



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

At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land

Msgr. Giuseppe Lazzarotto: “My heart is always in Jerusalem”

A great Church diplomat at the service of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre



With Pope Francis’ approval, Grand Master Cardinal Edwin O’Brien has appointed Msgr. Giuseppe Lazzarotto Assessor of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre. The position was previously held by Msgr. Antonio Franco, who had asked to be replaced having reached the age of retirement. The new Assessor – who can be called to replace the Grand Master should the latter suffer an impediment or pass away – served for five years as Apostolic Nuncio in Israel and Apostolic Delegate in Jerusalem and Palestine. His mandate ended in August 2017. Msgr. Lazzarotto knows the Order well, having been a member for about fifteen years.

“I have a visceral love for the Holy Land and its inhabitants,” confided the new Assessor of the Order, as he recalls his first experience in that land in 1982-1984, when he was secretary for the Apostolic Delegation in Jerusalem, after a period spent at the Nunciature in Cuba. “Then I worked for ten years in Rome, at the second section of the Secretariat of State, for foreign relations, where I met the future **Cardinal Pietro Parolin**, who was still a young official” he points out. Like the current Holy See Secretary of State, Monsignor Lazzarotto is originally from the province of Vicenza and the birthplaces of both men, where the same dialect is spoken, are just a few kilometres distant from each other.

After Rome, this great Church diplomat was sent on mission by the Pope as **Apostolic Nuncio to Iraq** and also as the **first Nuncio to Jordan** after the famous Oslo agreements of 1993 defined relations between Israel and Jordan. “Since Jordan belonged to the territory of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, I had numerous contacts with the Order of the Holy Sepulchre,” he says affably. “The situation in Iraq was difficult, because of international sanctions, but Christians freely lived their faith in peace,” he adds. He was soon to witness of a series of tragic Western decisions that shook the Middle East and forced millions of refugees of diverse confessions to flee.

Six years later, Monsignor Lazzarotto left for **Ireland**, where the local Lieutenancy wanted him to **enter the Order**. The diploma was signed by Cardinal Carlo Furno – Grand Master of the time – who had been a Professor to the new member at the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy. The then Archbishop of Armagh – future Cardinal Sean Brady – celebrated the Investiture.

During his seven years in Ireland, the new member of the Order established **beautiful spiritual friendships with Knights and Dames**. Then it was time to leave again, for **Australia**, where he continued to care for members of the Order, especially at the annual meeting organized in the federal capital Canberra on Palm Sunday.

He describes his great and joyful surprise to be **recalled to Jerusalem** six years ago, and how he made his solemn entry into the Holy Sepulchre on November 25, 2012, the eve of the entry to the Holy Sepulchre also of Cardinal O'Brien, who had just been appointed to the office of Grand Master by Pope Benedict XVI. **"I met the Grand Master of the Order** on that occasion, without imagining that one day I would become his right-hand man in Rome", commented Msgr. Lazzarotto, now fully available to assume the role of Assessor. In fact, he lives in Rome, not far from the Grand Magisterium, in a house where several retired nuncios continue to offer their important contribution to the Holy See.

His episcopal motto, **"In virtute Spiritus"** – which can be translated "in the power of the Spirit" – evokes the baptism of Christ in the River Jordan, as well as the mission of the first disciples who followed the Lamb of God with boldness and courage until gift of his life for all men, in Jerusalem.

"Today – in a complicated international context concerning the question of Jerusalem – **apostolic courage consists in fostering a bilateral dialogue, with the participation of the international community**", emphasizes the Assessor of the Order, an expert advocate of the position of the Holy See on this issue: "The two-state solution, respecting the status quo and 1967 borders." "Everything is linked to Jerusalem – the religious, social and political aspect – and therefore the utmost delicacy is required, in order to preserve the balance and the sacred character of the holy city for three great monotheistic religions."

When he was Nuncio in Israel, Monsignor Lazzarotto worked hard on the **agreement between this country and the Holy See** regarding the places of worship and the taxation of religious institutes that have a commercial activity, a planned continuation of the fundamental agreement signed in 1993. "This desired **final agreement is almost concluded**", the diplomat observes, "and will represent a fundamental guarantee for the local Church", as in Palestine, where such an agreement was already concluded in 2015.

More generally, Archbishop Lazzarotto feels that his heart always remains in Jerusalem, a city that exercises "an incredible attraction" on those who fall in love with it. "Our mission – as members of the Order – consists in **helping the Christian communities everywhere to live this luminous appeal**, this special spiritual bond with a land chosen by God for His plan of salvation which continues today and of which we are called to be joyful channels of compassion and unity".

François Vayne

(February 8, 2018)

