk of acting by

losing sight of the end. We must continually embrace what Jesus taught, that he did not ask the Father to remove us from the world, because he sends us *into* the world, but that we are not *of* the world, just as He is not of the world; and he asked the Father to keep us from the evil one (cf. *Jn* 17:14-16.18).

The Spirit uncovers the deceptions of the evil one, so we are called to continually discern whether we are being led by the Spirit or by the evil one or by our own interest.

You are engaged in a journey of renewal. Renewal cannot simply be institutional, normative: it must first of all be interior, spiritual, because this gives meaning to the changes of the rules. You have renewed your own law, the Constitutional Charter and Melitense Code. This was necessary, since several aspects needed to be clarified, especially the nature of the religious Order, given and guaranteed by members of the First Class, but whose charismatic strength is also shared by the Second and Third class, to different degrees.

You have also completed the task of the "Commentary" on both normative texts. This work is extremely useful in facilitating not only the literal understanding of the norms, but also that of their spiritual and theological foundation, of primary importance for a correct interpretation and application of the Spirit. Certainly, the journey of renewal is not complete; on the contrary, it is still at the beginning, because it requires the conversion of the heart, a lifelong task for each one of us. We know how arduous the conversion of the heart is. The members of the First Class in particular are called to commit themselves to this in order to overcome any temptation of secularization, that is, to a life not inspired by the evangelical radicalism that is proper to a religious Order. If the First Class does not undertake this journey of conversion which, difficult and demanding though it may be, is supported by the Spirit of the Risen One, it cannot be expected that the Second and Third Classes accomplish it, in accordance with their condition.

Conversion, however, is always incentivized by a significant experience that touches our heart. Your action to assist the sick, or the *Signori Malati*, as you like to call them, and the poor of any type, meritorious before God and before men, is what sustains your conversion. Your charitable and apostolic action is the fruit and manifestation of a spirituality, the one that has been transmitted to you from the beginning by Blessed Gerard, and which you are called to embody in today's world in an ever-greater evangelical authenticity, the fruit of continuous purification.

With great joy I have learned that there are aspirants who have asked to begin the experience of the novitiate, and of a residential novitiate, which constitutes a novelty after a long time of dissolution of community life. This is a reason for great hope, but it is also a challenge for the entire Order and above all for the formators. Formation is a fundamental aspect for all institutes of consecrated life, and it is particularly demanding in view of the complexity of the experience of candidates at the present time. It requires, more than ever, a specific formation for formators, without which the formative work would remain approximate and ineffective, as it would if its

course and content were not well defined. Formation does not concern only the First Class, but also, with different methods, the Second and Third Class. It must focus, as a fundamental element, on prayer: liturgical and personal, nourished by solitude and silence, necessary dimensions the more one devotes oneself to the activity of service to one's neighbour, so that this may be a witness to the love of God, who makes himself present.

Likewise, it is a source of great hope that some professed members wish to begin an experience of community life. I heartily encourage this desire, because community life concretely forges mutual charity and the authentic observance of the three evangelical counsels. Even if this intention will encounter some difficulties in its implementation, they can be overcome with the help of the Spirit, thanks to whom hope does not disappoint (cf. *Rm* 5:5).

May the Virgin of Philermos, Saint John the Baptist and Blessed Gerard intercede for the fulfilment of all your noblest sentiments and desires, while I cordially send you the Apostolic Blessing, which I extend to your loved ones and to all those you encounter in your service.

From the Vatican, 24 June 2025

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