



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

At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land

The first major celebration presided over by the new Grand Master of the Order



Accompanied by the high dignitaries of our pontifical institution, the Italian Lieutenants and the Knights and Dames of Rome, Cardinal Fernando Filoni celebrated Mass on February 1 at the Church of Santo Spirito in Sassia, located in front of Palazzo della Rovere, headquarters of the Grand Magisterium of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, to begin his mission as Grand Master in prayer.

For the occasion, many members of the Order and friends gathered around him in the crowded church to entrust the Lord with his ministry and the path of the Order in the coming years.

After the Eucharistic celebration, His Eminence met all the participants in Palazzo della Rovere, greeting each one personally.

Below is the homily delivered on the occasion of his first public mass as Grand Master.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

From the first moment of my appointment to lead our Order, I have wished to meet you to pray and ask God for the gift of light and His grace.

Reflecting on our special mission or calling in the Church, my thoughts went to the Gospel passages which narrate the vocation of the disciples of Jesus: in fact with them he initiated a profound human relationship and the process of their formation and his revelation. In Matthew's Gospel it is said that

the Lord "saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew... *"Come, follow me,"* Jesus said, *"... Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. Jesus called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him."*(Mt 4:18-19.21.23); And Jesus *"saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him."*(Mt 9:9). Jesus encounters them each where life has placed them and they have exchanged gazes forever.

Therefore, I like to think that our call to the Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem is the result of an encounter and a call in which we have been, so to speak, scrutinized and chosen; just as Mary of Magdala at the empty sepulchre; there the gaze and the unmistakable voice of the risen Jesus immediately led her to cry out: *"Rabboni!"* (which means *"Teacher"*); yes, he was not the gardener, but the living Master! (cf Jn 20:14-17). But what restlessness, what agitation of the heart and mind!

The same may be said of Paul - while going to Damascus to arrest Christians - was closely scrutinized by the Lord; from that interior experience, from that encounter with the Risen One, he, the persecutor, perceived the grace and obtained the force that changed his life, becoming the greatest preacher among the pagans.

Dear Dames and Knights of the Holy Sepulchre, the thought that each one has been looked upon and loved by the Lord at a particular moment in our life and that his gaze has marked our hearts, allows us to reflect on the sense of our belonging to the Order.

We belong to it not by inheritance of family or class, but because we are called by the One who became the watershed in human history; the "empty sepulchre" we could say, is the point and place where two stories meet: the story of the 'ignominious' and 'unjust' end inflicted on a man who had done good, but who had become cumbersome in the eyes of religious leaders and the power of Rome, and the story of Peter, John, Mary of Magdala and others who saw his empty tomb, but above all recognized the risen Jesus. This story continues to us; it has not been exhausted.

In front of that empty sepulchre and the encounter with the living Christ, the greatest transformation of humanity had occurred and unthinkable scenarios were opened up regarding the coexistence between peoples, social relationships, the dimensions of the spirit, the meaning of our existence. History would never be the same again. Human beings found themselves judged by the mystery of the cross and resurrection: love was redefined, good and evil knew their clear point of separation, grace and truth, shown in Christ, revealed the merciful face of God (cf. Jn 1:17-18).

With the discovery of the empty sepulchre, which had aroused amazement and dismay, and then in the encounter with the Risen One, who restored inner peace and brought immense joy (cf. Jn 20:20), the adventure of the 'Christian' faith began.

It is still useful for us to listen again to the strong testimony of Peter and the other Disciples, who cry incredulously to Thomas: *"We have seen the Lord!"* (Jn 20:29-25); it is precisely from his disbelief, in which humiliation and faith were intertwined, the last beatitude of Jesus was born that will accompany the life of every believer: *"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed!"* (Jn 20:29).

It is with the same faith, humble and reassuring in the Risen One, that, in harmony with today's Gospel, we would then like to enter the boat of which the Gospel speaks; we are not referring here to a material boat, rather to the boat of life's journey that navigates in the restless waters of the heart and mind: it does not matter if in navigating our lives there will sometimes be a boring calm and it appears meaningless; it does not matter if we are shaken as if by a storm due to an impetuous and destructive wind; it does not even matter if sometimes it seems that the boat is about to capsize or

fill up with water, while fear would lead us to cry out: "*Teacher do you not care if we drown?*" (Mk 4:38), if the Risen One is with us.

Having the Risen One in the little boat of our life or in the big boat of the Church, knowing that He has promised to protect us from the evil one (cf. Jn 17:15) and in truth (cf. Jn 17:17), this is a guarantee for us and certainty that at the right moment Jesus will threaten the waves and will cry to the wind: "*Quiet! Be still!*" (Mk 4:39).

As Dames and Knights of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, we set out from the same place where Peter, John, Mary of Magdala and the others set out for the world; that is, from that empty sepulchre and from the encounter with Christ, our hope and our intimate joy, we know that He gives meaning to our existence and we will be witnesses of the living Lord.

My most cordial greetings, my gratitude and my prayer, to all of you present here, and to all the great family of Dames and Knights of the world. The purpose of our existence in the life of the Church, consolidated several times by the Supreme Pontiffs, is to ensure that the Gospel continues to resonate in the Land where there are many sacred places, and that the work of charity, support for cultural and social institutions and defence of the rights of those who live there remain alive.

These aims guide us back to the New Testament root of our commitment in the Holy Land. We know that the first Christians of Antioch, due to the serious famine that occurred between 49-50, "under the empire of Claudius", with commendable zeal "*decided to provide help for the brothers and sisters living in Judea. This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.*" (Acts 11:27-30). It was a gesture of high solidarity, nonetheless of those that Paul had also asked of the Churches of Galatia and Corinth (1 Cor 16, 1-4) and that offered by the Christians of Macedonia; these, despite "their extreme poverty", had shown great generosity: "*For I testify* - writes the Apostle in his second Letter to the Corinthians - *that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people*" (2 Cor 8:1-6). A splendid attitude to want to take part in the help of Christians in Palestine!

In all those gestures, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, we find - I like to repeat it - the root of our work and the purpose that the Supreme Pontiffs wanted to assign us. We must never forget that charity and solidarity qualify the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre and we are honored to have them as our characteristics in favor of the Patriarchal Church of Jerusalem and of the many brothers and sisters in need who live in that Land; A land blessed by the Most High, but also in need of peace.

Thank you for your presence; thank you for your generosity. Thanks for your prayers. May the Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of Palestine protect you, we entrust ourselves to her, and the Most High bless you. Amen.