



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

At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land

“An enormous task”

Reflections of the Grand Master



Two years ago, Pope Francis called for this October, 2019 to be an “Extraordinary Missionary Month” with the aim both of fostering an increased awareness of the mission *ad gentes* (to nonbelievers) and of taking part with renewed fervor in the missionary transformation of the Church’s life and pastoral activity. This is simply an obedient response to Christ’s parting words to his disciples “Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15; cfr. Matthew 28:19).

Quoting extensively from Vatican II, the Pope calls this the “essential task” of the Church which is “missionary by nature” and is the responsibility of every believer. He suggests it remains an enormous one, quoting Pope Saint John Paul II that the mission is far from completion and in fact is still only beginning.

What might we say are today’s challenges to the evangelization of the world?

There is a growing, worldwide “Christianophobia.” The respected Pew Research Center (PRC) recently found Christians to be “the most widely targeted body of believers” with more than 80% of the world’s population (6.6 billion) living in religiously repressive countries—144 countries, in fact. This has created a tidal wave of refugees escaping torture and murder even in countries that are “allies” of Western democratic nations. Moreover, as Pope Francis notes in his address to us in the Vatican at the close of last year’s Consulta: “In addition to this martyrdom of blood, there is also this ‘white martyrdom’, such as that which occurs in democratic countries where freedom of religion is limited.” Increasing instances can be cited in which those who advocate Church teachings on marriage and family life are threatened with legal reprisal as hate speech. Finally, this year’s official Vatican Book of Statistics notes that the Church’s growth is increasing in most of the world. From 2016 to 2018, there has been a loss of 240,000 Catholics in Europe. Other recent research shows that in North

America 33% of those ages 21 - 29 (overwhelmingly Christian) consider themselves non-religious. A critical call for “re-evangelization.”

This is a huge and discordant landscape. It might even be depressing were it not for the Lord’s promise on departing, “I am with you always even to the ends of the earth.” For members of our Order, our call to personal prayer, holiness, formation and our solemn commitment for the defense and promotion of our Faith in the Holy Land are sure steps in response to Pope Francis’ final exhortation to all of us in his call at our Consulta’s conclusion.

Citing our devotion to Mary under the titles Our Lady of Palestine and Our Lady of Persecuted Christians, he asked: “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.”

Edwin Cardinal O’Brien

(Fall 2019)