



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

*At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land*

How can we be authentic witnesses of the love of Christ with our non-Christian brothers?



The Knight Mark poses this question (a summary): *As members of the Order ... we have received the gift of being able to concretely encounter Christ not only in our Christian brothers and sisters but also in sharing with our brothers and sisters of other religions and non-believers ... How can we nourish a fraternal dialogue with people who do not profess our faith.... and be authentic witnesses of unconditional love?*

Dialogue requires the meeting of two or more people. It is necessary when we have different opinions or beliefs. The only alternative to dialogue, is ignorance of the other, or conflict and oppression. Dialogue does not require that I lead the other to 'my' way of thinking; but that I understand them, their point of view and their needs. It is not a question of uniformity, but of having a respectful attitude, devoid of prejudice. The truth, in fact, cannot be imposed, only proposed. We should say that truth "imposes itself by itself", however it is not always evident or recognized, especially if we consider the diversity of cultures and formation.

Dialogue grows on a respectful journey undertaken together; usually with small steps. Faith also grows with small steps. Jesus does not ask to be believed by simple affirmation, but he appeals, for example to good works, to fruits.

A Dame and a Knight, through their adhesion to the Mystery of Christ have an interior attitude that predisposes them to the meekness of Christ in their relationships with others. Even in the time of Jesus there were not only co-religionists in the Jewish faith, there were pagans, there were Greeks, people from Mesopotamia, from Phoenicia, from Syria, from the Arab regions. Jesus does not avoid

them, rather he speaks, listens and performs extraordinary signs also in their favor. One cannot forget the praise that Jesus expressed for the Canaanite woman who insistently appealed for help for her child "*tormented by a demon*" (Mt 15:22 and ff.); Jesus appeared to dismiss her roughly; in reality he was fostering her faith: "*Lord help me! ... even dogs feed on the crumbs that fall from their owners' table. ...*" Jesus replied: "*Woman, your faith is truly great!*" Dialogue is a meeting.

Palestine is and remains a meeting ground of ethnic and faith multiplicity; always. This is so even today. When there is no dialogue and respect, violence explodes. We cannot live in eternal struggle. I lived in the Middle East and the question I was often asked implied dialogue and respect.

Since the time of the Second Vatican Council, dialogue with the Christian Churches has become an irrevocable step; it was desired in various times and ways and became an integral part of the life of the Catholic Church with the conciliar decree *Unitatis Redintegratio*; at the same time, with the Declaration *Nostra Aetate*, the Council also felt it was its duty to promote relations with non-Christian religions and in particular with Jews and Muslims, since all men are created in the image of God. Moreover, regarding the Jews, the Council underlined the close bond of the Christians with the lineage of Abraham, to which "*Christ according to the flesh*" (Rom 9: 5), Mary, the Mother of Jesus, the Apostles and the early Church, belong, decrying at the same time, "*hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone*" (NA 4). Concerning Islam, the Council noted that the Church "*regards with esteem also the Moslems. They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself; merciful and all- powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to men*", and urged "*all to forget the past and to work sincerely for mutual understanding and to preserve as well as to promote together for the benefit of all mankind social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom*" (NA3).

Abu Dhabi's "Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together" (February 4, 2019) moved in that direction. We can therefore believe that the Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem is placed in the same vein, in a convinced and positive way, also taking into account what Pope Francis has recognized to our Order: "*It is a good sign that your initiatives in the field of training and health care are open to all, regardless of the communities they belong to and the religion they profess. In this way you help pave the way to make Christian values known, to the promotion of interreligious dialogue, mutual respect and mutual understanding. In other words, with your commendable commitment, you too offer your contribution to build the path that will lead, as we all hope, to the achievement of peace throughout the region.*" (Address to the Members of the Consulta of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, November 16, 2018).

**Fernando Cardinal Filoni**

*Grand Master*

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