



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

At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land

The 2015 Autumn Meeting of the Grand Magisterium



Members of the Grand Magisterium surround the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem following morning Mass celebrated in Palazzo della Rovere, Rome

On November 10 and 11, members of the Grand Magisterium gathered in Rome together with the Grand Master of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, Cardinal Edwin O'Brien, and with the presence of the Grand Prior, His Beatitude Msgr. Fouad Twal, Patriarch of Jerusalem. They prayed together and entrusted the inhabitants of the Holy Land to Our Lady of Palestine, whose icon is found in one of the rooms in the Palazzo della Rovere (Palace of the Rovere, Rome) where every morning Mass was celebrated before all seated proceedings.

On the first day Cardinal O'Brien spoke of his latest visits to the Lieutenancies in various countries such as Denmark, Slovenia, France, the United Kingdom and Australia. He furthermore announced his intention to travel, in the future, to Guam, the Philippines and Taiwan. The Grand Master insisted on the necessity of continuing the allocation of funds for individuals fleeing from the Middle East who are pouring into parts of the territory of the Latin Patriarchate in Jordan. He also reiterated the importance of the initiatives undertaken by Lieutenants in marking the participation of the Order in the Jubilee of Mercy in dioceses, encouraging local pilgrimages according to the instructions indicated in the Bull of Indiction of the Holy Year, *Misericordiae Vultus*.

The Governor Agostino Borromeo then gave a few words, extending a special greeting to Mary O'Brien, an American and presently the only female member of the Grand Magisterium. Agostino Borromeo likewise made mention of the first meeting in Australia of the Lieutenants and Magistral Delegates of Asia and Oceania, emphasizing the capacity for expansion of the Order that for some years now has not ceased to grow. He also informed the Grand Magisterium of a decision of the Italian Corte di Cassazione (Court of Appeals) that would soon allow the renovation of the management of the hotel, which thus far is entrusted to the Columbus society, to the benefit of the activity that aids the Holy Land.

The Priority of the Support of Persons: “Living Rocks”

For his part Patriarch Twal made a point of the situation of countries where he has pastoral responsibilities (Palestine, Jordan, Cyprus and Israel) and his displeasure over some of the episodes that have damaged the will to dialogue – such as the construction of the separation wall in the Cremisan Valley – and yet his joy in the educational and social action of the Patriarchate, something made possible through the support of the Order, to confront a “crisis that seems to have no end.”

Currently, the Middle Eastern migrants number twenty million, forty-two thousand each day. Those who arrive in Jordan benefit from the educational standards for their children, often in the Catholic schools of the Patriarchate, where Christians and Muslims live out a “meeting of cultures” on a daily basis. Speaking of these nearly fifty Christian schools in the Holy Land, the General Administrator for the Patriarchate, Father Imad Twal, presented the 2015 budget and forecasts for 2016, carefully noting that up to this point the Israeli government, which seeks to assume all schools into the national system, no longer guarantees regular subsidies, but only what is extraordinary. This is something that renders the entire system fragile.

Following a discussion, the Grand Magisterium approved sending thirty-five thousand dollars more per month to the Patriarchate for the schools and institutions like parishes and the minor and major seminary. “The formation of local clergy is essential”, the Patriarch underlined. He furthermore reminded all that the schools in the city and villages of the Holy Land are peculiar in that they depend directly on the parishes.

On behalf of the Holy Land Commission in charge of projects, Heinrich Dickmann added that supporting people, the “living rocks”, is more and more a priority, as is the better coordination of assistance in a quinquennial plan. Thomas McKiernan, president of the Holy Land Commission, presented said Commission’s report and valorized three projects: a children’s playground in Jaffa in Nazareth, the church of Marj el Hamam in Jordan and the multicultural pastoral center Our Lady of Peace near Amam, which also carries out humanitarian work. The report also gave a summary of the Commission’s visit that took place during the month of October. During this visit there were profitable ideas exchanged for the future, in particular with those in charge of structures that deal with education and health.

Bartholomew McGettrick, one of the three members of the Commission, placed emphasis on the necessary task of supporting the formation of the Christian community, which has been rendered quite weak, so that they might continue to play a role of mediation in resolving injustices.

At the conclusion of the session on November 10, engineer Pier Carlo Visconti presented a provisory budget of the Grand Magisterium’s accounts where it was shown that since January 2015 almost ten million dollars have been already sent to the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, of which this year a remarkable and enormous gift of one million dollars came from the United States.

The project of a continental meeting in Asia

The second day of proceedings, concluded with the traditional friendly and brotherly reception in honor of Our Lady of Palestine, began with a report on the schools of the Patriarchate that have recorded deficits. Father Imad Twal showed in all clarity the importance of this parish and academic channel for the Christian minority. Muslim children who grow up here build friendships that will bear fruit for all of society in the future. The Gaza Strip, for example, holds three schools of the Patriarchate whereas Catholics number at only 130 out of almost two million inhabitants.

“At the heart of our mission we are pastoral and at the service of dialogue by means of education,” said Patriarch Twal, to which Cardinal O’Brien publicly manifested his support in favor of the social impact of the Christian presence in the Holy Land. The salaries and pensions of professors must continue to be adequate and this cannot be a disregarded challenge. This was followed by a report on the work in Gaza that demonstrated how above all emergencies must be addressed because reconstruction is tied to a peace accord between two parties in conflict.

The next item of the day was an account given by Paul Bartley of what has happened during the first meeting in Australia of the Lieutenants of Asia and Oceania, once again stating the idea of an upcoming meeting in Singapore to specifically grow closer to the Lieutenants of the Philippines and Taiwan. He underlined the importance of maintaining the relationships between the Grand Magisterium and the farthest geographic Lieutenancies from Rome for the better circulation of news.

Msgr. Antonio Franco, Assessor of the Order, then brought to the attention of the members of the Grand Magisterium the current situation of the Saint John the Baptist Vatican Foundation (Fondazione Vaticana San Giovanni Battista) for culture and formation in the Middle East. This pontifical Foundation was born in May 2015 and, presided over by Cardinal O’Brien, has already found ways for the reduction of the deficit of the University of Madaba. In this sense it continues in its work, leading negotiations with banks, and yet there is still much more to be done.

Lastly, the Chancellor Ivan Rebernik provided the details of the statistics of the Order, which welcomed 1,164 new Knights and Dames in 2014. He described the work of the Communications Service that is creating a new internet site for the Grand Magisterium. He also spoke of the work undertaken to increase the space for the paper archives of the Order. He furthermore suggested and encouraged the creation of a documentation service for the Order in the future.

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