



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

At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land

Taking care of the Body of Christ

Dear Friends,

For Lent, a time in preparation for Easter, let us listen to a reflection taken from "And the whole house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment," (cfr. pag. 15-18), a text of spirituality that draws from the source of the mystery of Jesus' death and resurrection. It can be a good viaticum on our journey to stimulate us to a deeper reflection.

With the mind, we go to Bethany where a gesture took place that will be remembered forever.

Six days before the Jewish Passover, we find Jesus in Bethany, a village not far from Jerusalem, in the house of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. These friends offered Him a dinner. Lazarus was alive again. After an illness had dragged him into death and after he had been buried for four days, Lazarus had been brought back to life by Jesus. While at dinner, *"Mary took a pound of costly ointment of pure nard and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was to betray him), said, 'Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?' his he said, not that he cared for the poor but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box he used to take what was put into it. Jesus said, 'Let her alone, let her keep it for the day of my burial.'"* (Jn 12:3-5, 7).

Jesus is looking beyond that moment. Mary of Bethany will no longer have the opportunity to show her affection for the Master, and the Master accepts that gesture for the day of His burial. In fact, the Resurrection will anticipate every other gesture of the women who, after the Jewish Passover, would go to complete the anointing of the body of the Lord.

The encounter with the person of Jesus, sacramentally in baptism and existentially in the life choices we have made (marriage, religious life, work, social relationships) allows us to continue the same work of Mary of Bethany — that is, for us also to anoint the Body of Christ, which is the Church, in which Jesus now lives. I refer to the Church in its universal and local reality, but in particular, to its faithful, pilgrims, refugees, and poor whom Jesus left to us (*"For you always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me"* [Jn 12:8]), in order to contribute in some way to the good and the religious and social peace that is so necessary today in time of strong individualism, personal claims, indifference and violences.

Every Christian, therefore, continues the same work of Mary of Bethany, taking to heart the person of Jesus living in the Church. Knowing this "Body of the Lord" and taking care of it in its limbs is the high privilege that every baptized person can assume.

In truth, now more than ever, we need to care for this «Body of Christ», wounded today by incalculable violence, all the more painful when it occurs at the hands of those who were once part of it. Twisted

and moralistic reasonings have no place, just as Jesus immediately dismissed Judas' hypocritical reasoning.

It is fundamental for every Christian to understand that the Church in the world, as desired and understood by Christ and left to us by the Apostles, is an authentic *"sacrament, or a sign, or an instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race."* (*Lumen Gentium* 1). It is necessary to give back to this Body its supernatural fullness, against the many attempts to trap it simply in a sociological and horizontal perspective without a future.

The sacramentality of the Church touches its most intimate and profound nature, that is, the awareness that it has of itself, infused by Christ, which makes it not a mere human organization, but a gift of God for mankind with a spiritual and moral mission. At the same time, so that it is an instrument of peace and union between peoples, it is devoid of ideological, political, or military calculations.

Therefore, being Church means participating in the mission of salvation entrusted to it by Jesus while, at the same time, being at the service of men and women, all the more in times of anxiety, social changes, and imbalances that often violate dignity, freedom, and the human person itself.

Fernando Cardinal Filoni

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