



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

At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land

"If you have ever wondered if our Order makes a difference, I can assure you that it does"

Reflections by Father John Bateman, priest-secretary to the Grand Master, at the end of his time of service in Rome



In a recent article I mentioned how coming to Rome and becoming a member of the Order truly was led by God. The blessings that God has showered upon me over these past 3 ½ years are clear evidence of the Lord's presence and direction. Now, as I complete my time of service to the Grand Master as his priest-secretary and to the Order, it is an opportune moment to share my reflections on the wonderful experiences in which God has deigned to allow me to participate.

The Universal Church. One of the wonderful things about our Grand Master is that he is always "out there" among the Lieutenancies and members of the Order. Because of his desire to personally visit as many Lieutenancies as possible, travel has been a normal part of life. But it is not tourist trips but always pastoral and spiritual journeys that have allowed me to gain a tremendous experience of the world-wide Church. Visiting the Lieutenancies and Magistral Delegations throughout Italy and Europe, in South Africa and South America, in Australia, Asia and North America has enabled me to see the One, Holy, Catholic Church as her Faithful live the Faith in their particular cultural and historical situations. Yet, through it all, despite differences of culture and language, we are One Body in Christ (*cf.* 1 Cor 12:12-27).

Fraternal Love and support. We all know how difficult it can be to be a stranger in a strange land. But for us, as members of the Order, this is never the case. Amongst our Knights and Ladies there is an immediate connection that unites us with one another. Certainly that is first and foremost the Holy Eucharist (as the Eucharist unites all Catholics). But as members of the Order that Eucharistic union is further enriched by our common purpose and mission: personal holiness and love for the people of Jesus' Holy Land. Being with others who take their faith seriously and ever strive for greater personal sanctity encourages *me* to strive even harder. I have had the unique and special opportunity to meet so many of *YOU* who have, unknowingly, given me wonderful and encouraging examples of

the constant quest for holiness (the true vocation of every Christian). Seeing the sacrifices that our members make for others, without any thought of self, has helped me to grow in love for our brothers and sisters who live in difficult circumstances in the Holy Land.

Pilgrimage. Every journey these past years has truly been a pilgrimage. Celebrating the Investiture and the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in every continent has made every trip a spiritual one. But of course, as the Equestrian Order, one of our greatest joys (and responsibilities) is also to make pilgrimage to the Holy Land. How, after seeing the parishes and meeting her people, after comforting the sick and elderly, after talking with the students of Bethlehem University and the Patriarchate schools, after visiting the Holy Stones and the Living Stones... after all of this, how could our lives not be changed? My pilgrimages to the Holy Land, both those with the Cardinal and Grand Magisterium staff and my own personal pilgrimages, have opened my eyes and my heart to a greater Faith and deeper love and concern for the Christians of the Holy Land.

The Institutional Church. Living in Rome is a unique experience in itself. To be so close to our Holy Father and the tombs of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul (my confirmation patron) and to so many saints who lived, worked and died in Rome has helped me to better love the Church. It can seem to many to be a bureaucratic structure, and certainly that exists because we are human beings in need of a structure. But what most are not able to see or experience is the humanity of the Church: so many men and women, priests and religious, who work diligently and faithfully to build up and provide for the needs of the Church. Certainly this applies to our staff at the Grand Magisterium, whose tireless labors make possible all that our Order is able to do to support our Christian brothers and sisters. But it also applies to everyone who works for the Church and the Curia. My experiences here in Rome have allowed me to see the love and sincere concern to help provide for the needs of God's people from every part of the world.

Resolve. Completing my assignment with the Order and returning to my Diocese as a member of the Order, I could not be more committed to the work of the Order. As a priest, I have heard and understand our Grand Master's insistence that we priest-members not just wear a mozzetta and signs of dignity, but that we take on an additional responsibility to provide for the spiritual needs of the members of our Lieutenancies, Magistral Delegations and Sections. I can't wait to get involved in my own Lieutenancy (USA Eastern) when I return home.

Gratitude. Through it all, is a profound sense of gratitude: First, gratitude to God for having called me to this task and responsibility; Gratitude for all of you whom I have been privileged to meet and to serve and to be inspired by your love and commitment; personal gratitude to our Grand Master, Cardinal O'Brien, whose humility, spirituality and love have helped to continue forming my priestly-heart.

If you have ever wondered if our Order makes a difference, I can assure you that it can and it does—if we fully engage in the activities and projects of our local Lieutenancies and when we gather together, as fellow pilgrims, at the Eucharistic Table of the Lord. It is there, either here on earth or in the blessedness of heaven, that I look forward to meeting you all once again.

Father John Bateman

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