



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

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

## Prayer, gratitude and friendship: three gifts for this Christmas



Altar of the Greccio Grotto, known as the "second Bethlehem" or the "Franciscan Bethlehem" because on Christmas Eve 1223 St. Francis created the first living nativity scene in history. "In that scene simplicity is honoured, poverty is exalted, humility is praised" wrote Tommaso da Celano, in his biography of St. Francis "Vita Prima", reflecting on the meaning of the sacred Christmas representation desired by the Saint in 1223 on his return from the Holy Land.

Christmas is a day of recollection and prayer. If we are to remain within the true and profound meaning of the *dies natalis* of the Christ child, we need to cultivate this attitude. Prayer is a gift of faith.

When a child is born there is not only the trepidation of waiting, there is not only the joy for a new life that has blossomed, there is also gratitude. If it is true that parents contribute to the creation of the new living being, it is equally true that there is also a divine spark that operates in the mystery of life: "Light from light" we profess in the Creed. Gratitude is a gift of the heart.

To pray is to show gratitude to God for Jesus Christ, the Word of God incarnate.

So we need to pray, thinking of our families, the crises we experience at work, our relationships that have been profoundly altered by the pandemic. And then to the many crises in the world: the violence in many regions of Africa, Asia, the Middle East and in the Land of Christ itself. I ask you all to cultivate an attitude of inner prayer.

In fact, Christmas impels us to rekindle our convergence to Jesus Our Lord, Our Saviour and Redeemer, the cornerstone of all human destinies (Paul VI).

Our friendship as Members of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem is rooted in the mystery of Christ's Incarnation. This permits us to experience "being-together" on a daily basis, something that is difficult and complex in a world full of so many political obstacles, social and ideological barriers, and today by the intense and complicated necessity for physical and social distancing.

Friendship is a divine gift. Jesus says to the disciples: "You are my friends" (Jn 15:14); and the Disciples learned to look at each other and to act by keeping their gaze fixed on the Master who first became a friend. Christmas is the manifestation of God's friendship with us. This gift, therefore, has a reference to Christ and, as Members of the Order, is manifested in a special way in the exercise of charity towards the Holy Land.

Due to restrictions, we cannot reach Bethlehem as pilgrims, but it remains the symbolic and spiritual place towards which to turn our gaze. Yes, God's life among us began there, and ideally we too go there, as encouraged by the Angels who appeared to the shepherds.

So let us go to Bethlehem with these gifts to encounter and learn of God's humility and friendship (Benedict XVI).

I wish you all a merry and peaceful Christmas.

**Fernando Cardinal Filoni**

*(December 18, 2020)*