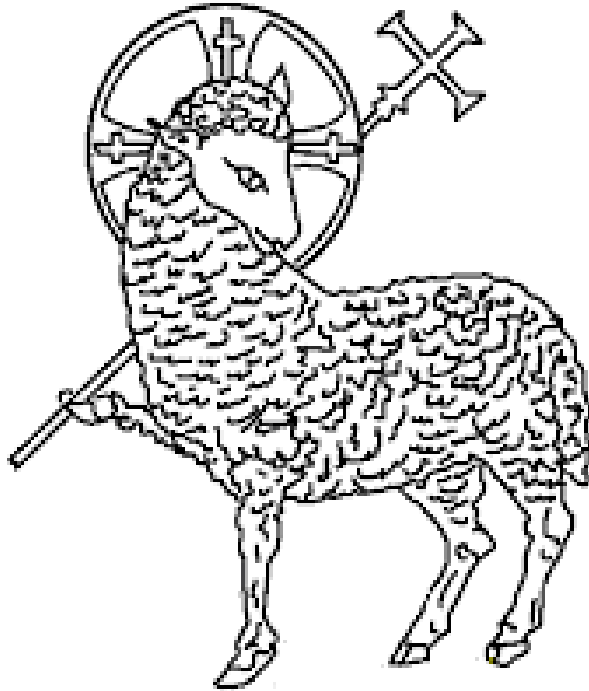




GRAND MAGISTERIUM – VATICAN
EQUESTRIAN ORDER OF
THE HOLY SEPULCHRE OF JERUSALEM

At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land

Cardinal O'Brien's pastoral letter for Easter 2016



In almost breathless terms St. Gregory describes the fourth century event he witnessed in his home city of Nyssa:

*What have we seen! A light like a cloud of fire
of the candles burning during the night.
All night our ears have resounded with prolonged
hymns and spiritual chants; it was like a river of
joy running through our ears to our soul, and filling
us with blessed hope.*

This good bishop was describing his experience, many centuries ago, at the Easter Vigil, one similar to which many of you will participate in the coming days. This night's Vigil, the Church insists, is "the greatest and most notable of all solemnities" and while all of us might not experience the grace of "a river of joy running through our ears to our soul" it is my prayer that the Easter Solemnity will "fill us all with blessed hope". For as the Exultet of the Vigil proclaims:

*This is the night when Christ broke the prison-bars
of death and rose victorious from the underworld.....
The sanctifying power of this night dispels wickedness,
washes faults away, restores innocence to the fallen,
and joy to mourners, drives out hatred, fosters concord,
and brings down the mighty.*

Do we, can we, Knights and Dames of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem catch this uniquely Christian spirit of hope? Is our Faith alive in us enough, to fill our hearts with thanksgiving for this Glorious Mystery of Christ's Resurrection? As members of this Order, we have a special claim on this Mystery!

In spite of the darkness, the wickedness and the hatred that threaten to capture lives and hearts in the Holy Land, in the midst of it all there is an Empty Tomb – empty because Christ has emerged from it eternally and fully alive. Whatever the darkness there – or in our hearts – he announces the message of hope: “Do not fear! I have overcome the world!”

To accept the Cape of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem is solemnly to commit ourselves to announcing that message of hope by the way of life we lead as Catholic women and men and by the steps we take to bring hope to the Holy Land.

In the midst of this Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy, and at the high point of the Church's liturgical year, Knights and Dames would do well to review the intensity both of a) our personal faith and b) our commitment to the goals of our Order.

a) As members of the Order we are seen in the public eye as Catholic leaders – and expected to be such by the Church, as evidenced by our personal lives:

- how intense is our sacramental life as seen in a notable devotion to the Mass and the Blessed Sacrament as well as in frequent participation in the Sacrament of Reconciliation?
- are we growing personally in our knowledge of and full commitment to Christ teachings and discipline?
- how active are we in the programs of our parish and diocese, especially in carrying out the spiritual and corporal works of mercy?

b) We have also taken upon ourselves further commitments, especially as regards to the Holy Land:

- in what ways are we contributing to “breaking the bars of death” driving out hatred and fostering concord there?
- is our Lieutenancy up to date on the status and struggles of our Christian brethren there and what are we doing to bring these to the attention of our membership?

- when appropriate, do we wear our capes and insignia at local Church functions (e.g. Good Friday) and make available to fellow Catholics information about the Order and its spiritual and material support of our suffering fellow Christians there?
- what are we doing to attract younger members and to involve them in the activities of the Order?

Along with our Governor General and others in our central staff, I am uniquely aware of the genuine striving for holiness on the part of members throughout the world. With Patriarch Fouad Twal we are impressed and inspired by the zeal of so many in keeping the flame of Faith alive in the Holy Land.

Thank you!

In establishing the Holy Year of Mercy, Pope Francis centered on Jesus and his mission then and now:

The signs he works, especially in favor of sinners, the poor, the marginalized, the sick and the suffering, are all meant to teach mercy. Everything in him speaks of mercy. Nothing in him is devoid of compassion.

May this be said as well of our Order of the Holy Sepulchre and each of our members.

A Blessed Easter Season.

Edwin Cardinal O'Brien

(March 15, 2016)