



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

At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land

Saint Peter in Gallicantu and the last night of Jesus



There are spiritual places that speak to us in a particular way and that become places of the heart in our journey of faith.

The church of Saint Peter in Gallicantu is a Roman Catholic Church located on the eastern slope of Mount Zion, just outside the Old (walled) City of Jerusalem. The word “Gallicantu” comes from the Latin and evokes the place where “the rooster sang”, as narrated by the Gospel story of the evening of the arrest and condemnation of Jesus: “The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: “Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times.” And he went outside and wept bitterly “(Lk 22: 61-62). This was the site of the palace of the High Priest Caiaphas.

The current church that dates back to the early decades of the 20th century is built on the foundations of the ancient Byzantine and Crusader churches. Probably the most revered square meters of this sacred place are those of the cave which tradition has identified as the place where Jesus was sent down to wait until he appeared before the Sanhedrin to be condemned.

The members of the Order who talk about their pilgrimage, when they talk about this “pit” cannot fail to do so without a certain emotion. Guillaume Angier de Lohéac is a young Knight of the Lieutenancy for France who discovered this place more than 10 years ago when he came to Jerusalem for an internship at the Assumptionist house, the religious community that runs the sanctuary. “This holy place is edifying. The more time I spent here, the more I realize the depth of the mystery of our salvation. Here we remember not only Peter’s denial and Christ’s forgiveness but also the denial of the Son of God by the Sanhedrin and his descent into the pit. The prison under the crypt of the church is a moving place where pilgrims pray Psalm 88: ‘You have put me in the lowest pit; [...] I am confined and cannot escape.’ (Ps 88:7.9)“

Maria José Fernández Martín is Dame Commander of the Order. This summer she accompanied a group of young people on a pilgrimage and volunteer experience organized by the Lieutenancy for Western Spain. She speaks of the moment of prayer that they experienced in the place of Christ's imprisonment: "As we descended the stairs, the silence grew. The young people drew closer together as if the strength of the place asked them to. I approached the pulpit and read Psalm 22: 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish? My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest.' (Ps 21: 2-3). Silence enveloped the cave. There was no need for great explanations. Everyone understood the importance of the place we were in".

Outside the church, we recalled the episode of Peter's denial and the exchange of glances between the apostle and the Master. "Peter who denies Jesus three times in the courtyard brought tears to my eyes while I was in the place where this event took place – confirms Joan Bridges of the USA Northern Lieutenancy – for two reasons: the first is the pain that this must have caused our Lord while he was looking at Peter when the rooster sang after the third denial and the second is the pain that Peter must have felt for having denied Jesus in that moment of great suffering". However, there is also another historical place that touches the heart of the pilgrim: the path that Jesus certainly travelled from Gethsemane to the house of Caiaphas.

Saul and Christy Eiva of the USA Northeastern Lieutenancy say: "Outside the church of Saint Peter in Gallicantu we heard the story of Jesus' agony from the Gospel according to Luke. From where we were, we saw on the other side the Cedron Valley, the Mount of Olives and the Garden of Gethsemane. Then we realized how Jesus could see the soldiers gathering with their torches and weapons outside the palace of Caiaphas where we were. Jesus would have had about 45 minutes to turn around and escape to the other side of the mountain. But he chose to stay, suffer and die for us ... The steps of the ancient Roman road that crosses the valley are still here and Jesus must have climbed them to go to the palace. How incredible is God's love for us and how touching it was to listen to the events of that night."

Elena Dini

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