



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

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

## Consecrated life and the Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem



Historical document kept by the Poor Clares in Nardò (Province of Lecce, Italy) and certifying that, in 1677, Sister Clare of Jesus, a Servant of the Lord, had joined the 'Confraternity of Holy Places in Jerusalem', animated by the Franciscan religious in the Kingdom of Naples.

**Over the years, spurred on by some manifestations of interest on the part of religious who wondered whether, and possibly how, to become part of our Pontifical Institution, the Order has raised the question of their possible membership within its own ranks. In the past, in some cases, they have been given an honour but is it not possible to think of alternative ways? Now the Grand Master wishes to start a discussion on this subject inspired by the story of the Venerable Sister Clare of Jesus.**

At the end of August, on the occasion of the visit that I usually make to the Poor Clares of Nardò (Lecce), this year, meeting the small community of one of the oldest monasteries of Poor Clares (1256), we talked about the Venerable Mystic Sister Clare of Jesus, born Isabella D'Amato (1618-1693), Servant of God, whose cause for beatification is in progress.

She offers us a beautiful image of a consecrated woman who, leaving the comfort of the noble family, dedicated her life to prayer and friendship with the poor and suffering Christ. Love for the cross of Christ led Sister Clare to an intimate spiritual relationship, experiencing the Cross in her own inner life, as the mystical gift of the Lord, the mystery of suffering and His love.

The sisters then asked me about the activity of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre in the Holy Land; one of them told me: "Do you know that among the papers belonging to the Venerable, we found her adhesion to an Association in favour of the Holy Land?". Intrigued, I asked for the reproduction of the document you see in the photo.

In fact, it is about Sister Chiara's adhesion to the "Fraternity of the Holy Sites of Jerusalem", organized by the Franciscans in the Kingdom of Naples; in 1677 Sister Chiara di Gesù was admitted among the benefactors of the Holy Land, beneficiary at the same time "of many spiritual goods, and of many Sacrifices celebrated in the same places consecrated with the priestly Blood of our most compassionate Jesus".

Since the beginning of my mandate as Grand Master of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem I have wondered why among the Members of the Order, in addition to lay men (Knights) and lay women (Dames), bishops (Grand Priors), priests and men religious (as Priors, chaplains and members), there are no women religious (although, it seems, with some rare exceptions).

Our Order has a profound spirituality which has its roots in the great mystery of the Redemption; moreover, it has a participatory commitment in generosity (financial donations) towards the Patriarchal Church of Jerusalem and its works, developing numerous initiatives of friendship and spiritual solidarity towards the communities that inhabit the Land of Jesus.

Since women religious (and the same can be said for men religious) because of the vow of poverty cannot fulfil the financial commitment in a stable and ex-proprio way, they are prevented from participation in our Order.

One wonders if, as many as they wish and with respect for the charism proper to each religious institute, the possibility of adhering to our commitment to the Land of Jesus by making their rich spiritual contribution cannot be foreseen. Sister Clare of Jesus is an example in this direction that can inspire us. Her Franciscan spirituality, her asceticism towards the Cross of the Lord, her deep love for Christ crucified, her prayer, show us that there is a space to offer to women religious in our Order, expecting from them the spiritual contribution and the richness that they can bring with prayer to the good of the Holy Land, to peace in that Region, to coexistence between communities in a spirit of true brotherhood.

Furthermore, it should not be forgotten that many religious institutes, both male and female, are already present in the Holy Land and work with great commitment and generosity in the Church and in the composite society of that Region.

Any openness, with an adequate formula, to religious cannot fail to enrich the commitment entrusted to us by the Apostolic See in a context of inclusiveness that gives the idea of a body that acts in unison. In fact, a large number of female religious institutes operating in the Land of Jesus have the support of our Order in pastoral, educational and charitable institutions of great depth.

In this space for dialogue inaugurated through the Grand Master's Corner, it therefore seems appropriate to share these thoughts with you and to welcome your observations and suggestions.

**Fernando Cardinal Filoni**

*(October 1, 2020)*

