



GRAND MAGISTERIUM – VATICAN
EQUESTRIAN ORDER OF
THE HOLY SEPULCHRE OF JERUSALEM

At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land

Feast of Our Lady Queen of Palestine - Homily of the Cardinal Fernando Filoni



Today, with this solemn concelebration in St. Peter's Basilica, we honour Our Lady Queen of Palestine, Patroness of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem. Ours is an encounter that takes place around the altar on which Christ sacramentally continues His presence among us; it is a coming together after a year of life and commitments for the Land of Jesus: This is the reason why we wish to ask today, once again, for the maternal blessing of Mary on the Order and on each of us and, on our part, we wish to renew our twofold commitment: of Christian life and of men and women who hold the Mother Church of Jerusalem in their hearts and who intend to support it with prayer, affection and generosity. Our appointment comes amid troubled times during a pandemic that spares no one. The Holy Land itself is still profoundly afflicted by it. Our patronal feast therefore must adapt to the circumstances, and thus we are streaming this sacred rite electronically for those who wish to join us spiritually.

In this time, which is complex and trying, we are all called not to lose spiritual joy, as the Protocustodian of the Holy Land, St. Francis of Assisi, taught Brother Leo, almost echoing the words of the Apostle James when he wrote : *"Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything"* (James 1, 2-4). A Dame and a Knight know well that union with God, love for God, is the supreme good to strive for, and it is this love for God that produces true joy and peace.

In venerating Mary Queen of Palestine, let us reflect briefly on this title initially attributed to her by Patriarch Barlassina (1920) and then definitively established by the Congregation of Rites in 1933. By love for the Holy Land, we do not mean an attachment to historical-archaeological sites, which are certainly always fascinating, nor even a love that has its locus in the genre of philanthropic relationships, however noble they may be. Rather, love for the Holy Land is situated in the context

of that love that God had for humanity; a love that was fully manifested in a region, in a concrete, geographically determined land, precisely Palestine; a place where God wanted to reveal himself: "*Take off your sandals, because the place where you are standing on is a holy land!*" (Ex 3, 5), the Most High cries out to Moses; there God also reveals His name, He makes Himself known; Isaiah the prophet will then add - with a universal perspective - that the Lord would tear the veil that covered the face of all peoples and the dark sheet that covers all nations (cf. Is 25: 7). Allowing Himself to be known by the man who walked "*as if groping*" (Acts 17:27), implied for God to re-establish that original relationship and filial dignity for which he had created human beings.

God is not a philosophy, that is, some high and distinct form of reasoning; nor the result of a desire to escape from human limitations and the fear of death. God is, according to the words of Jesus, Father! He who by loving, generates; St. John the Apostle, in his theological synthesis, will write, "*God is love*" (1 John 4:16). These words of John, commented Benedict XVI in his first encyclical, *Deus caritas est*, "*express with remarkable clarity the heart of the Christian faith*" (n. 1).

In Palestine, therefore, God manifested the fullness of his love in Christ. In this manifestation, He did not use astonishing actions, but humble events, and simple people who agreed to collaborate in a natural way. How natural was the cooperation of a woman for her generative abilities. The woman has a name, Maria, she has a life, a land, a village, an education, a faith; has a family of origin, thinks of a spouse. Mary is the co-operator, with Joseph, of a sacred history. There is not only a sacred land, there is also a history that becomes sacred, because God intervenes in it, silently bursts into it; Mary's life with Joseph will be a life like many others, common to many families, but also unique for the presence of Jesus and for the redemptive mission that the Father entrusted to him.

The Liturgy of the Word, in the two passages chosen for today's celebration, reveals to us a fragment of Mary's life who, with Joseph and the Child Jesus, was forced to flee to Egypt; then returning to Palestine, they went to live in a village, Nazareth. The Evangelist Matthew comments that this happened so that what was said through the prophets would be fulfilled: "*he would be called a Nazarene*" (Mt 2:23), a non-secondary title, since on the cross of Christ, Pilate will have inscribed, "*Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews*" (Jn 19:19).

Thus the family of Jesus returns to Palestine, here Mary's life will unfold alongside that of her Son; Palestine was, therefore, the land that Mary travelled several times, developing friendships and relationships, often linked precisely to those of Jesus. In this land another existence also began, that of the Church; today's first reading recounts that very beginning in Jerusalem: after the Lord's Ascension, in the same place where the Last Supper had taken place, the disciples returned "*to the room where they were staying*" (Acts 1, 13): among the Eleven in prayer there was also Mary, some women and men. By the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Church was born. We grasp the parallelism between the birth of Jesus and the beginning of the Church both through the divine outpouring of the Holy Spirit; in both cases, Mary had a prominent role: but if for the birth of Jesus her function was corporeal, for the Church it was spiritual. Palestine therefore witnessed to two events that are at the beginning of the history of salvation and of the Church.

The title of "Queen of Palestine" is not a memorial to noble descent, but originates from the mission itself with reference to God; a title which by extension then goes beyond Palestine and extends to the Church and the world.

Our affectionate prayers go to her, Patroness of our Order and constant presence alongside the Christians of the Holy Land, also venerated by other religious expressions present there, and by all of us, Knights and Dames. To her, who gives herself to the world and to the Church and with the Church in an ever new way through history and cultures, we ask for the gift of peace for the world and in particular for the Land which had her as its chosen daughter; we ask for her maternal protection on the Church so that she continues to be the "Body of Jesus" spiritually generated by her, faithful to

the mission entrusted to her by her Son; a Church in which Jesus reveals himself and gives himself to the world. Amen.

Fernando Cardinal Filoni

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